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The Model of Bilingual Education as a Platform for Harmonizing the Interests of the Multi Faith Environment in Business Schools and Universities

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Abstract

The paper focuses on revealing bilingual education features serving the purposes of harmonizing the multi-faith business schools and universities environment, using Russian and international experience. The empirical study was carried out using questionnaire method, polling, and method of involved observation. Russian business schools in 2017, 2018 and 2019, with a total number of 404 students, including 202 students in academic programs implementing bilingual education model in Russian and English, as well as the same number of students in classical monolingual programs in Russian (control banding), formed the empirical base of the study. It was revealed that bilingual education is a complex socio-pedagogical phenomenon and a promising educational model, which focuses not only on shaping and building a wide range of students' capabilities but also on the unique socio-cultural educational environment functioning aimed at the solution of such problems as: harmonization of students' interests to overcome intercultural differences; expanded socialization and facilitation of productive activities in terms of intercultural, interfaith education. It was also determined and confirmed empirically that the overall orientation of the bilingual educational model, which forms a productive cross-cultural communication environment, influences the potentially successful overcoming of interfaith differences and harmonization of interests of representatives of different confessions, as well as religious and atheistic practices. Thus, the use of a single neutral language code, free from religious-oriented vocabulary, reduces the tension in communication perception of educational activity subjects, reducing the risk of contradictions and conflicts of inter-confessional character, thus, harmonizing the interests of participants multi-religious educational environment. The results obtained confirm the hypothesis that the use of bilingual education in Russian and English in modern Russian conditions can be considered as a potentially highly effective platform for harmonizing the interests of a multi-faith environment in business schools and universities.

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1. Introduction

The paradigm of bilingual education is gaining ground in both domestic and Western educational practice, which, however, does not exclude large-scale debate on both bilingual education organization and anticipated efficiency. If the discussion is particularly acute for General secondary education (Abramova, Yessina, 2014), then in relation to higher education, business education, on the contrary, there is a certain research gap. Partly, it exists due to the fact that bilingualism has been actively used in higher and business education for a long time and with the utilitarian purpose of providing a significant coverage of the contingent foreign students and attracting foreign-language teaching staff representatives. Using, apart from the official state language of educational institution accreditation, a universal language code (usually English), it is possible to significantly expand higher and business education opportunities. This is achieved primarily by ensuring mutual understanding between students and faculty, between students, teachers and other subjects of the educational process. In short, bilingualism makes it possible to attract foreign-language subjects to the system of higher and business education, who would not be able to participate in the educational process if they were taught in the national language alone, or would do it very ineffectively. Bilingualism, among other issues, provides great opportunities for experience exchange, scientific knowledge sharing, and inter-University cooperation. Therefore, the applied value of bilingual education has long been appreciated in the system of higher and business education in many countries of the world (Chen, Yang, 2018).

It should be noted that the potential of bilingual education is certainly not limited to these purely practical purposes; it is much broader, and some aspects are beginning paid attention to only recently. Among them are the multiculturalism inherent in bilingualism (Guerrero, 2017), and one of its most important consequences is the wide potential of practice – oriented implementation in order to harmonize the interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities. Since in Russian practice, according to our survey on bilingual training programs for higher and business education, more than 90 % of the total number of programs are taught in Russian and English, it is interesting to observe the possibility of using the latter in the framework of bilingual courses in order to harmonize the interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities.

The purpose of this paper is to study the possibilities and potential of applying the model of bilingual education as a platform for harmonizing the interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities of the Russian Federation.

Accordingly, the following tasks were assigned to the authors: 1) to consider the concept, essence and paradigm of bilingualism in higher and business education; 2) to study theoretical and methodological aspects of bilingual education potential in order to harmonize the interests of the multi-faith environment of higher and business education; 3) to review and systematize the practice of bilingual education model application in universities and business schools of the Russian Federation and individual foreign countries; 4) conduct an empirical study of bilingual education impact on ensuring the priority interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities; 5) present actionable conclusions on the bilingual education potential in Russian and English in modern Russian conditions as a platform for harmonizing the interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities of the Russian Federation and other EEU States.

2. Materials and methods

The current research is carried out on the basis of an inclusive-structural approach to the social phenomena study, at the intersection of the humanitarian and phenomenological educational paradigm, the concepts of inclusiveness and continuity of learning, and taking into account the current state of the theory and practice of bilingual education.

The empirical study was carried out using questionnaire method, polling, and method of involved observation. The materials were processed using the methods of correlation and regression analysis using programs and packages for automated statistical data processing.

