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УДК: 37.013.42 (510)

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**THE SITUATION AND PROBLEMS OF BILINGUAL TEACHING  
IN XINJIANG UIGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION: A CASE STUDY OF AWATI COUNTY  
EXPERIMENTAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN AKSU PREFECTURE**

**Синьцзян-Уйгур автономиялуу районундагы кош тилди окутуунун азыркы  
абалы жана проблемалары: Аксу шаарынын Ават округунун  
эксперименталдык башталгыч мектебинин мисалында  
Текущее состояние и проблемы двуязычного обучения в Синьцзян-  
Уйгурском автономном районе: на примере начальной школы округа Авати  
города Аксу**

***Abstract.** With the popularization of quality education in China, the bilingual teaching for ethnic minorities has developed steadily. The implementation of bilingual education not only meets the needs of economic and social development of the state, but also protects civilization, inherit culture, and cultivate talents with multi-cultural background. This paper conducts a survey in Awati experimental primary school in Aksu prefecture, Xinjiang, on the students' and their parents' use of Chinese, their attitudes towards bilingual education, and the influence of bilingual teaching on home-school communication. The results show that there are some problems in bilingual education in Xinjiang: teachers' insufficient bilingual education ability, students' difficulties in Chinese pronunciation and writing, and obstacles in home-school communication.*

***Аннотация.** Кытай өлкөсүндө сапаттуу билим берүүнү ар тараптуу жайылтышына ээрчий этникалык азчылыктарды эки тилде окутуу омоктуу өнүгүп жатат. Этникалык азчылыктар үчүн кош тилдүү билим берүүнү ишке ашыруу улуттук экономикалык жана социалдык өнүгүүнүн керектөөлөрүн гана канааттандырбастан, цивилизацияны коргоп, маданиятты мурастан, маданияттуу сабаттуу таланттарды өстүрө алат. Сурамжылоо ыкмасын колдонуу менен бул макалада Синьцзяндын Аксу префектурасынын Ават уездиндеги эксперименталдык башталгыч мектепти изилдөө объекти катары алып, окуучулардын жана алардын ата-энелеринин кытай тилин колдонуусун, алардын кош тилдүү билимге болгон мамилесин жана эки тилдүү билим берүүнүн таасирин изилдейт. Сурамжылоонун натыйжалары Шинжаңдагы этникалык азчылыктарды эки тилде окутууда көйгөйлөр бар экенин көрсөтүп турат, мисалы, мугалимдердин кош тилдүү билим деңгээлин жогорулатуу керек экени, окуучулардын Кытай тилин айтууда жана жазууда ачык кыйынчылыктары бар болгону, үй менен мектеп ортосундагы байланышта тоскоолдуктардын жаралганы сыяктуулар.*

***Аннотация.** Благодаря всесторонней популяризации качественного образования в Китае неуклонно развивается двуязычное обучение этнических меньшинств. Внедрение двуязычного образования не только отвечает потребностям экономического и социального развития государства, но и защищает цивилизацию, наследует культуру и культивирует таланты с мультикультурным прошлым. В этой статье проводится опрос в начальной школе Авати в городе Аксу, провинции Синьцзян,*

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на предмет использования китайского языка учащимися и их родителями, их отношения к двуязычному образованию и влияния двуязычного обучения на общение между семьей и школой. Результаты показывают, что в двуязычном образовании в Синьцзяне есть некоторые проблемы: недостаточная способность учителей к двуязычному обучению, трудности учащихся с китайским произношением и письмом, а также препятствия в общении дома и школы.

