Bilingual Strategies for Teaching Sports Majors at Universities in Wuhan

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Abstract. Bilingual teaching (Chinese-English) has a lot of benefits such as improving students’ cognitive skills, increasing their awareness of other cultures, and enhancing their job prospects in an interconnected world. Teaching PE classes bilingually has become one of the most important teaching reforms at Chinese universities, because students who can combine English with their majors are in high demand due to China’s increasing international business relationships. This article discusses the benefits of bilingual teaching for students with sports majors, and then introduces some practical strategies for university PE instructors to teach bilingually.

1. Introduction

Due to the globalization, the society has a high demand of talents who can not only speak English well, but more importantly, incorporate English as a communicative language in their majors. PE class is one of the best classes to teach bilingually because it is easier for students to remember and understand English words since instructors mostly use demonstrations to explain sports skills. When combining English with movements, students can appreciate the practice value of using English in sports instantly. Two Spanish scholars Baena-Extremera and Granero-Gallegos measured students’ satisfaction towards bilingual PE classes by sending out surveys to 328 high school students. The results showed that most students were satisfied with the bilingual teaching in PE, and they enjoyed it.[1] Unfortunately, very few instructors at universities in Wuhan are teaching PE classes bilingually. We interviewed many PE instructors at universities in Wuhan. Many told us that they were not ready to deliver classes in English yet because they did not think their English was qualified enough, but they would like to try it if their English gets improved. Thus, if universities could provide some support for PE instructors by offering some English classes to improve their English, it would be possible for more and more PE instructors to teach bilingually. This article discusses the benefits of bilingual teaching for students with sports majors in university, and then introduces strategies for PE instructors to teach bilingually.

2. Benefits of Bilingual Teaching in PE Classes

2.1. Improving Students’ Cognitive and Communication Skills

Many research proved that bilingual teaching can enhance students’ cognitive skills. Using two different languages helps improve the functionality of brain, such as better ability to multitask, pay more attention to details, be more adapted to environmental changes, and etc.[2] Thomas and Collier from George Mason University conducted a thirty-two year study, and they found out that students who had a bilingual education had better achievements in vocabulary, mathematics, and reading compared to students that were taught with one language.[3] To learn English in PE classes is a valid way to encourage the use of English, and also at the same time facilitate the learning of sports skills. Compared to traditional monolingual teaching, bilingual teaching can create more chances for students to interact with each other to improve their communication skills. For example, instructors can make students play games while counting scores in English, make them teach other in English, and etc.
2.2. Stimulating Students’ Interest in Learning

Traditional monolingual PE classes can be boring for students especially those with sports majors. Sports skills need to be cultivated through numerous repetitive practices. For example, in order to serve a good ball at a good placement either in tennis or volleyball, students have to practice it for hundreds of times. In order to loop well in table tennis, students have to practice it for years. Because of these repetitions, students can get bored very easily or even give up. However, if we can use some stimulus to make PE classes more interesting, such as using English to teach or make students count scores in English when they play games, it will be a new and much more fun experience for them. Thus, they can be more motivated in improving their sports skills and also be more willingly to learn English.

2.3. Standing Out in the Job Market

The globalization and widespread of internet have connected people from all over the countries. China, as the second largest economy country, has created so many opportunities for students to work internationally. China needs the young generation to promote international cooperation and communication. Thus, students who are being able to incorporate English with their majors is in high demand. For students with sports majors, they have to have good English skills to be able to become international referees, volunteer in international events, or work for international companies. Thus, students who can speak English well will stand out in such a competitive job market and have better job prospects.

3. Strategies for PE Instructors to Teach Bilingually

3.1. Use Sports English Class as a Required Prerequisite

Sports English class can be set as a required course before students take bilingual PE classes. Once students are more familiar with sports English vocabulary, it is easier for them to understand English and sports skills at the same time in a bilingual class, otherwise it can be frustrating for them if it is too difficult to understand. So far, Sports English class is an optional class for students with sports majors. Since it is not required, not many students have chosen this class for credit. We interviewed many students at universities in Wuhan. Some told us that they did not think it was necessary to take Sports English Class, and some told us that they wanted to take it, but they were afraid that they may not be able to pass the class because of their poor English. Thus, it is necessary to make Sports English as a required prerequisite class to make students realize the importance of taking this class and well prepare students for bilingual PE class. In order to stimulate students’ interests and alleviate their anxieties in taking this class, instructors should make different teaching plans and proper assessments according to students’ English level.

