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# "Multilingual" Talent Development among Foreign Language Majors in Ethnic Minority Higher Education in China

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**Abstract:** With global economic integration and the increasing frequency of political, economic, and cultural exchanges, "multilingual" talent training has become an inevitable need of the times. On the basis of summarizing the current situation of "multilingual" talent training at home and abroad, this paper firstly introduces the definition and classification of "multilingual" talent training of foreign language majors, briefly overviews bilingual education in ethnic minority regions, then focuses on the talent training model of "dominant main-auxiliary type, subordinate diversified form" in ethnic minority colleges and universities, and finally puts forward suggestions for "multilingual" talent training of foreign language majors.

**Keywords:** Ethnic colleges and universities; Multilingual; Foreign language majors; Talent training

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## 1. Introduction

With global economic integration and the increasing frequency of political, economic, and cultural exchanges, "multilingual" talent training has become an inevitable need of the times. The multilateral interaction of international exchanges and the enhancement of regional economic cooperation also show a diversified trend in the demand for foreign language talents. Monolingual talents of foreign language majors can no longer fully meet the employment needs of society, and there is a growing demand for "multilingual" talents who are proficient in two or more foreign languages. Compared with monolingual talents, international multilingual talent training has gradually become a reform trend in both comprehensive colleges and universities as well as foreign language colleges and universities.

The training of international multilingual talents represents a development trend, and this is equally applicable to ethnic minority colleges and universities. Located in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, colleges and universities for ethnic minorities are richly endowed with unique bilingual resources, where a

significant number of ethic minority students have bilingual educational backgrounds. Therefore, the training of "multilingual" talents will emerge as a new approach to educate foreign language talents in ethnic minority colleges and universities, based on their distinctive characteristics and combined with the practical realities of foreign language majors. On the basis of summarizing the current situation of "multilingual" talent training at home and abroad, this paper firstly introduces the definition and classification of "multilingual" talents of foreign language majors, briefly overviews bilingual education in ethnic minority regions, then focuses on the talent training model of "dominant main-auxiliary type, subordinate diversified form" in ethnic minority colleges and universities, and finally puts forward suggestions for "multilingual" talent training of foreign language majors in terms of talent training objectives, curriculum design, textbook development, teacher construction, and learner factors.

## 2. The connotation of "multilingual" talents

Different scholars have varying definitions of "multilingual" talents. Wang [1] defined "international multilingual" talents from two dimensions: "international" and "multilingual." Specifically, "international" focuses on elements such as cross-cultural communication skills, innovation ability, and international outlook, involving interdisciplinary content, international training approaches, and a diversified evaluation system. "Multilingual," on the other hand, refers to the proficiency in mastering two or more foreign languages in addition to one's native language, along with cross-cultural and multilingual communication abilities. On this basis, Sun [2] defined "multilingual" talents as international high-quality talents, and further proposed the training objectives for "multilingual" talents. These talents are expected to have high multilingual ability, language application ability, cross-cultural communication ability, along with innovation and critical thinking. Therefore, multilingual talent training places greater emphasis on the balanced development of students' multilingual abilities, compared to monolingual ones. They are expected to have extensive international knowledge and robust cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to meet the demands for foreign language talents in the globalization background.

## 3. Research status of "multilingual" talent training

Research on the training of "multilingual" talents abroad encompasses bilingual education, language acquisition, and related areas. There are three main types of bilingual education research models: "experiment-based" model, "experiment + survey" model, and "metalanguage-based" model. For instance, the bilingual education implemented in secondary schools in Queensland, Australia, falls under the "experiment-based" model; the bilingual education in Ireland, however, is based on the "experiment + survey" category. Research on "metalanguage," such as Colin's [3] study, focuses on the influencing factors of bilingual education. Regarding language acquisition, research on the "multilingual" talents training mainly concentrates on second and third language acquisition. The development of second language acquisition theories [4] offers guidance for bilingual education. Additionally, some scholars, from a psychological perspective, argue that trilingual learners exhibit significant differences in language abilities compared to monolingual learners, due to their extensive language learning experiences.

In China, research on "multilingual" talent training mainly centers on bilingual or multilingual learners. The models of multilingual talent training can be dated back to the 1980s, such as the "Spanish + English"

bilingual model at Shanghai International Studies University and the "English + French" bilingual model at Beijing Foreign Studies University. At present, only certain foreign language colleges, a few comprehensive universities, and engineering colleges have offered multilingual programs. Nevertheless, there are no explicit requirements for the course syllabus and curriculum design in bilingual education.

Although there are differences in training models for multilingual talent, the educational objectives of these schools are quite similar, which is to seek a new path for training practical and compound language talents. Research on the talent training models for foreign language majors in China mainly focuses on a few colleges and universities that offer bilingual or "multilingual" programs, while the studies on combining foreign language programs in ethnic minority colleges and universities with foreign language talent training models are relatively limited.

