

Building Bridges for Foreign Teachers: A Case Study of an Urban Elementary School in Southern Taiwan

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1. Introduction

International business is pivotal to Taiwan's economic expansion, and in light of increasing the international competitiveness of Taiwanese students, bilingual education emerges as a critical educational strategy (National Development Council and Department of Education, 2022). In the realm of bilingual education, the quality of bilingual teachers becomes fundamentally essential (Huang, 2022). Local bilingual teachers, English teachers, and native English speaker teachers are all critical for implementing Taiwan's bilingual education and should work collaboratively. The foreign English teachers represent a vital resource within this framework (Kuo, 2022) since they are known to significantly enhance students' English listening skills (Wu, 2021), boost motivation in English learning (Wang, 2017), and play an indispensable role in the success of school-based English village programs (Chen, 2009). The accruing benefits from such initiatives align with the educational quality improvements anticipated by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Arora, 2019; Charsen & Bruggemann, 2022).

Despite the apparent advantages, there is a notable deficiency in research concerning the effective integration and support of foreign English teachers, and the government, educational leaders, and researchers should provide some solutions for the challenge. This study aims to address this gap by conducting preliminary research into the experiences of a case elementary school in Southern Taiwan that has undertaken to host a foreign teacher. Through this exploratory study, we intend to develop practical guidelines for schools facing similar challenges in accommodating foreign teachers. The objectives of this research include examining the specific challenges faced by the foreign teacher, identifying the institutional challenges, and proposing solutions.

2. Literature Review

To bolster the English proficiency of students, the development and maintenance of high-quality bilingual education programs are crucial. One of central policies in achieving this is the recruitment of foreign English teachers, viewed as a strategic component in these educational initiatives (Huang, 2009). Native English-speaking

teachers offer some advantages that enhance Taiwan's bilingual education. For instance, they are able to adapt to diverse roles within school-based English village programs, offering dynamic, culturally enriched educational experiences (Chen, 2009). Moreover, these teachers contribute to creating an immersive English learning environment, which significantly boosts students' motivation to learn English.

Despite these benefits, several challenges have been identified that can impede the effectiveness of foreign English teachers in Taiwanese schools. Wang (2023) highlights disparities in classroom management strategies between foreign teachers and their local counterparts, noting that these differences can create friction and disrupt the learning process. Additionally, the issue of variable quality among foreign teachers poses a significant concern, with some educators not meeting the expected standards of proficiency and pedagogical skills (Wang, 2023). Another critical challenge is the need for ongoing professional development for these educators to ensure they remain at the forefront of teaching excellence (Wang, 2023).

Addressing these challenges is imperative to enhance the professional competence of bilingual teachers and to ensure the success of bilingual education programs. Kuo (2022) suggests that establishing and nurturing a professional learning community within schools could serve as an effective strategy to support continuous teacher development and to harmonize teaching methodologies between foreign and local teachers.

Exploring the specific experiences of case school provides valuable insights into these challenges and potential strategies. This examination helps not only to understand the practical difficulties but also to generate actionable guidelines that can aid other schools in improving their integration and support structures for foreign teachers.

3. Research Method

This study employs a case study to delve into the challenges and solutions associated with hosting a foreign English teacher at an urban elementary school in Southern Taiwan. We conducted multiple interviews with various stakeholders at the school to gather diverse perspectives on the experiences and challenges faced.

The participants in these interviews included the school principal, the academic director, two collaborative teachers, and the foreign teacher. The interview details include the following parts. 1) School Principal: Interviewed six times, each session

lasting 60 minutes, and coded as IAP with specific dates (e.g., IAP, 20240308). 2) Foreign Teacher: Interviewed four times, each session lasting 60 minutes, and coded as IFT with date. 3) Local Collaborative Teachers (A & B): A total of four interviews were conducted with these teachers, each lasting 90 minutes, and coded as ITA or ITB. 4) School Director: Interviewed twice, each session lasting 90 minutes, coded as IAD. 5) Focus Groups: Three focus group sessions were conducted, each lasting 90 minutes, and coded as FGA, FGB, and FGC, with specific dates noted.

The methodology for data collection involved taking shorthand notes during each interview session, with the consent of the interviewees. Subsequently, two authors collaboratively reviewed the collected data, extracting key ideas and forming thematic clusters for further discussion.

This preliminary case study is designed to uncover insights into the practical realities of integrating a foreign teacher into the school environment. By analyzing these firsthand perspectives, we aim to identify recurring themes and propose effective strategies to overcome the challenges. Given the complex nature of this topic, the findings from this initial research suggest that further, more comprehensive studies are warranted to fully address the intricacies of hosting foreign teachers and enhancing their effectiveness within Taiwan's educational system.

4. Research Results and Discussion

This investigation into the experiences of a foreign English teacher at a Southern Taiwanese urban elementary school has elucidated numerous challenges, alongside corresponding solutions, faced both by the foreign teacher and the school. These findings are detailed below.

(1) Foreign English Teacher's Challenges

Our research identified several significant hurdles for the foreign English teacher. First, living-related challenges included lengthy and complex application procedures, limited accessibility to relevant local websites from abroad, and insufficient pre-arrival information about local resources and cultural integration. For instance, the foreign teacher expressed that: "I am difficulties with finding suitable accommodation and securing a stable job during the application process due to bureaucratic delays" (IFT, 20240315; IFT, 20240319). Additionally, "I am feeling isolated and lacking emotional support were significant concerns" (IFT, 20240320).

Second, curricular and instructional challenges include that the teacher faced obstacles related to unfamiliarity with Taiwan's English teaching policies, "lack of suitable lesson plans" (IFT, 20240319), and ineffective classroom management strategies. These issues were compounded by "It is very difficulties in handling sixth grade students with lower motivation levels" (IFT, 20240320).

