
**BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE REGION OF MURCIA: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TEACHERS' VIEWS**

**LA EDUCACIÓN BILINGÜE EN LA REGIÓN DE MURCIA: UN
ESTUDIO CUALITATIVO SOBRE LAS IMPRESIONES DE LOS
PROFESORES**

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Following a decade of the implementation of a Spanish-English bilingual education system in compulsory education in the Region of Murcia (Spain), it seems increasingly important to gain understanding and insight into teachers' attitudes, beliefs and professional mindsets about relevant bilingual linguistic policies. To this end, a qualitative study was designed to analyse data from interviews conducted with 23 teachers both from primary and secondary education of the Region of Murcia, Spain. This study captures a snapshot of the processes these teachers have gone through since bilingual education was first introduced in 2009, and taps

into their attitudes regarding the difficulties and challenges they have had to face, in particular, in terms of methodologies, training and teaching resources. Additionally, the study also explores the areas in which teachers and coordinators of bilingual schools feel policy makers could have offered more support in order to enhance both their teaching and the student's learning.

Key words: *bilingual education, teachers' attitudes, language assistants, streaming*

Tras una década desde que se implantara la educación bilingüe en la enseñanza obligatoria en la Región de Murcia (España), parece cada vez más relevante conocer de cerca las actitudes, creencias y formas de pensar de los profesores en relación a las normativas y directrices de los programas bilingües. Con tal propósito, se diseñó un estudio cualitativo para poder llevar a cabo un análisis de entrevistas con 23 profesores de primaria y secundaria de diferentes centros de la Región de Murcia. El presente estudio logra captar una panorámica de los procesos estos profesores han ido pasando desde que la educación bilingüe se implantara en 2009 en la Región de Murcia, y describe sus actitudes en relación a las dificultades y retos con las que se han enfrentado, en particular, las relacionadas con metodologías, formación y recursos de enseñanza. Este artículo, de manera adicional, también explora las áreas en las que, según estos profesores y coordinadores de programas bilingües, los agentes responsables y gestores de la nueva política educativa podrían haber ofrecido un mayor apoyo para mejorar tanto la enseñanza como el aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: *Educación bilingüe, actitudes de profesores bilingües, asistentes de lenguas, segregación*

1. Introduction

This article presents and discusses the findings of a qualitative study on language and content teachers' attitudes, beliefs and opinions on the bilingual education policies of the Region of Murcia, a coastal, province in in southeast Spain. A total of 23 teachers from both primary and secondary schools were interviewed in an attempt to understand more about the

effects of the recent linguistic policies on their motivation to teach and their attitudes to this novel classroom approach. First of all, we argue for the need to take the teacher figure into consideration when analysing the effects of this new educational policy. In a later section, we present the demographics on the Region of Murcia before detailing the different legislations that have regulated the current system –presently in the 2018-2019 school year the standard syllabus in 100% of primary schools in the autonomous community. In the findings section, we present our analysis and discuss the emergent topics currently concerning our sample about the bilingual system. Finally, we offer some possible solutions to the issues that arise as well as suggestions for future research in this area.

2. Teacher Motivation

Teachers are an essential cog in the learning process, nonetheless, they are rarely given the limelight in educational research. With the recent initiatives in Spain to implement bilingual education, it is the teachers who face the heavy workload of actually preparing themselves to impart their specialist knowledge in a language that is not their L1, making this figure a central stakeholder in the process (Díaz, Fernández, Gómez & Halbach, 2005). Given the few studies focusing on the teacher in language research, Mercer and Kostoulas (2018: 2) rightly claim “there is a need to redress the imbalance between studies that have focused on learners and those that have focused on teachers.” Teachers’ degree of motivation can have a significant influence on students’ ultimate sustained motivated engagement in learning. Indeed, teachers who are motivated can also prove beneficial in various dimensions of the educational process. For instance, Shahakyan, Lamb and Chambers (2018) indicate that motivated teachers have the power to inspire learners. On the other hand, unenthusiastic professionals can also be instrumental in demotivating learners. Motivated teachers are most likely satisfied workers and thus tend to persist in their employment and, last but not least, motivated teachers are more likely to support progressive educational reform because they “will look for ways to improve their practice and will put in the necessary effort to implement change” (Shahkyan *et al.*, 2018: 58). Teachers are, essentially, one of the most important aspects in the quality of the system developed (e.g. Feinberg, 2002; Ramos, 2007) and as such, are deserving of a great deal of policy makers’ attention when designing educational programmes.

