

Implications of Australia's Bilingual Education of Aboriginal People

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Abstract—Australia, as a multicultural and multilingual country, has been highly appraised by international linguists and statesmen for its formulation and implementation of language policies. Over the past years, linguists, statesmen, educators and residents have been devoting themselves to the further improvement of language education policies and laws, and the implementation of bilingual education for Aboriginal people. They have gradually resolved language problems, and most importantly, preserved linguistic and cultural diversity. This has set a successful example for China to follow. Under such circumstance, the proposed research, based on sociolinguistic theories concerning language policy and language planning, makes implications, suggesting how our country should proceed from the actual situations to take more practical measures and formulate better policies.

Index Terms—bilingual education, Australia, implications

I. INTRODUCTION

Bilingual education has been playing an increasingly important role in political stability and economic development in multi-ethnic countries. By developing it, governments can improve the overall quality of ethnic minorities, help develop their self-reliance and adapt them to social development.

Australia, a multi-ethnic country, is a pioneer nation. In the past decades, Australian governments of different levels, educators and linguists have been formulating and implementing various policies to promote the bilingual education of Aboriginal people. A good study of what Australia has done in this regard is not only academically significant but also useful for China's governments of different levels to learn from the successful experience and to develop and implement policies of ethnic bilingual education. So a large number of scholars at home have devoted themselves to relevant studies, such as Liu Fugen (1999), Meng Bingli (2005), Liang Junqing (2008), and Chen Xiaoyun (2008). However, studies at home focus on language and culture, language policy and language planning concerning bilingual education. Few research articles on the implications of Australia's bilingual education of Aboriginal people have been published yet. Thus, the proposed research will make efforts in this regard.

The author will base the proposed research on sociolinguistic theories concerning language planning and language policy and employ library research and descriptive method to briefly introduce the Aboriginal people's bilingual education in Australia and mainly make implications, suggesting how our country should proceed from the actual situations to take more practical measures and formulate better policies.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Theoretical Framework

Language policy is fundamental for any country. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the terms, language policy and language planning, have been defined in many ways. According to Grin, "language policy is a systematic, rational, theory-based effort at the societal level to modify the linguistic environment with a view to increasing aggregate welfare. It is typically conducted by official bodies or their surrogates aiming at part or all of the population living under their jurisdiction." (Grin, 2003, P.30) Language planning, as is stated by Weinstein, "is a government authorized, long-term, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language's function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems" (Weinstein, 1980, P.56).

It is obvious that language policy is an official policy of a society in the aspect of linguistic communication while language planning is a series of practical measures within the policy to resolve linguistic communication problems. They, therefore, can function as the theoretical framework in this study for they are quite suitable.

B. Research Questions

With research background and the thesis statement in mind, we can now put forward the following two questions:

Research question one: How does Australia implement the bilingual education for Aboriginal people?

Research question two: How should China proceed from the actual situations to take more practical measures and formulate better policies?

C. Research Methodology

In terms of research methodology, it refers to the combination of research methods. Zhang and Hao state that: “the task or purpose of research methodology is to describe or analyze research methods, define and clarify presupposes and results, and lead the research feasibility to success.” (Zhang and Hao, 2008, P. 62)

The methods used in the proposed research can be classified as library research, and descriptive method. Library research will be conducted to access the relevant literature and collect data for my writing. In addition, descriptive method will be used to deepen my understanding of the collected materials.

III. ABORIGINAL PEOPLE’S BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Australia is a multilingual and multicultural country. In order to develop its language education, governments have formulated a series of policies and laws which cover many aspects of bilingual education of Aboriginal people and have a long history of development. These policies include 1987 “National Policy on Languages” (NPL), the 1991 “Australia’s Language-The Australian Language and Literacy Policy” (ALLP), the 1996 “Language Teachers: the Pivot of Policy” and many laws enacted by governments of each level, addressing the issues of Aboriginal people’s bilingual education, like “Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistant) Act 1989” and “Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistant) Act 2000”. All these policies and laws acknowledge the history and special status of aboriginal languages as the product of cultural and historical identification of aboriginal people, and are of great importance to interpreting Australian environment and of inestimable value to their users. Apart from those influential policies and relevant laws, they, as well, take practical measures, including capital investment, teacher training, curriculum design and textbook compilation.

