

The Influence of Children's Literature on Bilingual Education in China

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Abstract: Children's literature has emerged as a significant resource in bilingual education, particularly in China because it helps students become more proficient in multiple languages, have a deeper understanding of different cultures, and have increased opportunities for communication and future academic success. This paper provides an overview of the current state of employing children's literature in bilingual education and explores its influence on language skills, cultural understanding, and literacy development. The paper highlights the need for effective teaching materials and strategies in bilingual education and analyzes the challenges faced in using children's literature in this context. Further, several key strategies are proposed for the use of children's literature in bilingualism. It discusses the influence of children's literature on cultural comprehension and bilingual vocabulary learning and suggests practical activities like book club discussions and creative writing for better application in bilingual education. It also promotes a comprehensive approach involving cultural integration, teacher training, material development, creative activities, and research-based strategies to enhance learning outcomes for bilingual students.

Keywords: children's literature, bilingual education, language skills, cultural understanding, literacy development

1. Introduction

Bilingual education, the instructional approach that employs two languages as mediums of instruction, is gaining global recognition for its role in enhancing students' language skills, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness. Within this context, the utilization of children's literature in bilingual education has emerged as a significant focus of contemporary educational research. Children's literature, characterized by its engaging narratives and vibrant illustrations, is regarded as a valuable tool in bilingual education. However, a notable disparity exists in its usage across different regions and settings.

August and Shanahan underscored the efficacy of literature-based instruction in bolstering the literacy skills of bilingual learners [1]. Chen and Chen discovered the positive influence of children's literature on Chinese bilingual students' language proficiency and cultural awareness [2]. In line with these findings, a study conducted by Lotherington and Jenson also highlighted the positive impact of digital storybook projects on bilingual students' literacy development [3]. Despite

these promising findings, a conspicuous gap remains in the literature concerning the systematic incorporation of children's literature in bilingual education, particularly in China.

To address this gap, an extensive review of related literature was conducted. Bilingual education, which uses two languages as teaching mediums, is increasingly recognized for its benefits in improving students' language skills, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness. Children's literature, with its engaging narratives and vibrant illustrations, is seen as a valuable tool in this type of education. However, its usage varies across different regions and settings. Various studies have shown the positive effects of literature-based instruction on bilingual learners' literacy skills and cultural awareness, particularly among Chinese students. Despite these findings, there is a gap in the literature regarding the systematic use of children's literature in bilingual education, especially in China.

This paper explores the role and potential of children's literature in bilingual teaching, with a particular focus on China. It delves into the importance of children's literature in second language education, its application in various teaching contexts, and the theoretical framework for its implementation. The paper also addresses the challenges faced in the use of children's literature in bilingual teaching, such as cultural differences, lack of teacher training, and inadequate materials, and proposes potential solutions. Through case studies and research, the paper underscores the benefits of integrating children's literature into bilingual education, such as improved language skills, increased interest in learning, and enhanced cultural understanding. The paper's significance lies in its contribution to the existing dialogue on the subject, offering fresh perspectives for bilingual teaching and encouraging additional exploration and application in this area.

2. The Application of Children's Literature in Bilingual Teaching

2.1. Importance of Children's Literature in Bilingual Education

The integration of children's literature into English instruction has been recognized as a successful strategy in bilingual education. It can stimulate students' interest, cultivate reading habits, and boost their language proficiency. To begin with, it's crucial to comprehend the importance of children's literature in second language education. Bland and Lütge stated that children's literature can enhance language abilities and motivates students via captivating stories and characters [4]. It aids in vocabulary acquisition and also provides cultural insights. In China, bilingual education policies have been broadly implemented in schools [5]. However, it is necessary to cater to the needs of young learners through effective teaching materials and strategies. Chen explored the use of children's literature in English teaching for young learners and suggested that it can create an immersive and enjoyable language learning environment [6]. Besides, some studies have delved into the use of children's literature in specific language-teaching contexts. Li and Wu discussed how to use children's literature to teach reading comprehension to students of English as a foreign language [7]. They found that children's literature can foster comprehension skills, encourage critical thinking, and enhance students' overall language abilities. Huang also explored the use of children's literature in teaching English to young learners in an EFL context [8]. These studies revealed that children's literature facilitates language acquisition, promotes creativity, and builds a positive attitude toward learning. The application of children's literature can also extend to higher education. Wang and Zhang discussed its use in college English teaching and emphasized its role in developing students' cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and intercultural competence [9].