Regarding research on the figure of the teacher in the learning process and in educational systems, it is only recently that prominent approaches in mainstream motivational psychology have turned their attention to look more closely at the educator. Thus, as Shahkyan *et al.*, (2018) summarise, achievement goal theory is being used as a lens through which to study teaching motivation in relation to teachers' desires to attain certain goals and, in consequence, reach a desired level of accomplishment in teaching contexts (Butler, 2007, 2012). Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), has been employed to explore the influence that teachers' intrinsic motives may have both in their teaching and in their endeavors to teach and in motivating their students (e.g. Hiver, 2018). The construct of self-efficacy has been also researched with regard to their own abilities to exert a positive influence on students can have, in turn, a positive emotional effect on their practices in classroom contexts (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). More recently, Kubanyiova (2013) has called for a more comprehensive theoretical framework that is able to encompass the different aspects that lead to a better understanding of the teacher motivation phenomenon. To do so, she supports a theoretical framework of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) applied to language teachers' and delineates three important processes that come into play to inspire language teachers' visions of their ideal teaching selves: teachers' reflections on the who, involvement with the why (i.e. what guides language teachers' practices), and the creation of the image (i.e. visual portrayal of desired teaching selves). Teachers' visions, therefore, in her view, might become one key force sufficiently powerful to transform L2 classrooms into attractive and entertaining settings for language learning.

3. Legislation on Bilingual Education in the Community of Murcia

The Region of Murcia is a province in southeastern Spain with a population of almost 1.5 million. In terms of GDP, Murcia provides a high percentage of Spain's export business in the horticultural sector as well as generating a thriving tourist industry, making the area, as is the case with other coastal communities in Spain, one with a high demand for manual labour and an attractive residential area for expatriates. In the 2018 census, approximately 200,000 foreign nationals were registered in the province with over 50% of this population made up of North Africans and South Americans and the other 50% divided between Europeans and the rest of the world.

In 2009, this Region, one of Spain's 11 monolingual communities, took up the challenge of implementing a Spanish-English bilingual education system in compulsory education as advocated by the national government since 2004. Although Spain's central government regulates the core educational legislation and school syllabus in compulsory education, power is then conceded to the educational boards in each autonomous community to modify certain aspects of the syllabi. It is important to bear in mind that Spain has a very diverse linguistic landscape and there are 6 communities that have two co-official languages (Spanish and either Catalan, Valencian, Basque or Galician). This leads to great heterogeneity as regards the teaching of languages in the different school syllabi. In Spain, in the words of Zaraobe and Lasagabaster (2010: viiii), "there are as many models as regions".

In Murcia, from the year 2000, secondary education institutions could opt to have what was called a bilingual section in which students could choose take extra instruction in a second language, normally French, German, or English. However, the Education Decrees 286/2007 and 291/2007 establishing the curricula for primary and compulsory secondary education respectively were the first to indicate that the regional educational authorities had the power to authorise that part of the basic curriculum could be taught through a foreign language. Initially, for the 2009/2010 school year a total of 25 primary schools registered to implement the system in the Region. Given the apparent success of the bilingual school programme PCB (*Programa de Colegios Bilingües*) over the school years 2009/2010 and 2010/2011, the Murcia Board of Education approved an Order (18 April, 2011) regulating the bilingual system for primary schools (Lova & Bolarín, 2015). The 2011 legislation essentially offers guidelines on a) the percentage of syllabus time and subject matter to be taught through English and b) recommendations, guidelines or requisites regarding teacher training in CLIL methodologies. The original plan outlined by the Education Board in 2011 stipulated that the bilingual education programme (*Sistema de Educación Bilingüe* or *SEBI*) would involve teaching a least a quarter of the syllabus through the foreign language – English. This included EFL lessons. The subjects eligible to be taught in English were Environmental, Cultural and Social Knowledge, Artistic Education, and Physical Education. Teaching through English was to start in first year of primary and to continue progressively each year up through subsequent grades.

The 2011 legislation in Murcia established that teachers and coordinators of the bilingual programme were obliged to possess a primary teaching qualification with an EFL itinerary. In pre-Bologna days the EFL itinerary was approximately 30% of the 3-year teaching diploma and instruction centred on foreign language teaching methodologies and language skills. Nowadays, this is a 4 year degree with a 30 of the 240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) total comprising a foreign language itinerary focusing on EFL teaching methodologies, techniques and resources.

As more centres registered for the bilingual option and the pioneering schools consolidated the bilingual system in higher grades, subsequent legislation categorised and defined three levels of implementation: initial, intermediate and advanced levels in which a progressively higher percentage of lessons and subjects were taught through English.