Russian business schools in 2017, 2018 and 2019, with a total number of 404 students, including 202 students in academic programs implementing bilingual education model in Russian and English, as well as the same number of students in classical monolingual programs in Russian (control banding), formed the empirical base of the study. Statistical data processing was performed using a table processor based on relevant methods for checking the statistical significance of the results obtained: calculating the value of the Z criterion between two proportions in independent samples and statistically evaluating the significance of differences in average values according to the student's t-criterion.

3. Discussion

Bilingualism and as one of its implementations – bilingual education, are considered in modern conditions as a positive effect of globalization and humanization of communications (Wang, 2019). Rapid improvement of information and communication technologies, including simplification of access and expansion of the user audience, contributes to the active spread of bilingualism in modern communication practices (Vishnevskaya, 2018). The latter is connected with the Internet development, including its mobile and social networks segment in which, in addition to the users' mother tongues, communication is actively practiced in universal languages of global importance, primarily in English. Alongside the cross-border contacts activation and simplification, the vast majority of which have a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic character, the demand for specialists with advanced competence in foreign languages of global business communication, General and scientific communications is significantly growing. This determines the active use of modern practices in foreign languages teaching, among which an important place is occupied by training in a bilingual environment. However, the paradigm of bilingualism and bilingual education arose long before the information revolution of the turn of the 20–21st centuries. Actually, there is no established paradigm of bilingualism, there is a significant number of interpretations and classifications of the phenomenon (Shmatkov, 2011; Filimonova, Krylov, 2010; Kulikov, 2004). One of the natural causes of this situation is the development of colonial practices, as well as close cross – border cooperation between neighboring states, which gave rise to the phenomenon of bilinguals, i.e. people who simultaneously communicate in two languages. There is also the phenomenon of polyglots-people who speak several foreign languages at a fairly high level and actively use them in everyday communication.

According to a relatively commonplace truth, bilingualism should be called active everyday knowledge of two unrelated languages, with the ability to quickly switch between languages in accordance with current tasks and communication needs, ideally, the ability to build thinking in any of the selected languages (Bhatia, 2018). This definition is considered by us as a broad context of bilingualism.

For this reason in foreign research literature, it is customary to distinguish a second language (not native in terms of the territory of birth/primary education/socialization) and a foreign language (Napoli, Ravetto, 2018). For example, for a resident of the Russian-speaking (by the predominant ethnic composition of the population) city of Narva, Estonia, the second language will be Estonian or Russian, depending on the ethnicity of the parents and the conditions of the upbringing environment, or both languages will be the first. English or any other language, even if learned from early childhood, is foreign to them. This approach is not universal; for example, in South-East Asian countries teaching practice, a second language is usually understood as any language that is not native to the educating family, which is taught to the child from early childhood – as a rule, this is the English language, taking into account its universality and global demand. Foreign language is considered, in fact, a second foreign language, the study of which is carried out at an older age, even within the framework of General secondary education (Tuc, 2014). Many boundaries of bilingualism perception are blurred due to the widespread use of foreign language learning from early preschool age, however, there is no consensus among researchers on this approach efficiency and expediency (Valian, 2016; Mishra, 2018). For this reason, the conceptual framework of bilingualism is undoubtedly extremely broad. In this paper, for research purposes, we will use the concepts of "bilingualism" and "bilingualism", meaning any communicative or other activity (for example, teaching and educational) process taking course in two languages, one of which is not initially native to the subject of the corresponding activity.

Bilingualism types differ depending on the country (area), socio-cultural conditions, including objectively determined by historical processes. In psycholinguistics, there are three basic types of bilingualism – coordinative (the most acceptable, ideal option when there is a free switch between two languages); subordinative (there is a unique dominance of the native language, which is used for thoughts shaping, then transformed into a foreign language, often by loan translation, simple sentence) and mixed (Mahootian, 2019). Bilingualism can be artificial (by learning a foreign language), or natural (by bringing up two or more languages in a bilingual family or other similar conditions). Based on the classification suggested, it is fair to claim that in our country there is a bilingualism, mainly of an artificially subordinated type.

Modern science investigates the bilingualism phenomena in terms of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that takes into account the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-pedagogical aspects of the phenomenon, including the integral utility of constant practical communications in two or more languages for advanced socialization of the individual, the expansion of his cognitive abilities, and early socio-cultural adaptation in any, including new and even rejecting (hostile) socio-cultural environment (Berent, 2004). To the greatest extent, these characteristics are given to bilinguals of the coordinate type. At the same time, regardless of the preferred theory of formation and development of cognitive abilities, the dominant position among researchers and practitioners is that productive bilingualism of the coordinate type can definitely be artificial, that is, acquired in the course of training.