**Keywords:** Chinese-Uighur bilingual teaching, survey, status quo, problems.

**Урунттуу сөздөр:** Уйгур-кытай кош тилдүү окутуу, текшерип иликтөө, азыркы жагдайы, көйгөй.

**Ключевые слова:** Китайско-уйгурское двуязычное обучение, опрос, статус-кво, проблемы.

## **I. An General Introduction to Bilingual Teaching in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region**

Bilingual education is the educational system or educational model that uses two or more languages as the instruction medium. The bilingual education for ethnic minority students in Xinjiang adopts Uighur and Chinese languages. Since 1950s, ethnic minority students in Xinjiang have been offered bilingual courses. According to *The 2010 to 2020 Development Plan for Preschool and High School Bilingual Education for Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang*, by 2020, it is scheduled to realize the popularization of bilingual education in primary and secondary schools, and all minority high school graduates can master the national language, Mandarin, thus lay a good language foundation for future work or education in high schools [1]. At the same time, Article 33 of the *Implementation Measures for Compulsory Education of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* clearly points out that schools at all levels should promote the use of standard spoken and written Mandarin [2]. *The 13th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Education in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* requires that from the autumn semester of 2017, Mandarin is used in all the first year classes in primary and junior high schools. By 2020, the coverage of bilingual education of preschool and compulsory education will reach 100% [3].

## **II. Bilingual Teaching in Awati County Experimental Primary School**

Awati County Experimental Primary School is under the jurisdiction of Aksu District of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Aksu District, as a multi-ethnic area with Uighur nationality as the main group, has a total population of 2.4 million [4]. Awati County Experimental Primary School is a full-time bilingual primary school with 112 staff members, of them 86% are Han nationality and 14% are Uighur nationality. The school has 2,173 students in 45 classes, 23 of which are Chinese classes, and 22 bilingual classes. Ethnic minority students account for 57% of all the students. The school has implemented bilingual teaching for four years since 2017. According to *The 13th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Education in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region*, all students enrolled in the school are offered courses taught mainly in Chinese. At the same time, in order to promote bilingual teaching, the school offers all Uighur students a Uighur language class taught by Uighur teachers, which ensures the effect and diversity of bilingual teaching. By 2021, as the first group of Chinese-instructed students, all the grade six students have been taught in Chinese. The school also requires students to write Chinese characters correctly and use Chinese to communicate with their peers and teachers.

## **III. Survey of Bilingual Education in Xinjiang**

### **1. A general account of the survey**

### A. Purpose of the survey.

A questionnaire survey is conducted on the first group of students who are offered by bilingual teaching in Avati County Experimental Primary School. The data is collected and then analyzed together with the current situation on the effects, influence and problems of bilingual teaching in the school.

### B. Respondents of the survey

The respondents are two hundred and ten 12-14-year-old Uighur students in grade six of Avati County Experimental Primary school. With Uighur language as their mother tongue, they have received bilingual education from 2017. When the survey is conducted, they have experienced three years' bilingual education.

### C. Questionnaire design

There are three types of questions in this questionnaire, mainly focusing on the following aspects:

- the use of Chinese by students and their parents;
- the students' attitudes towards bilingual education;
- the influence of bilingual teaching on home-school communication.

### D. The process of the survey

The survey is conducted with the questionnaire distributed and collected online. 35 questionnaires are distributed on December 1, 2020, and 30 valid questionnaires are collected on December 7, with a collecting rate of 85.7%. Finally, the data is analyzed by statistics software SPSS.

## 2. Statistics and analysis of the survey results

### A. The use of Chinese by students and their parents

83.33% of the students have the habit of speaking Chinese, and they use Chinese in their daily life. The habit is mostly formed in school, which indicates that bilingual teaching policy in Xinjiang has effective implementation. For the 13.33% of students who rarely use Chinese (see figure 1), it needs combined efforts from society, school, and family to help students to learn Chinese and develop the habit of using Chinese. In the communication between students and parents, 50% of students only use Uighur, and 43.3% of students use both Uighur and Chinese (see Figure 2). Besides, 50% of parents only know a little Chinese, and only 40% of parents use Chinese for basic communication (see figure 3). Therefore, it is speculated that these parents may know only a few simple Chinese expressions, or some simple spoken Chinese that the students have taught their parents. According to the analysis above, bilingual education is still in the development stage, and it is a gradual process that has a long way to go.