The 2016 Order (3rd June) in the Region of Murcia outlines the new regulatory framework under the modified title of Foreign Language Teaching System (*Sistema de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras*) (known by the acronym SELE). One of the major changes in this new Order is the concession to the educational institutions of the decision regarding which subjects to teach in English and the exact number of hours allotted. The Board of Education restricts its intervention in this regard to recommending that in the Primary Education syllabus, aside from the lessons in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (on average, 3 hourly lessons a week), in the initial modality, non-linguistic subject (NLS) are taught through English one to two hours a week in each year; in the intermediate modality, NLSs are taught 2,5 to 4,5 hours a week in each year and in the advanced modality, this should be raised to over 5 hours a week in each course. The initial level in the compulsory secondary education (*ESO*) syllabus, without taking EFL lessons into account also remains at one to two hours, with a raise in the intermediate level from three to six hours each week and the advanced level to over 6 hours per week in each course. This is the same for voluntary *Bachillerato* with the distinction that French or German are also eligible to be elected as a main foreign language along with English and that students are offered a second Foreign Language subject as well as NLSs within the plurilingual itinerary. Finally, in the 2017 Order, for the first time, the legislation in Murcia makes reference to the number of hours to be taught through English in the final 2 years of pre-primary education for 4 and 5 year-olds. It is established that at an initial level, 60 minutes daily can be

allotted to the EMI (English as a medium of instruction) and from 60 to 90 minutes daily at the advanced level.

3.1. Linguistic and Methodological Training

Equally diverse across the country are the requisites for training in CLIL methodologies for teachers. In 2010, Do Coyle, Hood and Marsh, stated that “quite simply without appropriate teacher education programs the full potential of CLIL is unlikely to be realised and the approach unsustainable” (2010: viii). The significance of teacher training for a successful plurilingual focus in education is also reiterated in Murcia’s 2016 legislation in article 24 in that “internal assessment of bilingual programmes in schools will include an index of teacher participation in CLIL methodological training as an indicator of the satisfactory progress of the programme” (own translation) (Guadamillas & Alcaraz, 2017: 90). It is the case that bilingual communities such as the Basque Country, and Catalonia, among others, could claim certain experience in integrating language and content, therefore facilitating their transition to the inclusion of foreign languages in the curriculum. In monolingual communities such as Murcia, however, regardless of their linguistic skills, most teachers would have lacked any practical knowledge of CLIL methods at the initial stages of the new policy. The first legislation of 2007 required in-service primary teachers to take a mandatory preparatory course of 100 hours, although it was not specified what proportion was to be devoted to methodological issues. As the courses were offered during the school year, substitute teachers were recruited to help with the workload of those taking instruction during school hours. Another feature of linguistic training was the offer of two week stays abroad involving 100 hours of language instruction, which were also financed and available for teachers to take during the summer months.

In Murcia, teachers who certify the required language skills are compensated with a once-off bursary of €400. In this sense, there is heterogeneity across the different autonomous communities in Spain in the compensation offered to teachers who offer to certify their foreign language skills and opt to take part in the bilingual teaching programmes. For instance, some communities offer a monthly bonus for teachers involved in the bilingual programme. With regards to requisites for training, these have progressively been somewhat diluted in subsequent legislation. For

instance, the 2011 Order modified slightly its reference to ‘mandatory’ training to include specific reference to training in CLIL methodologies (stipulating a minimum of 125 hours). However, for new teachers registering to teach bilingual subjects from 2011 onwards, no explicit mention is made in the Orders regulating the bilingual education system of linguistic training or stays abroad.

3.2. Language Assistants

As an additional support for the bilingual education system, language assistants were to be supplied for schools. This stipulation has been ongoing since 2009 and indicates that assistants should be native speakers of English and either graduates or enrolled in third level education. Assistants are allocated to several schools for a certain number of hours a week depending on the number of hours taught in the bilingual stream. For instance, for the 2018-2019 school year, 330 assistants have been hired by the educational authorities in Murcia for a total of 614 bilingual schools; an investment of 2.047.794, 07 €.

4. Methodology

Our study is a qualitative interview exploration carried out with 23 in-service non-linguistic subject teachers in the Region of Murcia. As our objectives involve understanding our participants professional mindsets and potentially subjective beliefs, we advocate a qualitative methodology as a richer and more reflective source of data, given the sometimes difficult to interpret nature of quantitative numerical survey type responses (Ushioda, 2009).

4.1. Research Questions

The overarching question that guided the study is:

According to NLS bilingual teachers what are the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of the bilingual education system in the Region of Murcia?

This question leads to the following subpoints we wished to explore:

- The difficulties teachers face in their work regarding training in teaching methodologies and L2 skills and in terms of classroom resources.
- Teachers' perceptions of the influence that teaching through a foreign language has on the L2 competence of students and NLS syllabus content.
- The areas in which teachers and coordinators of bilingual schools feel policy makers could offer support in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in bilingual education.

4.2. Participants

A series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with the 23 participants. All the participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, and participation was invited either through direct contact with or emails sent to school heads and coordinators. We felt that the voluntary aspect was important in that it indicated that, in contacting us, participants were manifesting a desire to make their opinions known, be they positive or negative. We did not want teachers to feel coerced in any way. A total of 8 were primary teachers from 7 different state schools located either in the city of Murcia or surrounding rural villages. A total of 15 were teachers employed at 5 state-run secondary schools, two from the city of Cartagena and three more rural areas of the province. All 15 secondary teachers were specialists in non-linguistic subjects—the majority, Science or Mathematics. Most of the primary teachers had taken the English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching itinerary as part of their primary teaching university degree. One, however, was a teacher with an itinerary in music that had obtained accreditation as a bilingual teacher (known in Spanish as *habilitación*) by certifying a B2 level of English.