As for bilingual education, it can be considered in a narrow (teaching a second foreign language) and broad (teaching all or selected subjects of the course in the native and selected foreign languages) context (Abramova, Esina, 2014). The contiguous form may encounter when multiple (more than one, except the actual foreign language and literature) course subjects are taught in a foreign language – but in the wider context, such education cannot be called bilingual, it is focused primarily on foreign language learning facilitation a foreign language as such, but not on the learners' broad universal key skill set development focusing on the bilingual education. In this respect, we recommend to distinguish between the categories "bilingual instruction" and "bilingual education". In the first case we are talking about episodic and/or selective use of foreign languages in the teaching of individual disciplines, courses, educational programs; in the second case – the system shaping the socio-cultural bilingual educational environment (synonym – "language training").

The current paper focuses on bilingual education as a complex socio-pedagogical phenomenon and a promising educational model, application of which is aimed not only at the universal formation and development of a wide range of key competencies of students, but also at the functioning of a unique socio-cultural educational environment aimed at solving such problems as overcoming intercultural differences, ensuring extended socialization and facilitation of productive activities of students in the conditions of intercultural and interfaith education.

Elements of the general model of bilingual education in modern higher education may be the following: 1) proportional distribution of teaching academic subjects in two languages, including one discipline acquisition; 2) bilingual equally distributed project work and other contact and independent activity of students (trainees); 3) the possibility of free (part of a common proportion set) selection language of instruction (including the predominant language of instruction mixed type) in most academic disciplines, i.e. the courses should be suggested, as a rule, in two languages with the corresponding possibility of taking them; 4) active involvement of bilingual teachers, as well as foreign language native speakers into the educational process; 5) educational process methodological support development in two languages; 6) informal communication fostering in two languages; 7) students' groups formation taking into account the level of proficiency in two languages, active involvement of foreign, foreign-language students who speak a foreign language – the second language of the educational program, including as native, and those who speak a third language; 8) directly for business schools and other business education subjects: boosting bilingual business communications between course participants.

Teaching in two languages for native speakers of the basic language in the specific university or business school socio-cultural environment (hereinafter referred to as the UBS), among other things, is a very specific challenge, a practice-oriented task of a new type. The problem is a foreign language proficiency level, in particular, used in a bilingual pair (hereinafter referred to as FL – foreign language used in tandem, NL – native (in particular, Russian language) the language for the educational activities of UBS. As our surveys of students in bilingual courses show, programs,

one of the important reasons for choosing a course (training program) is to improve personal language skills (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Reasons for choosing a bilingual education course for Moscow business schools students in 2017–2019, based on the survey results (first main choice, n = 202 people)

The first (main) motive	Russian-speaking students	Foreign language students	Z (p < 0,01)
Improving personal language skills	49 %	16 %	2,663
Improving personal communication skills	1 %	33 %	-1,690
Better academic course mastering	2 %	33 %	-2,667
Full understanding of experts	6 %	9 %	-0,795
Ability to communicate with native speakers	16 %	1 %	1,087
Perception potential of foreign-language business practices	24 %	1 %	1,149
Other	3 %	6 %	-1,012
Total	135	67	-

It is remarkable that, as can be seen from Figure 1, this goals are increasingly being followed by Russian-speaking students, in contrast to students for whom Russian is a foreign language, the difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. In addition, it is statistically significant to conclude that foreign students, in contrast to Russian speakers, prefer to choose a bilingual education for the purpose of better course mastering.