## 4. Current situation of bilingual education in ethnic minority regions

Bilingual education in ethnic minority regions is primarily implemented at the compulsory and senior high school stages. Taking an ethnic minority area in Jilin Province as an example, bilingual education exhibits distinctive characteristics in terms of educational model, teaching staff, main achievements, and problems.

### 4.1. "One-main and four-auxiliary" bilingual learning and application model

Bilingual education in this ethnic minority area has undergone a process of continuous refinement. Chronologically, it can be categorized into three phases: the "Chinese as a Course Teaching" phase, "Bilingual Learning and Monolingual Application" phase, and the "Bilingual Learning and Application" phase. The shift from the "Bilingual Learning and Monolingual Application" phase in the 1980s to the "Bilingual Learning and Application" model after 2000 has gradually led to the establishment of the "One-Main and Four-Auxiliary" "Bilingual Learning and Application" model. During the "Chinese as a Course Teaching" phase, ethnic languages were used as the primary teaching language, and Chinese as a course in bilingual education. From the perspective of Chinese teaching, this phrase can be described as a model of "Chinese as a Course Teaching." In the "Bilingual Learning and Monolingual Application" phase, both the minority language and Chinese were used as teaching languages in non-language courses. In the "Bilingual Learning and Application" phase, following the reform of bilingual education, Chinese has become the teaching language for most subjects.

Currently, the "Bilingual Learning and Application" model employed in ethnic minority primary schools transcends a teaching model of a single language or subject, but rather a teaching practice integrating teaching languages, subjects, and quality education. Since the "One-Main and Four-Auxiliary" bilingual education model was introduced in this area, the bilingual education reform has been gradually deepened. In the "One-Main and Four-Auxiliary" bilingual education model, "One-Main" refers to the main class, using Chinese and an ethnic minority language as teaching languages, and bilingual teaching is the main channel to improve teaching quality. "Four-Auxiliary," on the other hand, includes creating a language learning environment, enhancing ethnic cultural education, advancing bilingual teaching experiments, and organizing language practice activities. Primary and secondary schools should carry out bilingual teaching seminars and extracurricular activities in combination with teaching openness and other initiatives, prioritizing classroom instruction as the main channel to enhance bilingual education and ensuring effective language instruction. Combining activities such as Teaching Open Days, primary and secondary schools conduct bilingual teaching

seminars and extracurricular activities, using classroom teaching as the main channel to improve bilingual teaching and achieve effective language teaching.

In addition, ethnic cultural education also runs through the process of school life. The ethnic minority area is in a bilingual environment, with various traditional ethnic customs and social etiquette. These activities not only enrich students' campus life, but also profoundly influence students' development. By fostering campus cultural development, they create a conducive atmosphere for language learning, thereby promoting "bilingual and bicultural" education in the "One-Main and Four-Auxiliary" model.

### 4.2. Current situation of bilingual teaching staff

The educational qualifications of teachers in ethnic minority schools in this ethnic minority area could reach the standards set by the local education department, with a high qualification rate. Most teachers of ethic minority schools are graduates of normal major and have good professional quality. The construction of preschool teachers in this area has also been further strengthened. The teaching staff in many kindergartens have transitioned from the "one teacher, one assistant" form to the "two teachers, one assistant" form, and in some schools they are in the form of "three teachers, one assistant."

The teacher training in this ethnic minority area is timely and effective. Local governments and education departments not only provide policy support for the training of primary and secondary school teachers, but also put forward a five-year teacher training program, which offers guidance on training content and scheduling, including preparation, promotion, implementation, review, and assessment phases. Training methods are diverse, incorporating both ethnic minority languages and Chinese into the curriculum. Evidently, the development of bilingual teaching staff has garnered significant attention from local governments and education departments.

While the construction of bilingual teaching staff in this area has achieved certain successes, several challenges persist. For instance, the structure of the teaching staff is imbalanced, particularly due to a scarcity of young ethnic minority language teachers. The lack of bilingual teachers hinders the sustained development of ethnic schools. As the number of students in ethnic minority schools decreases, class sizes have changed a lot. Therefore, the teachers should adapt to new circumstances and update innovative teaching philosophies. Furthermore, the evaluation of professional titles needs to be further improved to stimulate teachers' motivation. Currently, ethnic minority schools offer limited professional title opportunities for teachers, potentially impacting their enthusiasm for teaching and research.

## 5. Construction of the talent training model for "multilingual" foreign language majors in ethnic minority colleges and universities

The exploration of a talent training model for "multilingual" foreign language majors in ethnic minority colleges and universities should fully consider the bilingual resources and regional advantages of ethnic minority colleges and universities, combined with students' needs for foreign language learning. This involves transitioning from single-language ability training to multilingual language ability training, gradually forming a talent training model dominated by the "dominant main-auxiliary type, subordinate diversified form."