4.3. Interviews

An interview guideline was prepared with the main areas we wished to discuss, such as teachers' beliefs on the quality of the system, the

opportunities they had for ongoing training and access to textbooks and other resources for their classroom activities. Nonetheless, we were anxious to allow for emergent themes so as to tap into the teachers' concerns regarding any aspect of the bilingual programme. One issue in planning the interviews was the question of anonymity. We felt that some teachers may be apprehensive about critiquing the education system, so we were very clear on the anonymous nature of the study. To ensure this, pseudonyms have been used and no reference is made to school location or other forms of identification in this paper. Another factor we decided not to focus on explicitly in our interview questions was their satisfaction with their level of English, as this was not a particular focus of our enquiry and we did not want teachers to feel that we were judging their ability in any way. Nonetheless, any references the teachers made of own accord to their L2 skills was noted. The interviews, held individually or in pairs, took between 25 and 60 minutes and were recorded with the permission of the participants.

4.4. Data Analysis

The interview data were initially transcribed and manually coded by each interviewee (the two authors of this paper). At a second stage, each author checked the transcripts of the other. The topics that had initially been agreed on along with themes that emerged from the teachers' discourse were coded and thematically classified. At a later stage, all coding was contrasted again between the researchers to check for any possible misinterpretations.

5. Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented and discussed firstly in terms of the general assessment of the pros and cons of the bilingual education system that we obtained from the interviewees. We then continue the discussion by looking at the main common concerns that emerged in the interview data. In our discussion we attempt to interpret the difficulties that teachers are facing in the light of the literature on bilingual education policies and CLIL methodological proposals and propose potential solutions.

5.1. Benefits of the System

To start with an overall impression on behalf of the 23 teachers interviewed, it is notable that almost 10 years since the implementation of the programme in the Region of Murcia, most concur in that whereas the concept of a content and language integrated education is, in principal, beneficial to students and an excellent proposal on the part of educational authorities, it is still in need of further development. As one teacher put it: “As an initiative, it is a very interesting one but, as a system, it is still very incomplete and with many deficiencies”. The participants almost all coincided in classifying the current system as lacking in terms of offering a consistently high standard of education. One aspect that was palpable from teachers’ general appraisals was the high degree of independence or individuality in a school’s approach to the bilingual programme with the connotation that some schools varied in their work ethic in this new educational system: “It depends on each school. There are centres where teachers do what they want. We take it seriously here”. Teachers seem to highlight their schools’ actions in contrast with others as in:

In this centre, everyone involved was very willing to help and there was a marked interest in making sure (the classes) were in English. Not like other cases where the teacher says ‘I’ll teach in Spanish and give them a handout with the English vocabulary’.

Rosa, a geography teacher at secondary level, tells us “I have to highlight the generosity of my colleagues in this school and the effort they make to train and prepare themselves to be able to participate. It’s a huge effort”.

Regarding possible benefits of the bilingual programme for students, most teachers also noted that these students were improving certain aspects of English, especially in the acquisition of technical vocabulary and communicative skills. Typically, the interviewees contrasted current day L2 competencies with that of pre-bilingual programmes of the past decades:

If we compare the level of English of a child in sixth class now to that of 20 years ago there is an enormous difference. In those days a child couldn’t even have a conversation in English. If you look at it like that, then it’s a good thing, but we can’t label that ‘bilingualism’.

One secondary teacher noted the overall improvement in students' performance was possible due to the reduction in class size and a common group dynamic: "Students improve many competencies. These are small groups, and it is possible to work in the classroom. All students are on the same wavelength".

Secondary teachers in particular agreed on three main benefits. Firstly, these teachers admitted to having the 'good groups' and enjoying this fact. Secondly, being in the bilingual program enhanced the motivation of these teachers to improve their own levels of English. Thirdly, bilingual programs, had enabled temporary teachers to work. One secondary teacher emphasises that "there is a great benefit for temporary or substitute teachers. The linguistic programs have triggered a real boom, and there is an increasing interest to be accredited as bilingual teachers".

5.2. Disadvantages of the System

In response to our initial question asking for a general opinion on the bilingual programme, some teachers' were quick to critique the term 'bilingual'. As we know, beliefs about Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and how it should work may be affected by stakeholders' conceptualizations of what the term 'bilingual' means. In the present study, our teachers commented on what they saw as an incongruous use of the term, which they claim also affects how parents conceive the aims of the programme:

The term bilingualism is wrong; it's not what we do. To say immersion would be more appropriate. 'Bilingualism' creates expectations in parents that we (teachers) cannot meet. They think their children are going to leave this school fluent in English. To call it a linguistic immersion programme would be more 'serious' and would give a truer vision of what this is to parents and to society.