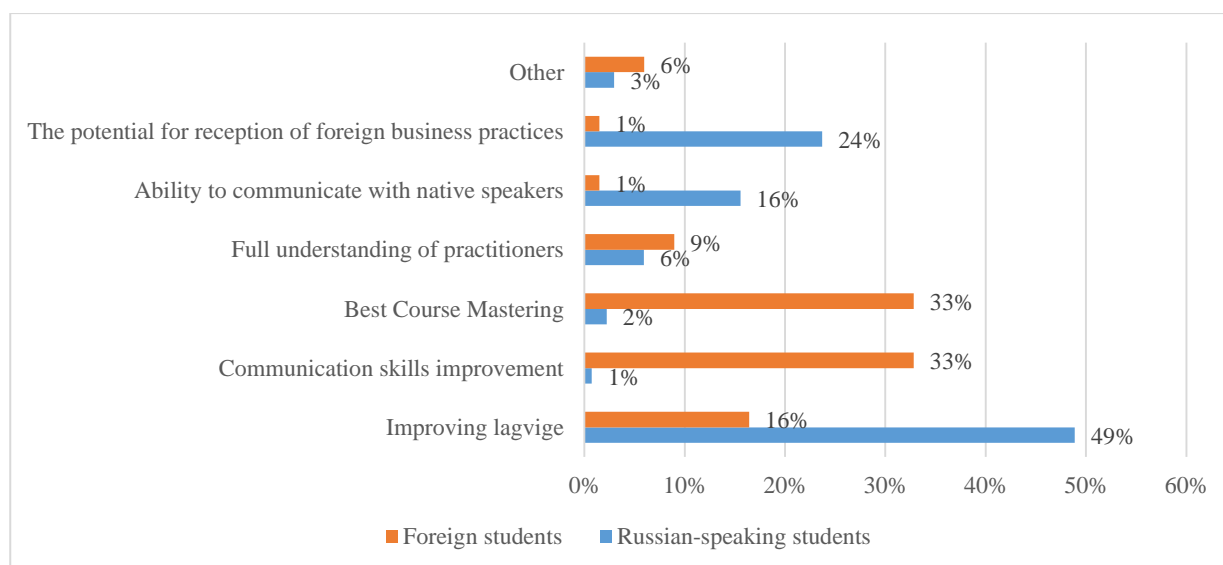


Fig. 1. Distribution of reasons for choosing a bilingual education course Moscow business schools students in 2017–2019, based on the survey results (first main choice, n = 202 people)

The situation is problematic from two aspects at the same time:

- on the one hand, bilingual education itself is not aimed at filling in gaps in foreign language proficiency and assumes a sufficiently high level of proficiency in it for the successful mastering of the training program. The best choice for such students is a variety of language courses; when trying to align and a foreign language knowledge, the true opportunities and advantages of bilingualism are lost. For this reason, native Russian speakers are not recommended to take bilingual courses, at least not for the sole purpose of improving their poor knowledge of a foreign

language. If they have sufficient competence in the field of a foreign language, students are able to successfully complete the course (program) of training, and in this case, the task of getting a language practice will not contradict the main educational goals, in our opinion;

- on the other hand, for foreign students whose native is a third language or a foreign language used in the process of bilingual education, bilingualism is a relatively effective means for cross-cultural communication establishing socio-cultural environment integration to the venue of UBS, effective interaction with other students (trainees) of the training programs of UBS, the native Russian language and its study, which invariably gets borne out by events in scientific research (Kyuchukov, 2016). At the same time, the corresponding potential is not used with full efficiency, especially if students from the third countries do not have sufficiently developed competencies in terms of foreign language proficiency. The solution to this problem is mainly in the plane of optimizing the selection of course participants and the selection of courses in accordance with the formed level of competence in a particular language.

One of the most important tasks of applying bilingual education, as has been repeatedly emphasized above, to ensure interests harmonization of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities.

The approach used in international practice to achieve the stated goal is based on the paradigm of language perception as a universal communicative code (Skiba, 1997), through which not only information itself is encoded and transmitted, but also experience and traditions, socio-cultural values and practices as well.

There is no doubt that the Russian language is the cultural code of the title ethnic group, the nation, which in many cases is associated with the religious code. The use of the Russian language in religious and ceremonial practices is sometimes so fundamental that large-scale social conflicts, including inter-confessional and intra-confessional ones, occur over it. It can be argued that in a significant number of cases, languages contribute to the tension in inter-religious relations, especially in a multi-religious society. For example, a typical native speaker of the Russian language may simply not notice the active use of clichés, "catch phrases" that are characteristic of a particular confessional code. For a Russian native speaker, it is hardly surprising to hear from a teacher such everyday phrases as "for God's sake", "God loves the Trinity", "for Christ's sake", etc. In some studies there is an entire layer of confessional-oriented words and expressions that can be conventionally referred to as "confessionalisms" (Bonvillain, 2019). It is impossible to say that among the languages of world importance with a share of speakers of more than 1 % of the world population, Russian language is most saturated with confessional-oriented vocabulary – such languages as Hindustani, Arabic, Malay, Bengali and Portuguese the share of confession nominatus in vocabulary, for selected statistics, is more by 15-70 % (Bonvillain, 2019).

Meanwhile, among the languages of world significance, there can be also those in which the share of confession nominatus in active vocabulary does not exceed 0.1-0.5 % (English, Japanese, Chinese, modern German), while in Russian the corresponding indicator is estimated to exceed 3.5 % (Figure 2).