Generally speaking, Australia has achieved huge success in Aboriginal people’s bilingual education on the ground that governments of each level have formulated and implemented policies and laws which take the language rights of Aboriginal people into full consideration, and provide profound policy guarantee. Besides, the implementation for Aboriginal people in Australia not only gains all-side support, but also has sound theoretical basis. This has set a successful example for other multi-ethnic countries to follow, especially China. The following part will examine some implications.

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF AUSTRALIA’S BILINGUAL EDUCATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

In view of the outcomes of the bilingual education of Aboriginal people in Australia, it provides some implications for China.

A. *Improving Language Education Policies and Laws*

Australia’s huge success in ethnic language education lies in the formulation and implementation of policies and laws which take the language rights of all residents into full consideration. Apart from attaching importance to all Australian’s English literacy, they show respect for Aboriginal and community languages and cultures to help Aboriginal people and immigrants preserve and develop them.

Since the founding of new China, especially the reform and opening-up, the Party and the state have paid high attention to issues of ethnic language education. They have formulated a series of laws concerning ethnic language education. However, these laws are far from perfect. In particular, there has been no specific law on ethnic language education. As such, the long-term development of ethnic language education necessitates the improvement of relevant policies and laws, especially the formulation of a specific ethnic language education law. In formulating such a kind of law, attention should be paid to the following aspects.

To begin with, attention should be paid to the comprehensiveness. The current laws in China center on the special status of ethnic languages and the right and freedom of ethnic people to use and develop their own languages but not on the significances from the perspective of autonomy or on the part they are playing in inheriting and developing ethnic cultures. This, to a large degree, will hinder the development of ethnic language education. As a result, all these aspects should be taken into account in the specific ethnic language education law.

Then, attention should be paid to specificity. The future ethnic language education law is supposed to compromise specific rules as well as macroscopic contents. Specifically speaking, there should be a detailed description of purposes and objects of ethnic language education, curriculum design, teacher training, textbook compilation, and most of all, capital investment. Only in this way can we make such a kind of law into full play and reflect its legislative and social values.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to practicability. As is mentioned above, ethnic language education in Australia has profound policy guarantee. These policies are based on Australia’s specific history, culture, political systems, as well as social and language environments. Thus, China’s such a kind of law should be equipped with Chinese characteristics, and integrated with actual situations.

Finally, attention should be paid to ethnic independent capacity. Since the founding of new China, the central government has provided a large amount of support for ethnic language education, such as investing capital, training teachers, designing curricula and compiling textbooks. However, all these belong to external conditions, not enough to deal with essential issues. In essence, ethnic language education depends on the independent capacity of ethnic groups.

Therefore, importance should be attached to ethnic independent capacity in ethnic language education law. Only in this way can we make real improvement in the quality of ethnic language education.

B. Strengthening Curriculum Design and Textbook Compilation

Ethnic schools in China, under the guidance of state's regulation, set ethnic languages and Chinese courses for ethnic students. Some even set English ones due to the rapid development of globalization and the "English craze". Even so, there are still some problems mentioned above remaining to be solved. Therefore, curriculum design is supposed to take national conditions and practical situations of each ethnic group into consideration, as well as looking forward to the world and acting on the international conventions. Specifically speaking, the following measures should be taken.

Firstly, curriculum design should pay attention to the learning styles of ethnic students. Each ethnic area should base their courses on ethnic background, ethnic psychology, and specific features of ethnic languages to make the courses carry ethnic characteristics and cater for the development of education, economy and society in ethnic areas. Secondly, curriculum design should contain multinational and multicultural concepts to realize the diversity of courses and enhance its flexibility. It is not only our national condition but also our precious treasure that multi-nations co-exist and multi-cultures commonly develop. Thus, curricula in ethnic schools should include traditional cultures of each ethnic group and those of other ethnic minorities so as to enable ethnic students to have a good knowledge of their own cultures, gain a better understanding of others, participate in cross-cultural communication and cultivate a sense of national identity. Finally, curriculum design should look forward to the world and act on the international conventions. In addition to their own cultures, ethnic students are expected to be equipped with international knowledge and skills to cater for the rapid development of globalization.

Besides, the quality of textbooks, as is mentioned above, is far from perfect in spite of some achievements. The state and relevant departments should take actions to strengthen textbook compilation. First of all, capital for compiling textbooks ought to be invested; next, each area should organize a compiling group which is expected to comprise experts, ethnic education specialists, ethnic education researchers, ethnic language teachers and ethnic students as well; then, publishing and managing institutions ought to be established; finally, textbook types should be diversified; Chinese textbooks should be compiled specifically for ethnic students and multi-media ones had better be developed to cater for the need of selectivity and flexibility.