The "multilingual" talent training model in ethnic minority colleges and universities can adopt a "dominant main-auxiliary type," where students major in one language and minor in another. Depending on

the timing of the major and minor language courses, the training model can be diversified, dividing into two types: synchronous teaching of multilingual courses and segmented teaching of multilingual courses.

## 5.1. Synchronous teaching of multilingual courses

Based on the synchronous teaching model of multilingual courses, students learn two languages simultaneously from the first semester to graduation. Foreign language majors in ethnic minority colleges and universities can offer foreign languages + minority languages/regional dominant languages, and adopt this training model.

Taking a university in Jilin Province, which is located in a bilingual environment of Chinese and Korean, as an example, the training model for multilingual talents in the School of Foreign Languages can adopt "foreign language + minority language" model such as English + Korean, Japanese + Korean, Russian + Korean. According to the multilingual direction, they implement a 4–5-year undergraduate program and set student training objectives that are in line with the actual situation of the major. For example, the training objectives for multilingual talents in English majors can be set as follows: "To cultivate multilingual talents with noble morality of teaching, solid English language foundation and cultural knowledge, mastery of linguistics, literary, and educational basic theories, proficient English language communication skills, and the ability to engage in translation, management, and other work in foreign affairs, education, economics, culture, science and technology departments." For English proficiency, students are required to reach TEM-4 (Test for English Major Grade Four) level and complete all compulsory courses, which account for about 60% of the total course hours; for Korean proficiency, it is required to reach TOPIK-5 (Test of Proficiency in Korean Grade 5) level or above, and complete compulsory courses as well, which are about 40% of the total course hours. Major English courses include Comprehensive English, Advanced English, English Linguistics, English and American Literature, English Education, English-Chinese Translation, English Viewing, Listening and Speaking, and Survey of English-Speaking Countries. Meanwhile, in the fourth academic year, students are required to take at least three elective courses per semester. Minor courses in Korean, which are no less than 8 course hours per week, include Basic Korean, Advanced Korean, Korean Reading and Writing, Audio-visual & Speaking with four languages, Korean-English translation, etc. The training model for the multilingual direction, involving Japanese-Korean and Russian-Korean, is similar to the one for English-Korean.

## 5.2. Segmented teaching of multilingual courses

Based on the segmented teaching model for multilingual courses, two language courses are offered in stages, with different focuses at each one. In ethnic minority colleges and universities, minority candidates usually make up a certain proportion of students. Students from ethnic minority high schools can often speak one language (Korean or Japanese), showing certain advantages in language learning during their undergraduate studies. Taking the School of Foreign Languages at this university as an example, English and Japanese majors offer introductory courses in English and Japanese to enroll students who have a basic background in Japanese and Korean from high school. For these students, ethnic minority colleges and universities can adopt this model for training multilingual talents in foreign language majors. By integrating the economic development of the border area, they will establish multilingual directions in Japanese-Korean and English-Korean. Based on the language characteristics, they will offer various multilingual language courses and adopt diverse multilingual training models. The education system for the segmented teaching model of

multilingual courses can be extended to 5 years. For example, the training goal for Japanese language majors in the Japanese-Korean multilingual direction can be set as follows: Guided by the Scientific Outlook on Development, it aims to cultivate multidisciplinary professional talents who major in Japanese and minor in Korean, meeting the urgent needs of China's economic and social development. Based in the region and serving the whole country, they aim to cultivate international, multidisciplinary, and practical specialized talents with all-round development in morality, intelligence, physical, aesthetics, and labor, with high proficiency in Japanese listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, and with a strong pioneering spirit and comprehensive ability. In the curriculum of the Japanese-Korean multilingual direction, Japanese compulsory courses account for about 60% of the total course hours, while Korean compulsory courses account for about 40% of the total course hours. The multilingual study is divided into two stages: the first stage is dedicated to Japanese learning. During the first and second academic years, systematic Japanese courses will be offered, with no less than 16 course hours per week, providing students with comprehensive Japanese language skills training. The second stage is for Korean learning. In the third academic year, students mainly learn Korean by increasing its course hours and continue to study Japanese. Specifically, Korean course hours are about 10–12 hours per week, and Japanese course hours are about 6–8 hours. Through the segmented teaching of multilingual courses, students can skillfully master both Japanese and Korean.

## 6. Conclusion

With the globalization of the world economy and the increasing frequency of political, economic, and cultural exchanges with foreign countries, multilingual education has emerged as a new normal in the development of foreign languages. "Multilingual" talents, as a trend in training foreign language talents, align with the inevitable needs of the times in the context of globalization. Based on defining the connotation and characteristics of "multilingual" talents, this paper summarizes the current research status of "multilingual" talent training at home and abroad. It briefly describes the overview of bilingual education in ethic minority regions, and explores the talent training model of ethnic minority colleges and universities with "dominant main-auxiliary type, subordinate diversified form," and puts forward suggestions for the training of "multilingual" foreign language majors in ethnic minority colleges and universities.

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## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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