BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
PROPOSED IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Given that EFL is playing an important role in the national education system of Vietnam for its development and global integration, this paper proposes a bilingual education program with both Vietnamese and English subjects for primary schools. Descriptions and justifications for the proposed program are presented in details. Also, teaching methods and assessments are analyzed. As a pilot, this program is hoped to be widely implemented.

Keywords: program, Vietnamese, English, bilingual, primary school

1. Introduction

Since 1986, the Vietnam's open door policy has attracted many foreigners have visited and invested in Vietnam in the fields of education, economics and trade (Denham, 1992). In addition, the globalized context leads to the increasing role of English in Vietnam as it is used as a bridge to connect people from different countries (Le, 2015). Nevertheless, the teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in the past years did not get a good result. The students' levels of English were somewhat low after studying six years of English in secondary schools (Le, 2006). Hence, in 2008, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched a project "*Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system for the period 2008-2020*" in order to "*renovate thoroughly the tasks of teaching and learning foreign language within national education system*" (Prime Minister, 2008, p.1). This project also emphasized English as the main language to be taught and set the goal for primary students, who begin to study English as a compulsory subject at grade 3 to reach A1, the first out of the six level of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning,

Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001) when they complete the primary education. Another goal of the project is that by 2020 most students can use a foreign language (especially English) confidently in their daily communication, their study and work "*in an integrated, multi-cultural*" and multi-lingual environment, making foreign languages a comparative advantage of development for Vietnamese people "*in the cause of industrialization and modernization for the country*" (Prime Minister, 2008, p.1).

2. Bilingual education program proposed

The micro-context of the program is Dong Thap province, one of the provinces in Mekong Delta. Dong Thap is required to "*become a fairly developed province in the Mekong River delta and play the role as the region's gateway*" (The Prime Minister, 2011, p.25). Additionally, Dong Thap is to exploit the connections between areas and localities to promote its tourism (Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government Portal, 2011). To obtain these goals, human resources development is one of the most important solutions. Hence, a program which aims to train students, the future labour force to be proficient in Vietnamese and English is a requisite.

The proposed program is to be implemented at primary schools in Dong Thap province. Students who study from Grade 1 to Grade 5 at the school are from 6 to 10 years old; speak Vietnamese as their first home language. And Vietnamese is the majority and official language in Dong Thap. These primary schoolers learn all the subjects in Vietnamese following the Vietnamese curriculum and start to learn EFL from grade 3, with 4 periods/week (Le, 2015). The teachers of English are Vietnamese native speakers, who learn to teach EFL at college or university. These teachers mostly prefer the grammar translation methods, and teach students mainly vocabulary, grammar and reading. Therefore, the students' English levels are very limited. They cannot listen or speak in English in daily communication. They can only read and write basically, serving mainly their English exams rather than daily or business communication.

With the national and provincial goals stated above, it is necessary to carry out a program that trains students to be proficient in both Vietnamese and English. The proposed program is likely to be supported by the government because education institutions are to actively design and promote bilingual programs in order to foster their own training potential (see Appendix below).

3. Description and justification for the proposed program

As the reasons stated above and a bilingual education program, the general aims of the proposed program are for the students participating in the program to become bilingual and biliterate. Thus, "*strong*" forms of bilingual education are taken into consideration because the outcomes of these forms are the same as the ones of the proposed program (Baker, 2011, p. 222).

In addition, it can be understood that the program is to lead the students to "*additive bilingualism*" (Lambert, 1975, as cited in Roberts, 1995, p.371). In other words, students maintain Vietnamese as their first language and acquire English as the second. Baker (2011) suggested three types of programs matching the aim: "*maintenance/heritage language*", "*two way/dual language*" and "*immersion*" (p.210). The heritage language education is used for language minority students to preserve their first language and become bilingual (Baker, 2011). This kind of program is just partly suitable for the aims of the proposed program because the participants in the proposed program are majority language students and their first language is used widely in their community. According to Baker (2011), in dual language bilingual education, there should be "*a balanced mixture of children from two or (more) different language backgrounds*" (p.244). Meanwhile, all of the students in the proposed program come from the same language background. The immersion program is used widely in Canada, where majority language English – speaking students learn French as a second language, and its aim is to enhance the students' fluency and literacy in both languages. This program seems to match the aim and the participants of the proposed program most.