In this sense, primary teachers in Travé Gonzalez (2013) were also found to interpret the bilingual education policy in Andalusia from the traditional view of bilingual education, seen as the result of two corresponding monolingualisms (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998). In other words, an assumption that there is total fluency in both languages. Thus, a

very high percentage (83%) of Travé's sample, surveyed in 2009, believed that students would not be bilingual by the end of their compulsory education as our participant also suggests occurs with parents at his school.

Another teacher also questioned the term 'immersion' claiming "It's not an immersion really, we don't teach enough hours for that, but it's the nearest thing they will get to it". Marta, a primary teacher and Bilingual Programme coordinator at her school and a participant of the programme since 2009 was clear that the terminological confusion requires immediate attention in order to clarify the end aim of the bilingual project for all involved in her words "we need to establish our objectives and goals, 'bilingualism' is different to everyone ... it's one thing to a teacher, another to a parent, another to the authorities... we need a common objective."

It is clear from these remarks that if the very nature of the educational system that is badly defined from the start, on the one hand, it is highly unlikely that stakeholders can collaborate harmoniously and, on the other, expectations albeit false, will not be met, resulting in frustration. Nonetheless, it is probably no coincidence that the Board of Education of Murcia in the most recent modifications to its programme in 2017, changed the name of its policy from 'Bilingual Schools Programme' (*Programa de Colegios Bilingües*) to Foreign Language Learning System (*Sistema de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras*) or the acronym SELE. However, whereas this change in nomenclature may lead stakeholders to modify their expectations of the nature and the outcomes of the programme, without clear channels of communication between authorities, schools, teachers, students and, ultimately, parents or caregivers, the policy aims remain open to interpretation.

From our data, it seems that the disadvantages of the system for the teachers appear more related to primary education. Among the points mentioned were references to the workload with some teachers needing to search for resources and prepare materials at weekends and to the sense of extra pressure from parents:

In a way we are the centre of attention these days; everybody watches us to see how we do things. What our level of English is like, if we make the classes fun, if we have training... Other primary teachers are in the background now and we are on the front line... in the limelight.

Spain was doing so badly in language learning and now it's improving hugely. Thanks to the exposure to English and even a third language like French. But that has made society look at the school more closely. Parents are constantly asking 'what's your methodology?' or 'should I take my child to extra English lessons in the evenings?' Or they tell you they prefer another teacher's way of working with English because it was more fun or something like that. So, we are in the limelight.

With regard to teaching style and personality in the classroom, Marta claims "We lose spontaneity" a fact that is backed up by Paula's: "We can't transmit humour in English". This effect on the affective side of teaching has not been mentioned frequently in the literature on the linguistic policy in Spain and is one that hints at a larger more psychological burden on practitioners, who cannot share their full identity with students or fully offer emotional support, as was pointed out by a Maths teacher:

I have to teach my subject in a language that is not mine but as a Maths teacher, I have to reach my students affectively. To motivate them, to help them understand, to help them deepen their knowledge. I can't do that in English as well as I could in Spanish. That's what worries me most about the bilingual system.

5.3. Subject content

Among the disadvantages of the system that secondary teachers mentioned was the fact that teaching through a language neither the teachers' nor the students' L1 affected the pace or rhythm of the class, and this was closely related to the type of subject. Thus, in secondary education Maths, History and Geography, teachers acknowledged that they often had to rush in order to cover the full syllabus. This inevitable fact, in their view, affected students' ability to learn. One teacher suggested that the content of a bilingual subject should be revised as it was impossible to have an unmodified syllabus taught through an unfamiliar language. Vicente who teaches history highlights various conflicts: "Content is reduced... it's inevitable". In schools where they only teach a few hours in English they deal with the entire syllabus; we can't do it all in English."

All Maths teachers interviewed complained about the difficulty in explaining many mathematical concepts and problems.

The teacher has to connect with his/her students on the affective side, and in Maths it is really difficult to do this in English. Math teachers cannot just transmit content. They need to explain the *why* and doing this in English is complicated.

All primary teachers coincided in the fact that one of the subjects to be included as mandatory requisite for an intermediate level on the bilingual programme—Natural Science—was not the ideal choice:

In Natural Science, it's all technical, very dense and very difficult for the children. It doesn't lend itself to using grammatical discourse. It's also not in line with the level of English. We are teaching Science to young children with barely any English as you would to Anglo-Saxon children.

Carla, a primary teacher speaks of policies at all schools in her village thanks to the legislative changes of 2017 conceding autonomy to schools in deciding which subjects to teach through English: "*They are all changing to get rid of Science from the programme*". Along the same lines, Marta who has been coordinating and teaching on the programme since 2009, ten years later concludes in frustration:

So we have just made the decision this year to drop Natural Science from the programme. I did this with a very heavy heart... I am for bilingualism but it was impossible to keep going the way we were. It is as if are going backwards now. We have opted to teach more hours of English in *profundización*¹ and Arts.