C. Emphasizing Teacher Training

Teacher training has been playing an important part in implementing and developing ethnic language education and improving teaching quality of ethnic areas. Ethnic language education in China is started late with underdeveloped foundation and teaching systems and even imperfect teacher training. Besides, ethnic schools are suffering from shortage of qualified teachers. Governments of each level are expected to take effective measures to improve such a kind of situation. The author supposes that they can embark on the following aspects.

In the first place, each area should make full use of current resources to improve their training systems. Education departments of each level can establish training bases and experiment centers in current Ethnic Normal Colleges and Normal Schools. In terms of ways of training, they can employ formal training, vocational training, amateur training and in-service training. This will more or less make teacher training systematic and scientific.

In the second place, each area should make specific rules on training contents. On one hand, the training of bilingual capacity and bicultural literacy should be attached importance to. Furthermore, the teachers' knowledge level and scientific research consciousness ought to be improved. On the other hand, their ability to use modern teaching instruments is supposed to be cultivated.

In the final place, each area should standardize the personnel management system. Governments of each level and local education departments should show their respect for knowledge and talents embodied in policies. Besides, they ought to show much concern for the teachers and improve their working conditions and wages. Most of all, they are supposed to give priority to their evaluation of professional titles and employment of their children to remove their worries.

D. Deepening Theoretical Researches

Researches on ethnic language education in China suggest that the theoretical basis is far from sound for the lack of empirical studies and systematic, extensive and comprehensive investigation into ethnic language use. As such, relevant people are expected to deepen theoretical researches under the guidance of scientific attitudes. The proposed research thinks that they can work on the following aspects.

Firstly, research institutions should be established. Ethnic language education is a long-term project, so it ought to be implemented under the guarantee of organizations. The state and each ethnic autonomous region can set up their own research institutions to carry out macro and micro studies respectively, and to provide basis for the formulation of ethnic language education law. In addition, ethnic universities and colleges can establish their own research laboratories and make full advantage of language majors, ethnic students and even high qualified professors to conduct relevant researches. Research institutions of each level can start their own research journals, providing conditions for researchers to publish and communicate their research outcomes.

Secondly, qualities of researchers should be cultivated. Researchers are the key to ethnic language education

researches so much so that their cultivated qualities are of great significance. For one, ethnic language education is a comprehensive and interdisciplinary subject which is concerned with linguistics, ethnology and pedagogy and whose researches are featured by bilingual and bicultural characters, ethnic and interdisciplinary nature. This requires researchers to improve themselves in bilingual or multilingual capacity, abundant knowledge of linguistics, ethnology and pedagogy, and capacity for scientific researches. For another, society has entered an information age with the widespread popularization of internet technology. Researchers therefore must learn and master such a kind of modern technology to carry out relevant researches. Finally, researchers are supposed to cooperate with each other for the reason that this complicated, comprehensive and interdisciplinary research can't be completed by an individual researcher. Besides, they should forecast development trends, and conduct prospective studies.

Finally, in-depth researches based on previous experience and outcomes should be carried out in order to establish a distinctive and comprehensive theoretical system for ethnic language education. The author suggests that the following aspects should be studied: historical background of ethnic language education, past and current policies on ethnic language education in China, the relationship between ethnic language education and society, ethnic language education types, ethnic language education systems of each level, teacher training, textbook compilation and teaching methodology, factors accounting for ethnic language education, comparative studies of ethnic languages and Chinese, international contrast studies of ethnic language education, introductions of researches on ethnic language education abroad, investigations into language use; and bilingual education experiments.

E. Establishing Ethnic Language Education with Chinese Characteristics

The implementation of ethnic language education must cater for the psychological and cultural characteristics of ethnic minorities. In order to establish a kind of ethnic language education with Chinese characteristics, the following aspects should be taken into account.

On one hand, the specificity of ethnic language education should be paid attention to. According to the discussion above, we come to realize that ethnic language-Chinese bilingual education or ethnic language-Chinese-English trilingual education has been being implemented in ethnic areas. This kind of language education is distinct from Australia's bilingual education in which the second language is used as a medium of teaching. Exactly speaking, it is a special type of ethnic education. Ethnic languages are essential for inheriting ethnic cultures and developing ethnic education; Chinese is necessary for ethnic minorities to gain competence in both languages and promote ethnic unity; English is inevitable for ethnic minorities to keep up with international and global trends.