Moreover, the immersion program is chosen because the core features of the program are relevant to the context. In the proposed program, "*partial immersion*" is used; both Vietnamese and English are used equally as the medium of instruction (Baker, 2011, p.239). Consequently, the subjects the students learn are both in Vietnamese and English with different contents. The subjects in Vietnamese following the national curriculum (see the Table 1 below), while the ones in English are Literacy, Maths and Science.

Table 1: Subjects in Vietnamese

Grade	Subjects in Vietnamese
1	Literacy, Maths and Life around us
2	Literacy, Maths, Ethics
3	Literacy, Maths, Nature and Society
4	Literacy, Maths, Studying Society, Information technology
5	Literacy, Maths, Studying Society, Information technology

Another feature that Swain and Lapkin (2005) specify is that the immersion language is used restrictedly in the classroom. In Dong Thap, Vietnamese is the dominant language used in the daily life and at home. Thus, students can only use the target language at school.

In terms of students' level of L2 proficiency, as Swain & Lapkin (2005) point out, students participating in the program are in Grade 1 to Grade 5 and have no or limited proficiency level of English, the immersion language. They are monolinguals. In addition, students are considered as "*early immersion*" because they start to learn another language at the age of six (Hornberger, 2008, p.1700).

Regarding the teachers, Swain & Lapkin (2005) identify them as bilinguals. However, it is not easy to find teachers who speak English as L1 and Vietnamese as L2 in Dong Thap province. Therefore, the best solution is to team one native English-speaking teacher with a native Vietnamese-speaking teacher, whose English level should be at least CEFR B2 level of proficiency.

The final feature is that the culture classroom is that of the different language communities to which the students belong (Baker, 2011). Buttjes (1990) asserted the inseparable relationship between language and culture. It can be seen that learning another language includes learning its culture. Thus, this feature enables students to become bicultural. Accordingly, class sizes should be between 12 and 18 students of similar ages in order to meet their social needs.

About the teaching methods, communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) are employed. Among the two approaches, TBL plays a major part because TBL helps students develop four main skills (Harmer, 2007), which contributes to making students become biliterate and this is an aim of the proposed program as well. More specifically, during the Task cycle stage, teachers organise a variety of activities involving in using listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Harmer, 2007). Meanwhile, CLT is a supplement approach because CLT focus on listening and speaking skills, helping students communicate in real situations (Harmer, 2007).

In regard to resources used in the program, coursebooks are utilized to provide students organized lessons (Harmer, 2007). Besides the coursebooks for learning Vietnamese in primary schools in the national curriculum, a series of "*My Pals are here*" Maths, Science and Literacy (3rd edition, 2014) published by Marshall Cavendish Education are used in the proposed program. The series are used widely in Singaporean schools and are selected because the content in the series are similar to the one in Vietnamese books and the context in the series are familiar with the students. Regarding the library service, most primary schools in Dong Thap lack many good updated English books for students. In addition, the computers are not very modern

and the Internet connections are not stable. Thus, learning online as a supplementary for students is problematic.

More importantly, the Canadian immersion program is selected because it is elective (Baker, 2011). Parents select to let their children follow the program, which is new to the school and is used as a pilot. Therefore, at the beginning of the academic year, parents apply the forms for their children to join the program and are eligible to withdraw their children from the program.