Given the density and complexity of the subject, most teachers acknowledged translating English keywords into Spanish for the children in the classroom and we gained the impression through our interviews that this strategy was widespread both in references to their own classroom practice and in reference to other schools or teachers. As Halbach (2012: 34) says: "As students move up into higher grades, the contents that have to be taught become increasingly more complex". Not knowing how to face this challenge, many teachers finally resort to students' L1 for these more complex explanations.

Manuel, a history teacher also made reference to another issue he perceived in textbooks designed for bilingual lessons

So, are we supposed to anglicise the names of the kings of Spain? In some books it's Ferdinand and Isabella and in others it's *Fernando e Isabel la Católica*. We should establish our criteria in these matters. If not, the students can't remember, they can't internalise the data.

Anecdotally, one unexpected effect of instruction in English noted by one teacher, however, had to do with the trend towards the type of spelling mistake school leavers were making in their written work:

There is a negative influence on the acquisition of Spanish vocabulary. In terms of spelling, there are more and more students that make mistakes in exams and they might for example write *povreza* because they learnt 'poverty'.

With pupils receiving so much input in a second language, it is inevitable that cross linguistic influence will affect literacy in the L1 in different ways. As the system is rather recent, it is probably too early to say what these effects might be and whether they go beyond an anecdotal degree of relevance.

5.4. Streaming or segregation: a pro and a con

Diversity has long been a focus of a comprehensive educational policy in Spain and its autonomous regions. By diversity we refer to distinct learning abilities as well as linguistic and cultural diversity. Nonetheless, it appears that the bilingual policy actually turns into a filter or streaming system favoring the 'good' student or at least the 'good language student', largely in secondary schools but not exclusively. From the picture drawn by our interviewees, this could be seen as a double-edged sword.

A secondary teacher reports:

The bilingual system is advantageous for the students that were not very motivated before. There has been a kind of segregation (streaming) that has been very positive for students that truly want to study.

Parents, many secondary teachers reported, are ill-informed about how bilingual groups function and they only want to have their children in the "good groups":

Parents are not informed at all about bilingualism. They are wrong, they like to see the “bilingual” plaque on the door. They are just concerned about whether their children are in the good group.

This teacher explained that these students were previously demotivated by disruptive students in their classes. The topic of ‘segregation’, the term incidentally used by all our participants in Spanish, which we translate with the less socio-political term ‘streaming’, was a recurrent theme among the secondary teachers. Most teachers drew attention to the fact that bilingual groups were the ‘good’ groups, and in these, there were fewer disruptive students. This streaming was also one of the benefits remarked on for teachers themselves in this new system. One history teacher remarked that finally she could ‘teach’ a class and not spend her time disciplining students.

Pedro, a History teacher in secondary points out, that in many cases this phenomenon of the ‘good groups’ as seen from the parents’ point of view might be conducive to unfavorable outcomes for the students. Parents’ eagerness or insistence on choosing the bilingual stream so as to ensure their children are in ‘good groups’ might, as Pedro stated, result in students’ failing the subject, as in the middle of the academic year, these students realize that they cannot follow the class and, in consequence, must abandon the bilingual group. Pedro highlighted this fact in the following terms:

The main reason that leads parents to choose bilingualism is segregation and there are many students who fail. It is important to be aware of the fact that Bilingual programs entail more effort and greater motivation. Primary schools must inform students about what a bilingual program involves before students enroll in secondary schools.

A publication by the Ministry of Education’s *Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa* (Fernández-Rio, Hortigüela Alcalá & Pérez Pueyo, 2017) highlights the issues arising from the ability-based filter in bilingual schools and their findings point to social skills and responsibility in learning being enhanced in bilingual streams. This may mean that non-bilingual students are at a disadvantage in their social and educational development.

5.5. Training

If there has been one recurrent theme in the literature on bilingual education, it has been that of the importance of teacher training (e.g. Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2013; Coyle, 2007; Halbach 2012). All researchers coincide in the need for training in methods, strategies and techniques to teach a subject through a language that is neither the teacher's nor the students' mother tongue.

Halbach (2012) points to another challenge in this regard that in her view is tied to the 'nebulous' definition of bilingual education that was mentioned at the beginning of this section. Given that there are many types and aims to bilingual education systems, there are many methodologies. Thus, the method that is appropriate for one bilingual or immersion project may not be so for another that is developed in a distinct framework and with different characteristics (2008: 34).