On the other hand, practical measures should be attached importance to. In implementing language education, each ethnic area should set up their own education patterns in accordance with their distinct conditions. Besides, they should attract capital investment from social circles to strengthen infrastructure construction and make constant reforms and innovations. Furthermore, they ought to continue improving ethnic language textbooks and curriculum design to cater for national requirements and their own features. Finally, researchers are supposed to carry out case studies of primary and secondary ethnic schools in ethnic regions in order to gain a better understanding of ethnic situations. In a word, theories must be integrated with practice to establish a kind of ethnic language education with Chinese characteristics on the ground that only suitable language education is the best, and the key to progress and success.

All in all, if the Party and the state, under the guarantee and guidance of ethnic language education law, equip ethnic areas with qualified teachers, appropriate curricula and textbooks, Chinese characteristics, and at the same time, carry out scientific researches and academic discussion, ethnic language education in China will achieve brilliant success.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The discussion above is a systematic study of the implications of Aboriginal people's bilingual education in Australia. In general, Australia, in order to develop Aboriginal people's bilingual education, has formulated a series of policies and taken some practical measures. This has set a successful example for China in this regard on the ground that it has gradually solved language problems and preserved linguistic and cultural diversity by formulating language education policies and laws and implementing bilingual education for Aboriginal people. Governments of each level in China therefore should learn the successful experience so as to formulate better policies and take more practical measures. Exactly speaking, they are supposed to improve language education policies and laws, strengthen curriculum design and textbook compilation, emphasize teacher training, deepen theoretical researches and establish ethnic language education with Chinese characteristics.

With respect to the improvement of language education policies and laws, attention should be paid to comprehensiveness, specificity, practicability and ethnic independent capacity. In other words, the future ethnic language education law is supposed to compromise macroscopic contents, specific rules, Chinese characteristics, and attach importance to ethnic independent capacity to deal with essential issues.

With regard to the strengthening of curriculum design, the national conditions and practical situations of each ethnic group should be taken into account. In another word, curriculum design ought to pay attention to the learning styles of ethnic students, multinational and multicultural concepts and the traditional cultures of each ethnic group and those of other ethnic minorities. Besides, it should look forward to the world and act on international conventions. In view of the strengthening of textbook compilation, each state and relevant people are expected to attract capital investment,

organize a compiling group, establish publishing and managing institutions, and diversify textbook types.

In terms of the emphasis of teacher training, each area should make full advantage of current resources to improve their training systems, and make specific rules on training contents. Additionally, they should standardize the personnel management system. Governments of each level ought to show respect for talents and teachers, improve their working conditions and wages and, most importantly, remove their worries by giving priority to the evaluation of professional titles and the employment of their children.

As for the deepening of theoretical researches, relevant people, under the guidance of scientific attitudes, should establish research institutions to guarantee the implementation of ethnic language education. Besides, they should cultivate the qualities of researchers, like improving their bilingual or multilingual capacity, abundant knowledge of linguistics, ethnology and pedagogy and enabling them to master modern technology. Finally, they should carry out in-depth researches based on previous experience and outcomes.

As to the establishment of ethnic language education with Chinese characteristics, the psychological and cultural features of ethnic minorities should be taken into consideration. Specifically speaking, each area, when implementing ethnic language education, should pay attention to the specificity, namely, ethnic language-Chinese bilingual education or ethnic language-Chinese-English trilingual education in ethnic areas. Governments of each level should also take some practical measures, such as setting up their own education patterns, attracting capital investment from social circles, improving ethnic language textbooks and curriculum design, and calling on researchers to carry out case studies in ethnic regions to gain a better understanding of ethnic situations.

Finally, this proposed research has been finished with several limitations. It is conducted from the macro perspective and makes only a general description of the formulation and implementation of Aboriginal people's bilingual education in Australia. Though the author has made detailed implications of Aboriginal people's bilingual education for China, a much larger sample is needed so as to add color to the present study.

In working on the proposed research, the author has been inspired on some other aspects. First, a probe from a micro perspective is needed to enrich this regard. Second, an analysis of policies and practical measures can unfold a more colorful picture, which can include evolution of policies and relevant policies and laws, capital investment, teacher training, curriculum design and textbook compilation. Forth, there is no exaggeration to say that this is such an extensive field that any material about Aboriginal people's bilingual education in Australia could be discussed in details to form another article.

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