Third, foreign teachers frequently encountered significant challenges in communication, primarily due to language barriers and cultural hesitance when interacting with colleagues. Similarly, these communication difficulties extended to their interactions with students, particularly affecting those who had limited proficiency in English, further complicating the educational process (IFT, 20240320).

(2) School's Challenges

The school encountered several institutional challenges in hosting a foreign English teacher. First, the challenge of "We are lack of specific guidelines to host a foreign teacher" (IAP, 20240301). The absence of a tailored framework for recruiting and integrating foreign teachers forced the school to rely on protocols designed for local hires, which were not fully applicable (IAP, 20240308).

Second, the challenge of balancing diverse needs, managing the expectations and contractual stipulations of foreign teachers while aligning them with the school's broader educational missions proved challenging. Issues arose from differing commitments to school activities and curriculum flexibility (ITA, 20240402).

Third, the challenge of collaboration inefficiencies, "It is very difficult to find common times for planning and executing collaborative educational activities between foreign and local teachers was a logistical challenge" (IAP, 20240315). Additionally, there was a perceived overlap in the roles of foreign and local English teachers, which seemed to underutilize the unique capabilities of the foreign teacher (ITA, 20240412).

(3) Overcoming the Challenges through Collaborative Interactions

The school implemented several strategies to address these challenges. First, improving living conditions for foreign teachers, "I establish a host colleague system, where local teachers assisted the foreign teacher with settling in and adapting to the local environment" (IAP, 20240308). This approach was reported as successful and set a precedent for future practices (IAP, 20240412).

Second, enhancing understanding of teaching policies, a bilingual instruction team was formed, including school leaders and teachers, which helped the foreign teacher integrate into the local education system more effectively. Regular meetings and discussions on bilingual policy and teaching strategies were conducted (FGA, 20240316).

Third, fostering better interaction and integration, efforts were made to encourage the foreign teacher to share her international experiences and engage more with the school community through various activities, such as English broadcasts during lunch and contributions to school-based curriculums (FGC, 20240410).

In short, while the challenges of integrating foreign English teachers into Taiwanese schools are substantial, they are not insurmountable. This case study provides insights into practical strategies that can improve the experiences of foreign teachers and enhance the educational outcomes of bilingual programs in Taiwan.

5. Conclusion

The insights gleaned from our study have culminated in the development of a comprehensive set of guidelines designed to assist schools in effectively hosting foreign English teachers. These guidelines are tailored to mitigate the various challenges identified through our research, providing actionable advice that schools in similar circumstances may find beneficial.

- (1) Streamlining the Application Process: The government is recommended to establish a dedicated online center for foreign English teacher recruitment. This platform should offer downloadable examples of application procedures, clarifying the roles and responsibilities involved, such as specifying that the employer in the application forms should be the principal of the hosting school rather than a government body. This could significantly reduce the bureaucratic hurdles faced by schools and foreign teachers alike.
- (2) Provision of Comprehensive Local Information: Schools should prepare tailored information packs for foreign teachers, including details about local housing, transportation, religious communities, and relevant social media platforms. This will help foreign teachers acclimate more quickly and effectively prepare for their teaching roles in Taiwan.

- (3) Addressing Special Needs: It is crucial for schools to actively address and accommodate the unique personal needs of foreign teachers, such as dietary restrictions, religious practices, and health care requirements, ensuring a welcoming and supportive environment.
- (4) Building Supportive Relationships: Assigning dedicated, caring local teachers as collaborative hosts can facilitate a smoother transition for foreign teachers. These host teachers can act as a bridge to foster friendships and provide necessary assistance, making the foreign teachers feel valued and supported upon their arrival.
- (5) Encouraging Local Interaction: School leaders should encourage local staff to engage actively and warmly with foreign teachers. This not only supports the integration of the foreign teacher but also enriches the local community's linguistic and cultural competencies, aligning with the goals of bilingual education policies.
- (6) Incentivizing Student Interaction: Implementing a rewards policy to encourage student interactions with foreign teachers, such as an "Award Card of Interaction with Foreign Teacher" signed by the teacher for various engagements, can enhance students' enthusiasm and participation in language learning activities.
- (7) Educational Policy Familiarization: Schools should ensure that foreign teachers are well-informed about Taiwan's educational frameworks, including a key orientation on the 12-Year Curriculum Guidelines and how to incorporate key local educational issues into their teaching.
- (8) Flexible Teaching Roles: Encouraging foreign teachers to take on flexible roles beyond formal curriculum teaching can lead to greater contributions. Schools should leverage the unique cultural and linguistic skills of foreign teachers in school-based, extracurricular, and cross-cultural activities.
- (9) Support in Classroom Management: Considering that many foreign teachers may initially lack classroom management skills or culturally different classroom management rationale, schools should plan for local teachers to assist in this area as needed, ensuring a conducive learning environment.
- (10) Support for Schools in Remote Areas: The government should design specific

recruitment programs that transparently communicate the unique challenges of working in remote locations. This transparency will help ensure that foreign teachers are fully aware of and prepared for the conditions they will encounter, potentially increasing retention rates in these challenging environments.

By implementing these guidelines, schools in Taiwan can create a more effective and nurturing environment for foreign teachers and collaborative partners, thereby enhancing the overall success of bilingual education programs and contributing to the broader educational objectives of the country. However, critically assessing and continuously monitoring these guidelines' effectiveness is essential. While promising, their practical application and impact should be scrutinized to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving demands of bilingual education and genuinely serve the needs of all stakeholders involved. Further empirical research is necessary to validate these strategies and identify potential areas for refinement.

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