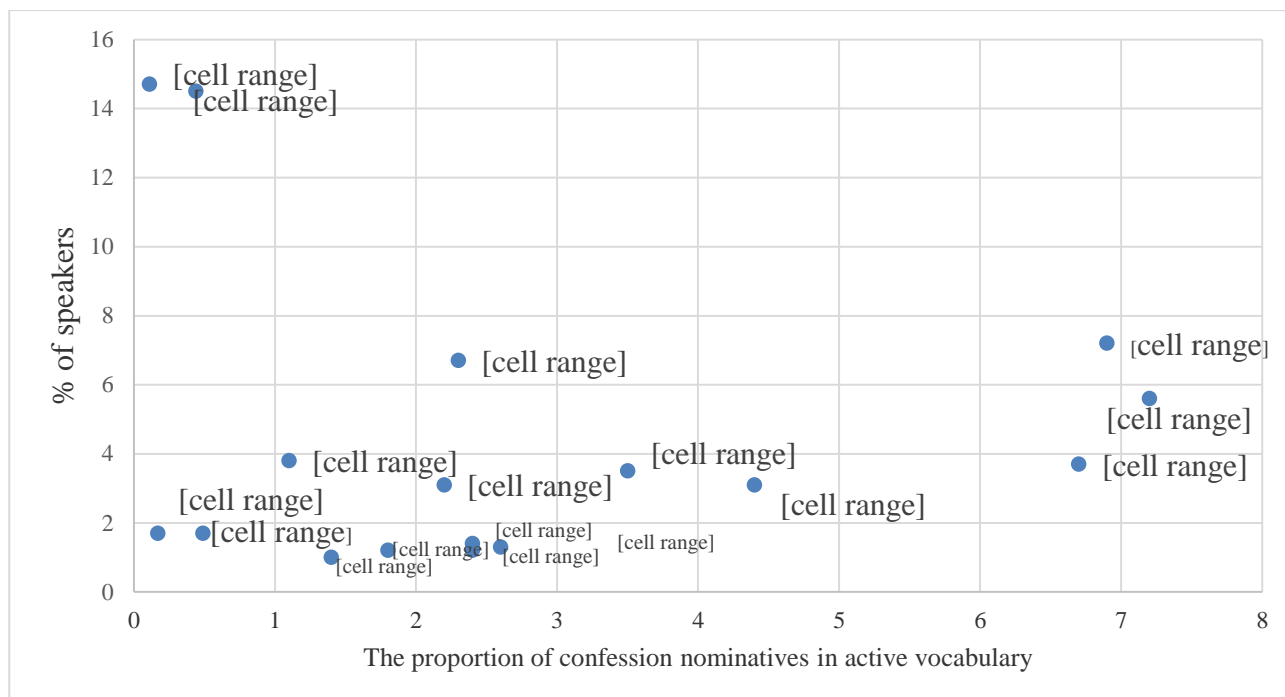


Fig. 2. Distribution of languages of world significance by the share of confession nominates in the active vocabulary (%) and the percentage of speakers (% , 2017)

Note: authors calculations ([Bonvillain, 2019](#)).

Data from cultural and linguistic research should certainly be used with some caution, since there is no universal method for identifying active vocabulary, as well as for calculating the frequency of use of nominatuses. Meanwhile, these calculations, even if they are more indicative, reference in nature, but allow us to distinguish in the world significance languages corpus, in fact, "cleared" from the religious code; such is clearly English, at the same time leading the group world languages as the percentage of speakers and the smallest proportion of religious nomination in vocabulary.

The current situation is connected with the active introduction of tolerance principles and religious indifference in the use of the English language, which began at the turn of the 20–21st centuries and is actively continuing at the present time ([Skiba, 1997](#)). It is no exaggeration to say that the current situation was the result of a social contract formed in the so-called Anglo-Saxon world – states for the vast majority of whose population English is traditionally, historically, the native language, including the language of the dominant group of immigrants – they are Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Such an unwritten social contract was a response to the growing sociocultural demand for tolerance, political correctness and harmony in public relations, including those with complex cultural and confessional components. These states are either traditionally multicultural and multi-confessional societies, or, like the United Kingdom, faced an active cultural diversification in the 20th century.

From the linguistic point of view, the process of achieving these goals is ensured by excluding from the active dictionary nominatives (lexemes, phrases, phraseological units) that do not have neutral common nominations of political, gender, professional, as well as religious and cultural plan ([Bonvillain, 2019](#)). It is also important to agree that in the mentioned socio-cultural environments, Gnosticism and scientific atheism, occult and mythical practices such as Kabbalistic and others are equated with religious practices ([Khodadady, Dastgahian, 2019](#)).

Refining the English language code from nominatives that have a pronounced socio-negative orientation was provided by replacing them with neutral lexemes, or with correct nominatuses. At the same time, this process occurred rapidly, just over a decade, and then spread no less rapidly around the world, including due to the rapid progress of modern information and communication technologies ([Khodadady, Dastgahian, 2019](#)).

As an example of language substitution for neutral lexemes, the following case can be given: instead of "Merry Christmas/Hanukkah", etc. religious holidays, anglophones say: "Happy holidays", which just refers to specific substituted religious (confessional) holidays traditionally

celebrated at a given time period, and not holidays at all. And an example of substitution for socially correct nominatives can be the widespread use of feminines, for example, "author", "editor", and so on.

As a result, by the beginning of the third decade of the 2000s, English can fairly be called confessionally-neutral, which determines the highest potential for its use for the purposes of multi-confessional communication harmonization, including in the framework of educational activities of the higher school of economics.