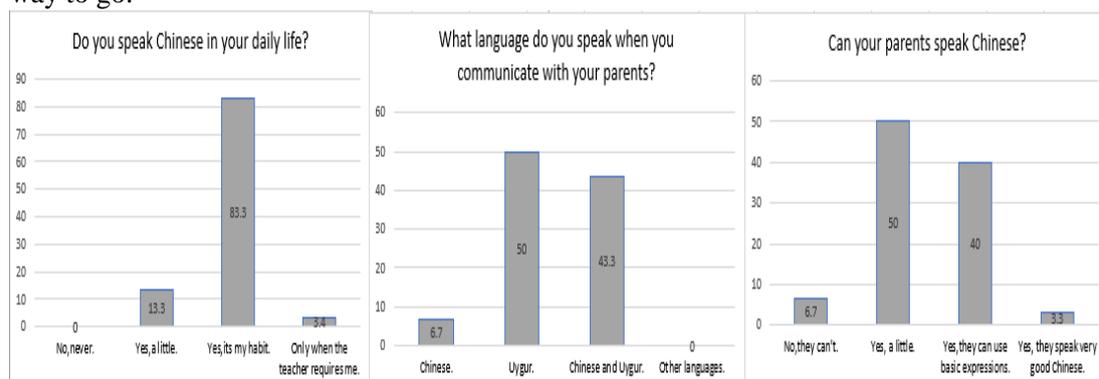


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure

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### B. Students' attitude towards Bilingual Education

As an important part of education, bilingual education plays an important role in the development of individuals. The findings of this survey indicate that most of the students support the Chinese-dominated bilingual teaching. About 66.7% of the students think that Chinese is more important for their future development, and 26.67% of students consider Uighur as important as Chinese (see Figure 4). As many as 80% of the students agree that the school should use Chinese for teaching, and 20% of students think the school should be bilingual (see Figure 5). It can be concluded that students support Chinese language education and they have great enthusiasm for Chinese language learning, which creates favorable conditions for the implementation of Chinese-Uighur bilingual teaching, and also provides support for the consolidation and improvement of the present bilingual teaching results.

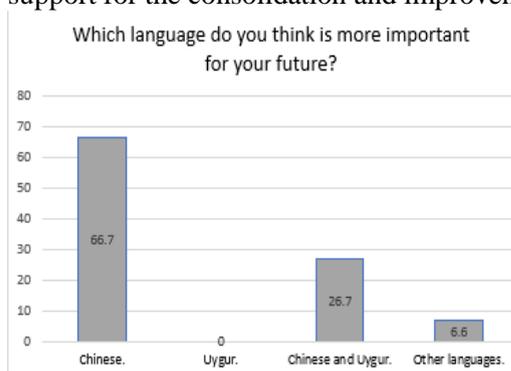
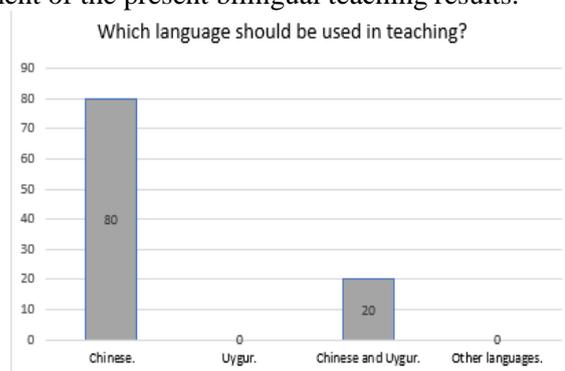


Figure 4



Figure

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### C. Home-school communication

When the students are asked who has influenced your growth most, most of them choose the school. The school is the most important place for students to study and live. It is at schools that students start learning to enter the society, and to shape their views on society, their life philosophy, and values. The survey shows that students think they are most influenced by two factors, e.g. the school, (43,33%), and the family (26,67%) (see Figure 6). In addition, 73.33% of parents are very concerned about their children's learning (see Figure 7), but most parents only occasionally (60%) or even never (3.33%) actively contact the teachers (see Figure 8). In the survey, we find that 60% of the communication between teachers and parents is on telephone, and 26.67% is through teacher's visit to the parents (6.67%) and parent-teacher meeting (20%) (see Figure 9). From the data above, we can see that although parents believe school education plays a very important role in their children's development, and they are very concerned about their children's learning at school, most of them have very limited communication with teachers. One of the reasons, we believe, is the language obstacle as is shown in figure 3.