3.2. Promote Online Teaching

3.2.1. Provide Teaching Materials or Videos Online

Online teaching has been more and more popular in recent years due to its flexibility. Teaching PE classes bilingually online can be combined with in person teaching. Instructors can upload teaching materials or videos online so students can review it after class to reinforce the knowledge they learned in class. With teaching materials, students can develop their reading skills and remember the spelling of sports related words better. With videos, students can pause, fast forward, or going back according to their own needs. Instructors can also share links of fun, informational, or educational articles or videos to stimulate students’ interests or broaden their horizons in sports field. This would improve learning efficiency.

3.2.2. Provide Various Forms of Tests Online

Instructors can also make students do tests regularly online to test students’ learning outcome, so they can adjust their teaching pace or content according to the outcome. The design of tests can be more diverse or interesting compared to the traditional in person tests. For example, they can use
multiple choice to ask the equivalent English words for “faqiu” (serve), “fangshou” (block), or “jingong” (attack). They can also combine videos with questions. For instance, instructors can make a few second video to show a sport technique, and then ask students to choose the right English answer. This would be much more interesting and efficient than testing students in person. Also, instructors can make various forms of questions, such as true or false, fill in blanks or write a short essay about a certain topic that is related to sports or sports English.

3.2.3. Increase Interactivity Online

Being able to share ideas, communicate, and help each other are essential when students work in the future. Instructors can increase online interactivity by creating discussion sections. They can post interesting discussion questions regularly so students can share their ideas and respond to each other. This promotes idea exchanging and creates an active learning atmosphere. Besides, many online teaching platforms have areas for students to ask questions, and anyone in the class can answer. This can not only address students’ questions more quickly, but also gives a great opportunity for students to help each other.

3.3. Increase Bilingual Teaching Practice Opportunities for Students

It is essential for students with sports majors to gain as much teaching experience as possible to prepare for their future jobs, such as PE teachers in school or coaches in training center. Instructors need to allocate some time every semester for students to practice their teaching skills. They can divide students into groups and make them teach different sports techniques to each other in turn. They can also create some opportunities for them to teach students with English major. Since students with English major tend to have better English level, they can understand bilingual PE classes more easily compared to students with other majors. This would not only give students with English major a fun experience but also increase PE major students’ teaching experience and communication skills. Moreover, universities should provide some chances for students to interact with some international schools where students can teach PE classes bilingually. For example, universities can arrange students to teach at some international primary or high schools during summer vacations or during internship. This can not only make students put what they have learned into practice but also stimulate their learning interests in bilingual PE classes.

3.4. Use Individualized Assessments

Instructors should use individualized assessment methods based on students’ specific majors. For example, instructors can test students’ sports English level according to their majors. For students who are majoring in Sports Training, they are required to master English that is more related to their specific sports, such as basketball, soccer, tennis, and badminton. Since each sport has its own terminology, instructors can give students assessments based on their specialized sports fields, and this is more useful and practical for them. For students who are majoring in Physical Education, besides testing the basic vocabulary of Sports English in general, instructors should also test students’ ability to combine English into teaching practice since most of them are going to become teachers or coaches in the future. For students who are majoring in Sports Health, it is important for them to master some vocabulary that is related to physiology. Thus, instructors need to make different assessment plans for students with different sports majors, which would be more useful and practical for students. Moreover, instructors need to take students’ learning progress and attitudes into account, and combine online testing with in person testing together when assessing students’ overall learning performance.

4. Conclusion

Teaching PE classes bilingually can not only improve students’ cognitive and communication skills, stimulate their interests in learning, but also increase their job prospects. Instructors can use Sports English class as a prerequisite to prepare students for bilingual PE classes. Instructors can also promote online teaching since it is much more flexible than traditional in person teaching, and it
gives instructors lots of freedom to customize various forms of teaching materials and tests. Moreover, instructors should create more opportunities for students to teach PE bilingually in class or at some international schools to help them gain some teaching experience and improve their communication skills. Finally, instructors can use individualized assessment methods based on students’ specific sports majors, so it is more useful and can prepare them for their future jobs better.

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