4. Justification of the Bilingual Assessment

Assessment is crucial to teaching and learning, especially for bilingual education. It is the important link between learning outcomes, content and teaching and learning activities. The aims of the proposed program are to train students to become bilingual and biliterate. In other words, students will listen, speak, read and write in both Vietnamese and English. Thus, several types of the assessment will be taken into consideration to evaluate whether students achieve the aims or not.

Baker (2011) insisted that in the assessment of bilingual students, three different areas of their development should be distinguished: *"(1) first language proficiency; (2) second language proficiency; and (3) the existence (or not) of a physical, learning or behavioral difficulty"* (p.348). This distinction may provide a better assessment for bilinguals. However, it should be kept in mind that although the testing of bilinguals has developed from the practice of testing monolinguals, bilinguals are not the simple sum of two monolinguals but are *"a unique combination and integration of languages"* (Baker, 2011, p.355). Baker (2011) also emphasized on making a distinction between the student's level of functioning in a second language and the student's level of language development. The child's development in the L1 should be assessed by several ways in order to get a holistic view of proficiency rather than deficiency. The potential problems in an individual's capacities that require specialist treatment are not the same as the child's language proficiency.

García (2011) asserted that the objective of assessing bilinguals is to discover the interrelationship language and content proficiency (p.740). Language proficiency refers to the bilinguals' ability to use appropriate vocabulary in a particular context, linguistic complexity and comprehend the spoken and written language (García, 2011). Content proficiency, on the other hand, is the ability of acquiring what they are taught in a subject matter (García, 2011).

García (2011) identified ways to assess bilinguals. Firstly, students in a bilingual program should be assessed via *"a translanguaging mode"*, a way of considering the child's bilingual capabilities as his or her identity and knowledge (García, 2011, p.745).

In other words, in oral or written tests, they should be allowed to freely use any language to answer the questions regardless of the language used in the questions. This would give teachers what students have learned without the interruption of languages and their language use in different contexts. Because of its benefits, this way is chosen in assessing the proposed program. In addition, with the aims of rendering bilingual and biliterate students, thanks to this way, students would easily speak or write in any language they prefer or more competent to be assessed.

Another way that García (2011, p.746) supported most is "*performance-based assessment*" because it offers the students chances to demonstrate their knnowledge and abilities thanks to a variety of activities individually, in pairs or in groups as well as their problem-solving skills, which enables teachers to evaluate the students' progress in every aspect and distinguish their language and content proficiency. Along with "*a translanguaging mode*", "*performance-based assessment*" is selected because it can help assess the proficiency of the students in both languages in total.

Besides, "*norm-referenced tests*" are usually used to assess the child in a bilingual program (Baker, 2011, p.355). This means that the assessor can compare the child with a large sample of so-called normal children. However, Baker (2011) noted that such tests are based on scores from native language majority children. Thus, comparisons can be unfair for bilingual children. (Baker, 2011, p.355). Therefore, a norm-referenced test chosen for bilingual students should have regional or ethnic norms that are designed by prestigious publishers (Ovando & Collier, 1985). On the contrary, "*curriculum-based assessment*" or "*criterion-referenced testing*" is used to check the students' progress in each curriculum area (Baker, 2011, p.356). The assessment seeks to establish what a child can do, and what is the next area of a curriculum where progress can be made. Such criterion-referenced assessment of bilingual children offers parents and teachers more useful and important data. In short, these two types of tests should be used to compare a student against others and against the curriculum, which helps assessor get a big picture of what students have learned and acquired.

Regarding the ways in which assessment results are used, two types of assessment are chosen for the proposed program, formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is "*the kind of feedback teachers give students as a course is progressing and which, as a result, may help them to improve their performance*" (Harmer, 2007, p.379). This type of assessment can be used to inform not only teachers but also students and their parents throughout the semester (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Employing TBL, teachers organise some activities in the classroom for formative assessment such as role-play, presentations, making a report or giving quizzes and homework. Students can work on their own, in pairs or in groups in the activities. Through these activities, teachers observe the students' performance, take notes on their

strengths and weaknesses, ask them to self-evaluate and give them feedback to improve their proficiency. On the other hand, the teachers can use summative assessment, "*the kind of measurement that takes place to round things off or make a one-off measurement*" (Harmer, 2007, p.379). One of the most common summative assessments employed in schools are the tests (Dixson & Worrell, 2016) and such tests take place every month and at the end of each semester.