From our sample, on the one hand we gleaned a simple dichotomy regarding methodological training in CLIL (*AICLE* in Spanish): those that had and those that had not received instruction. Only three of the interviewees had been on the mandatory courses organized by the Board of Education in 2010/2011. One secondary teacher and two primary teachers. Curiously, the three differed in their portrayal of the instruction they received. Possibly due to their own professional concerns or needs of the time it seems that they remembered more distinctly what they learned in terms of either language or classroom techniques. Therefore, María, a primary teacher explains that methodology is the very core of her professional approach:

I did the CLIL courses when they were mandatory in 2010. That was the best thing ever. They were fantastic... '*la bomba*' I learned so much. Then I did one on synthetic phonics and others... But on my own initiative. I don't know how people who haven't got training teach... it's so difficult.

Manuel, on the other hand, focuses more on the language learning element of the course he attended:

I was on the initial courses and yes, I thought they were very useful. I remember thinking that everyone was so good at English and that depressed

me hugely. Some had been abroad or had an English-speaking spouse... but then I realised that others were the same as me.

Along the lines of theory versus practice, another individual's perception of his training was that it lacked in actually showing how to extrapolate theory to the classroom:

The courses are like everything. Some things are interesting and of help. For instance, you get a list of resources... we went to a bilingual conference and you hear some interesting ideas... but others, well... it's like everything... but a soldier has to be there in the trenches doing the work and (as a teacher) with the children you have to adapt all that to the reality of your classroom.

Nonetheless, another hint that the courses on methodology did not make an impression on all teachers came from the fact that the same primary teacher quoted above became confused at the question on whether he noticed a lack of methodological knowledge in non-tenured or substitute teachers assigned to the school. His question "Ah, but do they not offer any of those courses anymore?", which was followed by a dismissive "well, yes, methodology is all very well but at the end of the day, it's about the type of teacher you are", which seems to imply that this teacher at least is not reliant on CLIL methodologies in his bilingual classroom.

Among those interviewed who have not taken any instruction in CLIL or bilingual teaching methodologies, attitudes varied: One teacher reports "Another weak point has to do with our training as bilingual teachers, as it is basically self-training." (Ruth, secondary teacher of Geography). A secondary history teacher claims "Although I can study the theory by myself, it's not useful; I would like to know about techniques for the classroom – not theory on CLIL but activities, strategies to teach certain things". This nuance of requiring practical advice, resources and techniques or group dynamics was also mentioned by four other participants. Javier, a Maths teacher, has reached his own conclusions on the utility of courses:

I haven't done the courses... I have small children and I don't have time but I know people who have done the courses and I don't think AICLE is applicable to my classroom... the courses aren't specific to maths.

Worryingly, the survey findings lead us to portray a negative picture with regard to CLIL training. We find a large proportion of our sample that have not received any instruction on how to deliver a content subject through a foreign language and, if they have, many do not perceive the content to be of use and they transmit this fact through the grapevine. As it is also said the training courses do not vary from one year to another. We also detect a great deal of confusion in whether our references to methodology are solely related to training in linguistic skills or to CLIL pedagogy or didactics. Spain has traditionally followed a textbook approach in its compulsory education system (e.g. Halbach & Fernández, 2011) and, as a result, the term ‘method’ can often be mistaken for the actual name of the textbook being used. Thus, we suspect that in the context of bilingual education the use of the term with regard to training is not commonplace leading to different interpretations.

Lack of awareness of the concepts related to CLIL, such as Basic Interpersonal Communication Strategies (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS) (Cummins, 1984, 2000) or the Vygotskian concept of scaffolding learning may also be the reason that these teachers favour less cognitively demanding subjects such as Arts and Crafts and Physical Education to be taught through English. Teachers appear to be of the notion that the subject content remains unchanged and is simply transmitted through another language. Another issue possible arising from lack of training is the role of the language assistant, which we discuss in the following section.

5.5. Language Assistant

Among the findings that we had not anticipated and that emerged in all except two of the interviews, was the critical view of the figure of the language assistant, proposed by the educational authorities as a support for the teacher and the classroom for linguistic and cultural input. Many of our participants saw these native speakers as an extra drain on their scarce resources of time and energy. The language assistant was viewed as someone that affected the dynamic of the class negatively and as someone who did not assist at all. In most cases, these assistants were people without training in education and complaints target this aspect.

Jaime, a secondary level Maths teacher claimed angrily:

It depends on who you get... but normally they come with no knowledge of the subject, no experience, no experience teaching, no motivation to teach. They are of no use to us at all.

Vicente, a History teacher at the same school has an equally strong critique: “*Entorpecen* - They just get in the way.” Marta, who coordinates the bilingual programme at her primary school also says that it is very much a question of ‘pot luck’ in whether schools get assigned a collaborative language assistant:

I have had one or two that wanted to help but mostly they are not here to work. They don’t know how to speak to a class... They’re not from education studies.