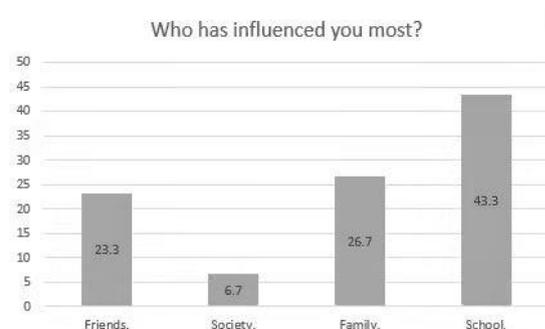


Figure 6

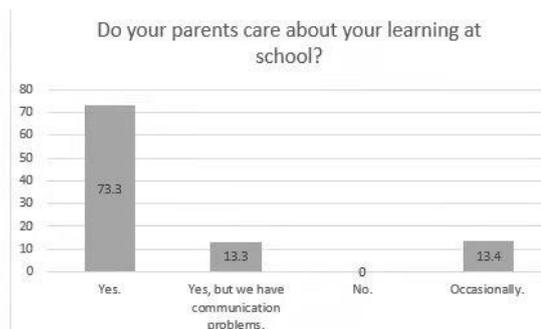


Figure 7

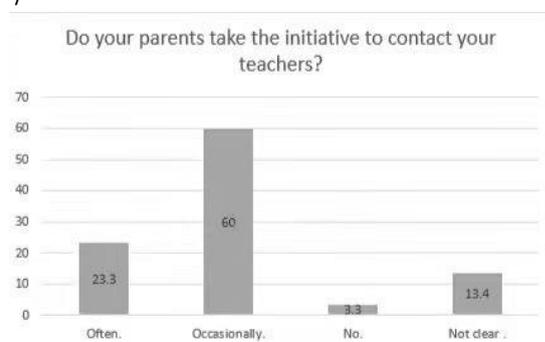


Figure 8

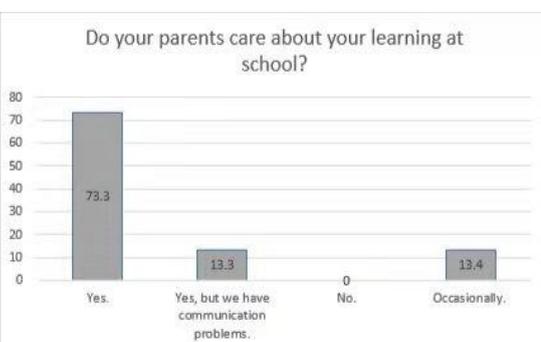


Figure 9

#### IV. Problems in the Implementation of Bilingual Education in Xinjiang

##### 1. The problems in teaching

Concluded from the author's observation and previous researches, there are many problems in education in Xinjiang, such as poor teaching conditions, lack of teaching equipment, bilingual teacher's inadequate language theory and education theory, bilingual teachers' insufficient language ability and limited teaching level, nonstandard teaching procedures, monotonous classroom teaching, low reliability and validity of language test, etc.

Among all the problems, bilingual teacher's problem is the one that needs urgent solution for bilingual education in Xinjiang. As Chinese is not the mother tongue of ethnic minority group, so when teachers use Chinese in their teaching, they are using a second language as the instruction medium. If a teacher wants to teach in Chinese, he or she has to improve their Chinese level first. As many Uighur teachers' Chinese proficiency is limited, they could not pronounce correctly, so when they teach their students, they encounter a lot of problems. Students may not understand their speaking, even worse, students may be influenced by the teachers' non-standard Mandarin. In addition, Aksu District is located in the remote area of northwest part of China. Because of poor natural conditions and economic development, the area is lack of bilingual talents, and it's very difficult to attract talents from outside. Some teachers are assigned by the local government to work there after graduation from junior college, and many of them quit and leave as soon as they have other opportunities, which results in a serious loss of bilingual teachers.