The potential of using English in the educational process to harmonize the interests of a multi-faith environment, in our opinion, is as follows: 1) the overall orientation of the bilingual educational model, which forms a productive cross-cultural communication environment, influences the potentially successful overcoming of interfaith differences and the harmonization of interests of representatives of different faiths, as well as religious and atheistic practices; 2) the use of a single neutral language code, spared from confessionally-oriented vocabulary, reduces the tension in the perception of communication by subjects of educational activities, reducing the risks of contradictions and subsequent conflicts of an inter-confessional nature, thereby harmonizing the interests of participants in a multi-confessional educational environment; 3) for third language speakers, the use of a universal and understandable code, which is English, helps to eliminate ambiguities and contradictions in the use of the Russian language of the educational institution and the main contingent of students (program listeners), thereby contributing to a more harmonious understanding of culture, religious and other features and differences in the country of study.

Thus, we can put forward a research hypothesis that the use of bilingual education in Russian and English in modern Russian conditions can be considered as a potentially highly effective platform for harmonizing the interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities.

4. Results

The research hypothesis has been confirmed by international experience, primarily in Western European countries, where the bilingual education model penetrates actively first into the business education system (1960–1980s), and then into universities (1980–2000s). According to available estimates, in the Scandinavian countries in the 2017–2018 academic year, more than 56 % of educational business programs and about 34 % of educational programs of universities are bilingual. In the Netherlands, this figure is 63 % and 29 %, respectively, and in Switzerland, 75 % and 48 % (Flores, 2017; Hernandez-Nanclares, Jimenez-Munoz, 2017; Xi et al., 2018). At the same time, this indicator is calculated not by the total number of implemented (accredited, licensed) educational programs, but by the proportion of students in the total number of students at universities and business schools for the period.

The researchers emphasize the presence of numerous positive aspects of the long-term accumulated practice of bilingual education in Western educational UBS, among which the following are of considerable practical interest: 1) a reduction of more than two times the period of social and cultural adaptation of foreign students (students); 2) reduction by 3-5 times of ethno-cultural and inter-confessional conflicts in the poly-national and poly-confessional combinatorics of students; 3) overall increase in satisfaction with the socio-cultural learning environment from 35-45 % of fully or partially satisfied students identified by the results of the survey to 65-80 %; 4) integral statistically significant increase in the success of educational programs (Flores, 2017; Hernandez-Nanclares, Jimenez-Munoz, 2017; Xi et al., 2018; Ping, 2017).

The accumulated data, despite the ambiguity and disparity, including those related to differences in educational programs and approaches to their development and implementation, confirm the potential for successful application of bilingual education as a platform for harmonizing the interests of a multi-faith environment in business schools and universities.

However while taking a positive view of the best foreign experience, it is impossible not to take into account cultural, social and linguistic specifics of the Russian UBS, counting the context of the specific model of bilingualism characteristic of our country and described above. It should also be noted that the share of bilingual educational programs in Russian higher education is still very small (from 0 % to 10-20 % in some cases), although in the field of business education, the prevalence of these programs, as well as the demand for them, has been growing in recent years; according to our estimates, up to 25-30 % of the student population coverage. At the same time,

according to the results of our survey, the indicators of multi-faith students of the corresponding programs are growing (Table 2, Figure 3), which, in many ways, may reflect the positive experience of graduates of previous years, reflected in the recommendations to applicants and the General atmosphere of approval of courses.

Table 2. Confessional composition of students of Moscow business schools bilingual programs of in 2017–2019, based on the results of the survey (first main choice, n = 202 people)

Confession	2017	2019	Z (p < 0,1)
Orthodoxy	48 %	41 %	0,798
Catholicism	6 %	11 %	-1,106
Islam	6 %	21 %	-1,954
Hinduism	1 %	4 %	-0,797
Other religions	2 %	3 %	-0,201
Atheist	12 %	7 %	1,128
No answer	26 %	14 %	1,758