Positive comments on experiences with the assistants appeared to involve a deeper understanding of the role of a language assistant although this was only detected in primary teachers. For instance, two EFL specialists in two distinct primary schools explained that they had a work plan ready for the language assistant. They prepared role plays and conversation topics for and together with the assistant to carry out with the students. Another primary teacher confessed to having been very lucky in the very willing and resourceful assistant she had been assigned. Aside from the ‘luck of the draw’ view seeing the language assistant as a helpful resource was also subject-dependent with a preference for subjects that involve clear direct imperatives with visual aid such as PE. Teachers of Science and Maths appeared most critical of the lack of subject knowledge of their assistants:

There are language assistants that help. There are many others that do not help at all because they don’t have any knowledge of the subject. This depends pretty much on the subject. They might be helpful in Physical Education, for example.

At this point, we conclude the analysis of our main findings and in the flowing final section of this paper we look at ways in which the issue that teachers have pointed to might be addressed by policy makers or ways in which future research might hone in on certain issues and offer further insight into the effects of the bilingual education policy.

6. Conclusions and proposals

The picture we have drawn of bilingual education in the Region of Murcia presents some positive aspects and some not so positive but that could perhaps be addressed in by educational institutions and policy-makers. It is worthy of note, and a concern that in contrast with findings by Fernandez and Halbach (2012) from their study of similar factors in the Community of Madrid in 2010, there are many (too many) similarities in the issues we fee policy-makers should be taking action to remedy. The impression is that despite apparent attempts to ensure a quality system, progress is not being made.

In answer to our enquiries about the advantages of the system, teachers highlighted students' L2 skills development as one of the palpable benefits of the system. Reports vary on the nature of the improvement starting with simply observing children and adolescents who are comfortable with the foreign language presence in a classroom, a fact that, in itself, constitutes a step forward in contrast with attitudes to foreign languages in pre-bilingual education years (e.g. Brady, 2019). We also saw reports on improvements in communicative competence and especially in L2 comprehension skills. Nonetheless, it is important that L2 achievement is kept on the research agenda to enable stakeholders to keep track of the nature and scope of L2 achievement and reasons behind these.

Secondary teachers in the Region of Murcia appear to have had their motivation boosted by the ability-based streaming that has come as a consequence of the bilingual section policy. These teachers report more focused lessons in which there appears to be common group dynamic with both students and practitioners benefitting. On the other side of this coin, however, we have noted that there are potential disadvantages for the non-bilingual pupil. We saw that the term segregation was common in our sample, yet this is a term that historically has quite negative socio-political connotations. To ensure that the bilingual education policies do not jeopardize children's education in any way, data are required on the profile of students who do not take the bilingual option; the reasons behind the choice and the outcomes of that choice before we can reach conclusions on whether these students are at a disadvantage in other forms of intellectual and social development beyond that of the linguistic issue.

The overall consensus that the figure conceived of as a support for bilingual teachers is actually more of a hindrance than a help is concerning, not least because of the considerable investment being made in teaching assistants by the Board of Education in Murcia. From the interviews, we see that it is the secondary teacher of a subject, such as Maths and Science, who appears least confident about how these native speakers can be used as a linguistic and cultural support in the classroom. It may be helpful to consider offering teachers support in the form of training in techniques involving the language assistant and how they can help in different subjects. The information itself could be offered either in print or digital format in either online or in face-to-face workshops given at the teacher training centres across the region.

Similarly, there appears to be great diversity among teachers in approaches to teaching in the bilingual classroom. Most of those interviewed do not appear to appreciate the utility of CLIL methods for the classroom nor do they seem to be aware of how theory can translate to specific subjects. This is where we feel the current bilingual system could improve most given that a deeper understanding of how to scaffold CLIL learning and adapt classroom language to students' cognitive and linguistic abilities could help overcome issues of resorting to the L1 and a sense of being overwhelmed with subject content. Practical, hands-on teaching instruction, detailing classroom techniques and strategies and adapted to different subjects and contexts are in demand. Personal constraints may impede teachers availing of training opportunities being offered outside both school hours and at a considerable distance for many. We are of the impression that teachers would be open to taking in-service training if alternatives could be looked at in the form of online support perhaps offering video workshops extrapolating theory to real world classroom practice.

In a similar vein, our findings indicate that schools seem to be somewhat insular and competitive in the way that they develop their bilingual programme. Although collaboration within centres appears to exist, we suggest that fostering communities of practice and promoting horizontal and vertical collaboration in primary and secondary schools and departments would help towards a more supportive community framework, offering advice, techniques, materials and resource banks. To this end online spaces could be created as well as interschool visits and events.

Finally, we would like to point out that our study was carried out in state-run schools – no teachers working at semi-private - *colegios concertados* or fully private - *colegios privados* were contacted. This was because we thought it advisable to start our enquiries in the state system before contrasting the findings with those of other school systems which could present distinct variables such as more funding or parental pressure to perform. In this vein, research exploring contrast between different types of school would be interesting due to socio-economic variables.

Notes

¹ *Profundización* is the term given to the intensive EFL lessons that schools may opt to offer as an alternative to teaching a NLS in English.

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