##### 2. The problems in learning

Students have obvious difficulties in learning the second language on the basis of mastering their first language. They will apply their familiar first language knowledge to the second language learning. For example, Uighur does not pay attention to nasals, so it is difficult for students to pronounce correctly front nasals and back nasals in Chinese, and teachers may pay

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more attention to Chinese characters, not the correction of speech, thus the pronunciation of nasals becomes a big problem for the learners. Another example is tones. In Uighur, syllables are composed of vowels and consonants without tones, and there is stress on the last syllable, which does not show any changes in meaning. The difference makes it very difficult for learners to produce the four Chinese tones.

In addition, Uighur students also have difficulties in Chinese character writing. Uighur is alphabetic writing, but Chinese is ideographic writing. In alphabetic writing system, pronunciation is the foundation for learning a new word, while in ideographic writing system, meaning is the foundation of learning a word. The fundamental difference is the main reason why Uighur students have writing errors when writing Chinese characters. They are not sensitive to the ideograms of Chinese characters, thus they tend to ignore the differences of ideograms, and make some writing errors. In addition, the writing habits of Uighur are also opposite to Chinese. Uighur is written from the right to the left, while Chinese is written from the left to the right. Except from the above, there are also great differences in the writing sequence of strokes.

### **3. The problems in home-school communication**

The effective teaching activities must be supported by parents, and only when parents participate in the teaching process personally and communicate with teachers, can children's physical and mental health be promoted. But in reality, there are still many problems in home-school communication.

In traditional home-school communication, whether it is conducted by telephone, text message, teacher's visit to parents, or teacher-parents meeting, all the approaches share one essential feature: parents are passive in their communication with the teachers. In Xinjiang, the problem is even more obvious. Although Xinjiang has implemented bilingual education from 2010, most of the students' parents only speak Uighur. When teachers of Han nationality try to communicate with these parents, they could not understand each other. As many of the teacher are Han nationality, and they could not speak Uighur, so in many cases, teachers can only ask their students to report to their parents, or ask other teachers for help. As a result, teachers cannot conduct effective communication with the parents, and language barrier produces the biggest obstacle in home-school communication.

To solve this problem, teachers and parents should first improve their communication effect. They should use more methods for effective communication. In addition to traditional communication methods, they can also use the Internet and other offline methods, such as network meetings, parent committee, or school visit day for parents, etc. In addition, it is in urgent need to popularize Mandarin at all levels in school and in society, to promote Chinese education, and to improve the level of Chinese speaking, so as to effectively promote home-school communication.

### **V. Conclusion**

From the above survey analysis, we can see there are some problems in bilingual education in Xinjiang. These problems cover teaching staff, students' learning, and home-school communication in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. In order to implement successfully bilingual teaching in ethnic minority areas, we also need to think about other problems, such as the improvement of bilingual teaching management level, standardization of Chinese teacher training system, more research on bilingual teaching, more communication channels for parents, etc. However, because of the distribution of ethnic minorities in different regions, and the different levels of economic development in Xinjiang, there is a quite different environment for bilingual education here. We should first consider the features of local ethnic minority, then

70 make reasonable innovations to improve the bilingual education in Xinjiang  
Uighur Autonomous Region.

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**Expert comments:**

Wang Manling's article *The Situation and Problems of Bilingual Teaching in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region—A Case Study of Awati County Experimental Primary School in Aksu Prefecture* makes a survey analysis about the status quo and problems of bilingual education in Xinjiang. The analysis and discussion in the paper are of reference value for policy makers and for research on bilingual education in China.

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