2.2. Theoretical Framework for the Application of Children's Literature

To effectively utilize children's literature in bilingual teaching, educators can refer to teaching resources such as "The Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers" and "Practical English

Language Teaching: Young Learners [10, 11]. These resources offer practical guidance and strategies for using children's literature in the classroom. The use of children's literature in bilingual teaching aligns with the theories and approaches in second language education. Richards and Rodgers discussed different approaches to language teaching, emphasizing the significance of meaningful and authentic materials [12]. Tomlinson and Masuhara provided a comprehensive guide to materials development for language learning, highlighting the importance of selecting appropriate materials for specific learner needs [13]. The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth also stressed the importance of developing literacy skills in second-language learners [1]. Children's literature plays a crucial role in improving literacy skills and overall language development among bilingual learners.

2.3. Application Cases of Children's Literature in Bilingual Teaching

A study conducted in a primary school in Beijing, China, applied children's literature in teaching English to grade 3 students [14]. Similarly, in a kindergarten in Shanghai, Liu incorporated children's literature into English teaching [15]. In a global context, a study conducted in a primary school in Spain used children's literature to teach English to Spanish-speaking students [16]. These examples highlight the widespread adoption of children's literature for bilingual education purposes and demonstrate the global recognition of the significance of children's literature in bilingual education. They provided concrete evidence of the benefits of using children's literature in bilingual education, such as improving language skills, increasing interest in learning, and enhancing cultural understanding. They also highlighted the importance of selecting appropriate children's literature and designing engaging activities that cater to the learners' needs and interests. These examples can serve as valuable references for educators and researchers in their efforts to improve bilingual education through the incorporation of children's literature.

3. Existing Problems and Possible Solutions

3.1. Existing Problems

One of the main issues in children's literature in bilingual teaching is the cultural differences inherent in literature. These differences can make it challenging for learners, especially those from diverse backgrounds, to fully comprehend and engage with the material. They may find it difficult to relate to the cultural contexts of the target language.

Another significant problem is the lack of adequate teacher training in the effective use of children's literature in bilingual teaching. Teachers need to be equipped with the right skills and knowledge to use literature as a tool for language teaching, but often, this training is insufficient or lacking entirely.

A third problem is the complexity of language found in some children's literature which can be too challenging for bilingual learners. The sophisticated wording and advanced vocabulary may confuse and discourage them from engaging with the material.

Another issue revolves around the potential scarcity of resources, especially in less privileged educational settings. Schools may lack the necessary supplies, technology, or other supportive resources to implement a comprehensive bilingual children's literature curriculum.

On top of that, the problem of learner motivation is a prominent issue. The use of unfamiliar bilingual children's literature can puzzle and overwhelm the students, thus affecting their intrinsic motivation to learn the new language.

3.2. Possible Solutions

To address the issue of cultural differences, one potential solution is to integrate elements of the learners' culture into the teaching materials. This could involve incorporating children's literature from various cultures into the bilingual curriculum. Such cultural integration could enhance understanding and foster a sense of belonging and relevance among the learners.

In response to the lack of adequate teacher training, professional development programs or workshops could be implemented. These programs could focus on effectively using children's literature in language teaching, equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to use literature as a tool for language teaching.

To counter the issue of complex language, the text could be carefully chosen or adapted to match the learners' proficiency level. Stories can start simple and gradually increase in difficulty as students' language skills develop. Visual aids and bilingual glossaries might also be used to aid comprehension.

A possible solution to the scarcity of resources could involve partnerships with local libraries, charities, or education departments to secure necessary resources or even implement a digital literature approach. The use of digital children's literature, audiobooks, and online reading platforms could also be promoted.

In addressing the problem of learners' motivation, educators could adopt more engaging and interactive teaching methods. They could use literature that relates to learners' interests and experiences, combined with varied and fun activities like dramatization, storytelling, and games to arouse students' interest and stimulate their motivation to learn.

4. Conclusions

This study found that children's literature significantly contributes to bilingual education in China by enhancing language skills, promoting cultural understanding, and fostering literacy development. The research work focuses on addressing challenges such as cultural differences, lack of teacher training, and inadequate materials through a comprehensive approach. It aims to overcome these issues by implementing strategies such as cultural integration, professional development for teachers, and material development. Methods such as book club discussions and creative writing exercises are recommended for a more practical application of children's literature in bilingual education.

The findings of this paper reflect the immense potential of children's literature in improving learning outcomes for bilingual learners, despite the existing challenges. Yet, the impact of children's literature on cultural understanding and bilingual vocabulary acquisition necessitates further exploration. The research findings highlight the potential impact of children's literature on bilingual education in China. Moving forward, it is important to expand this research to a global context and explore how children's literature can enhance language learning and cultural understanding in other bilingual education settings. Additionally, future research could delve deeper into the specific strategies and resources that can be effectively utilized to maximize the benefits of children's literature in bilingual education. By continuing to investigate and implement these findings, we can further enhance the effectiveness and impact of children's literature in bilingual education worldwide.

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