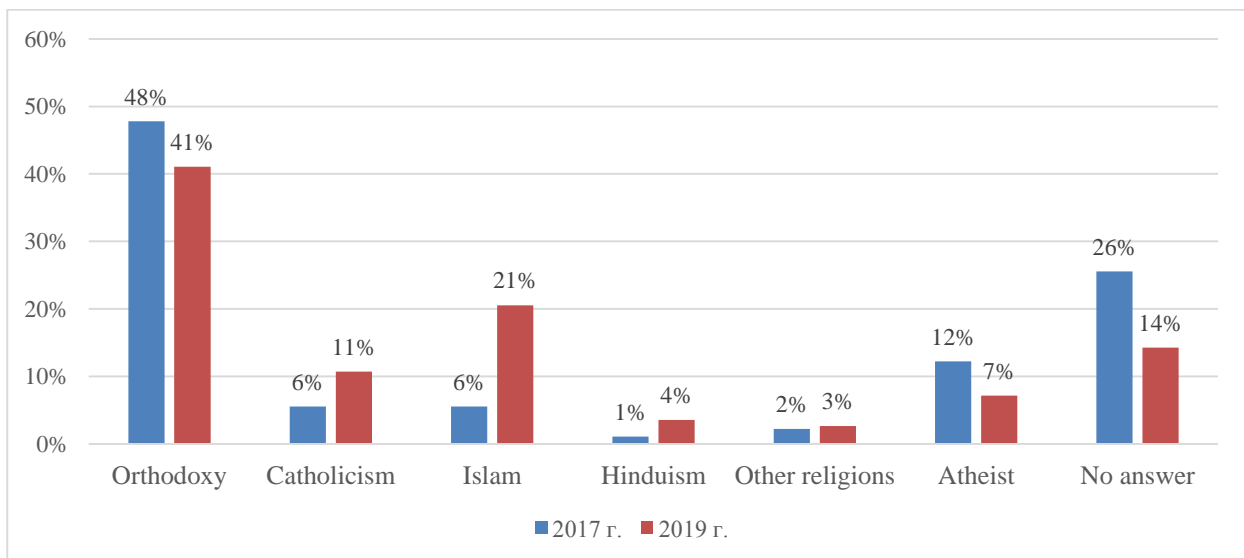


Fig. 3. Confessional composition of students of Moscow business schools bilingual programs in 2017–2019, based on the results of the survey (first main choice, n = 202 people)

As for the bilingual education efficiency as a platform for harmonizing the interests of multi-faith environment in higher and business education, the high potential is confirmed by the data of questionnaires and testing groups of students, shown in graphical form below (Figures 4-5):

1) a positive statistically significant relationship between the indicators of satisfaction with the learning process and the quality of the socio-cultural, including multi-faith environment, observed in students of bilingual programs (correlation coefficient 0.947) and almost not observed in the control group (correlation index 0.204; Figure 4);

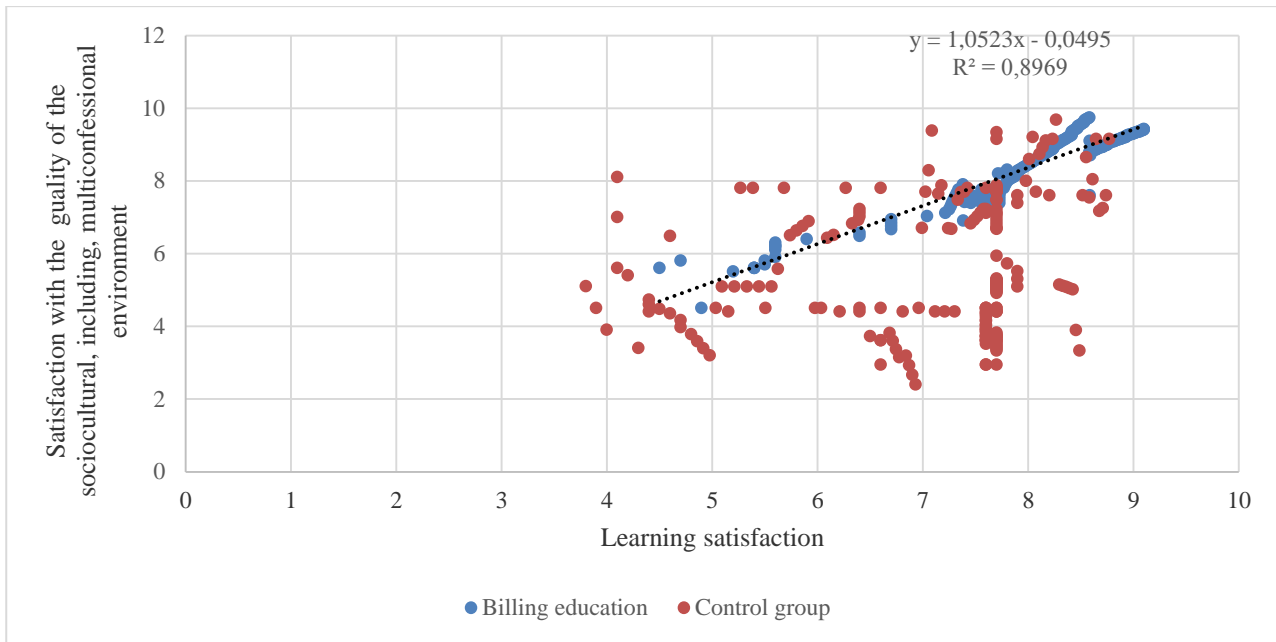


Fig. 4. Indicators of satisfaction with the learning process (points from 0 to 10, max = 10, the highest satisfaction) and the quality of the socio-cultural, including multi-faith environment (points from 0 to 10, max = 10, the highest satisfaction) in the students of bilingual programs (n = 202 people) and in the control group (n = 202 people.)