5. Conclusion

This paper addresses the current context of Vietnam in general and Dong Thap province in particular, where EFL plays an increasing importance for this country's development and global integration. To actively serve the project: "*Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system for the period 2008-2020*", the paper proposes a bilingual education program for primary schools in Dong Thap province. This program is being reviewed by local educators. If successfully implemented, the program can be applied throughout Vietnam and elsewhere in similar contexts.

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Appendix

A. The proposed program

1. Program model: Partial early immersion bilingual program.

2. Students:
    *   Grade 1 to Grade 5 primary students (from 6 -10 years old) at primary schools, Dong Thap province, Vietnam;
    *   Language majority students; native Vietnamese;
    *   Vietnamese is the official language and is spoken in the province;
    *   No or limited English level;
    *   Students start to learn English as a compulsory subject from Grade 3. English is used only in class;
    *   Students wish to become competent in Vietnamese and English.

3. Aims:
    *   To help students become bilinguals and biliterate in Vietnamese and English.

4. Objectives:
    *   Improve the students' four skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing in both Vietnamese and English;
    *   Enhance the knowledge of how languages work and the thinking skills.

5. Duration of the program: 5 years at Vietnamese primary school.

6. Timeframe for the program:
    *   This is a partial immersion program. Therefore, the amount of time of both language are used equally. However, from Grade 1-3, English can be used about 60-70% because students have no knowledge of English. It is a good idea to provide students more time to expose to English. From Grade 4 and 5, both Vietnamese and English are taught equally.
    *   The time of learning the subjects in two languages can exchange. Students learn subjects in English in the morning and subjects in Vietnamese in the afternoon in two weeks. After that, students learn subjects in Vietnamese in the morning and subjects in English in the afternoon in two weeks.

7. Subjects:

Grade	Subjects in Vietnamese	Subjects in English
1	Literacy, Maths and Life around us	Literacy, Maths and Science
2	Literacy, Maths, Ethics,	Literacy, Maths and Science
3	Literacy, Maths, Nature and Society	Literacy, Maths and Science
4	Literacy, Maths, Studying Society, Information technology	Literacy, Maths and Science
5	Literacy, Maths, Studying Society, Information technology	Literacy, Maths and Science

8. Pedagogical assumptions:
   - Teaching methods: communicative language teaching and task-based learning.
9. Teachers: Native English-speaking teacher's team teaching with native Vietnamese-speaking teachers, whose English level should be at least CEFR B2 level of proficiency.
10. In-class languages: Both English and Vietnamese.
11. Resources:
   - Coursebooks for learning Vietnamese in the primary school following the national curriculum;
   - A series of "My Pals are here" Maths, Science and Literacy (3rd edition, 2014) published by Marshall Cavendish Education.
12. Expected outcomes:
   - Students will be able to listen, speak, read and write in Vietnamese and English.

B. The proposed bilingual assessment

1. Aim:
   - To know what they have learn and acquire in both Vietnamese and English;
   - To help them to improve their performance.
2. When to assess:
   - When students take part in activities in the classroom;
   - Every month and at the end of each semester.
3. What to assess:
   - Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing competence;
   - Cooperative skills.
4. How to assess:
   - During the activities in class: the teacher observes the students' performance, takes notes on their strengths and weaknesses, asks them to self-evaluate and gives them feedback to improve their proficiency;
   - Every month and at the end of each semester: students take a paper-based test and oral test.
5. Who to assess
   - Students who attend the program;
   - Teachers in charge;
   - Students' parents.