2) statistically significant differences between estimates of interfaith tension among bilingual students (average value of 6.67 points, standard deviation of 0.74 points) and control group students (average value of 5.54 points, standard deviation of 0.96 points), correlation index between the two groups' scores of 0.9244, student's t-test of 3.995, with $p < 0.01$; [Figure 5](#)).

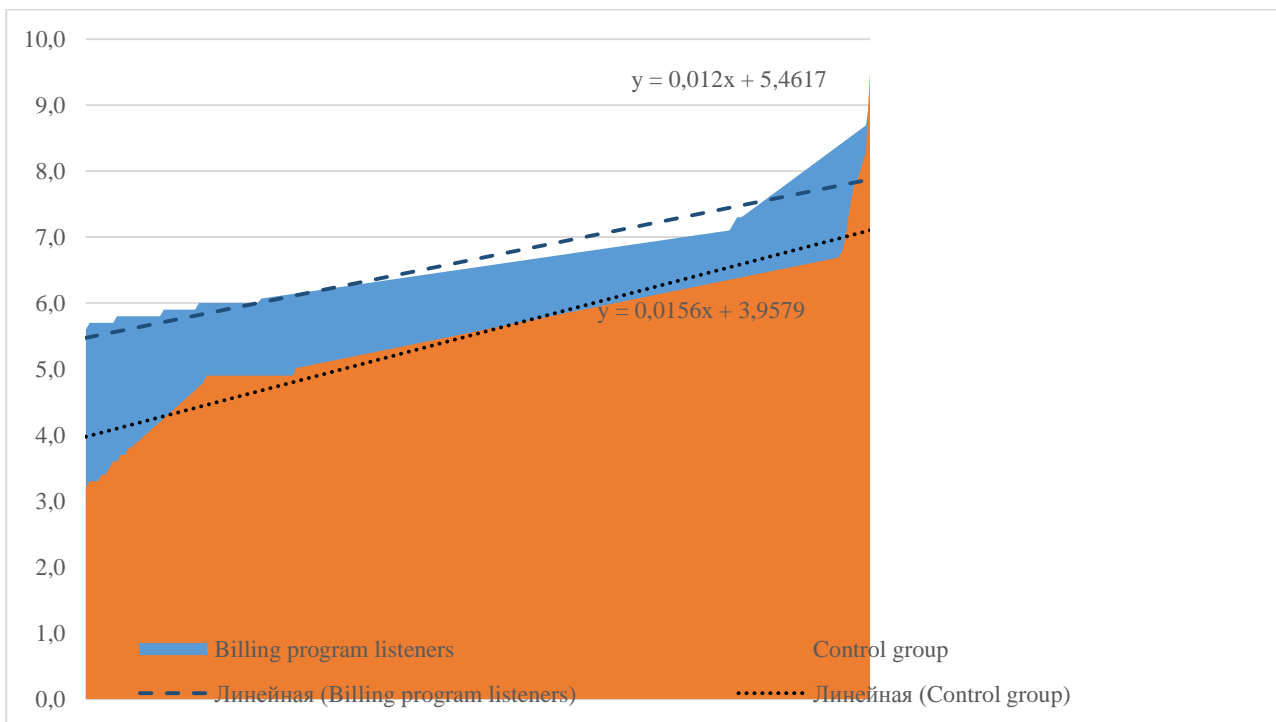


Fig. 5. Estimates of interfaith tension in business school (points from 0 to 10, max = 10, the highest level of tension) made by students in bilingual programs (n = 202 people) and in the control group (n = 202 people)

The presented data allow to confirm the research hypothesis based on the experimental study materials and in compliance with the specified conditions.

5. Conclusion

The results obtained allow us to assert that there is a potential for using bilingual education in Russian and English in modern Russian conditions as a platform for harmonizing the interests of the multi-faith environment in business schools and universities, by simplifying cross-cultural interfaith communications, developing tolerance among participants in the educational process and facilitating mutual understanding, rejecting emotional nominations with a transition to a neutral vocabulary, cleared of confessionally-oriented nominantuses.

However, while trying on and evaluating the results obtained, the limitations of this study, including time, spatial, quantitative, as well as in terms of the coverage of educational programs should be taken into account. Apparently an advanced scientific research should be undertaken by examining relevant data on university bilingual educational programs and their efficiency as a platform for harmonizing the interests of a multi-faith educational socio-cultural environment inclusively.

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