Families', Students' and Teachers' Attitudes towards Bilingual Education: Lessons to be Learned from Bilingual Contexts

Actitudes de las familias, estudiantes y profesorado hacia la educación bilingüe: Lecciones que aprender de contextos bilingües

Inmaculada Senra-Silva
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)
isenra@flog.uned.es

Diego Ardura
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)
dardura@edu.uned.es

Rubén Chacón-Beltrán
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)
rchacon@flog.uned.es

### Abstract

This paper presents qualitative and quantitative results of a research study carried out in order to examine families', teachers' and students' attitudes towards bilingualism and bilingual education in monolingual contexts. Five schools from four European countries, namely Italy, Spain, Lithuania and Romania, took part in this research. Two schools had a bilingual/multilingual immediate social context or historical background – those in

Lithuania and Romania – and three schools were embedded into a monolingual social context in Spain and Italy. With the aim of collecting data on these stakeholders' attitudes towards bilingualism and bilingual education, a mixed method approach was followed. A questionnaire was distributed to 499 parents, 892 students and 476 teachers all involved in bilingual education programmes in these four countries. The statistical analysis was a computerised data analysis carried out using SPSS. Furthermore, 48 interviews were conducted with parents, teachers and members of the school boards. They were then analysed with the software ATLAS.ti.

The results show differences in the way stakeholders in a bilingual/multilingual context or/and background approach bilingualism and bilingual education as compared to those in a monolingual context, as the attitudinal component is of paramount importance to approach successful bilingual education. The conclusions of this study enrich the academic discussion on the role of families, students, teachers, and school administrators in bilingual education programmes across Europe.

Keywords: bilingual education, attitudes, families, students, teachers

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados cualitativos y cuantitativos de un estudio de investigación realizado para examinar las actitudes de familias, profesorado, y estudiantado hacia el bilingüismo y la educación bilingüe en contextos monolingües. Cinco centros de cuatro países europeos, concretamente Italia, España, Lituania y Rumanía, participaron en esta investigación. Los centros en Lituania y Rumanía tenían un contexto social inmediato o antecedentes históricos bilingües/multilingües, mientras que tres centros escolares estaban integrados en un contexto social monolingüe en España e Italia. Con el objetivo de recopilar datos sobre las actitudes de estos

grupos hacia el bilingüismo y la educación bilingüe, se siguió un enfoque de métodos mixtos. Se distribuyó un cuestionario a 499 padres, 892 estudiantes y 476 profesores, todos involucrados en programas de educación bilingüe en estos cuatro países. El análisis estadístico se realizó mediante un análisis de datos informatizado utilizando SPSS. Además, se llevaron a cabo 48 entrevistas con padres, profesores y equipos directivos, las cuales fueron analizadas con el software ATLAS.ti.

Los resultados muestran diferencias en la forma en que estos grupos en un contexto y/o con antecedentes bilingües/multilingües abordan el bilingüismo y la educación bilingüe en comparación con aquellos en un contexto monolingüe, dado que el componente actitudinal es de suma importancia para abordar una educación bilingüe exitosa. Las conclusiones de este estudio enriquecen la discusión académica sobre el papel de las familias, el estudiantado, el profesorado y los equipos directivos en los programas de educación bilingüe en toda Europa.

Palabras clave: educación bilingüe, actitudes, familias, estudiantes, profesorado.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, being competent in more than one language is a common and very desirable skill as it opens opportunities for professional development as well as social interaction in many contexts in a globalised society (Johannessen, 2019). Public authorities in the EU invest plenty of resources to promote bilingual or multilingual development. Being able to interact in other languages goes hand in hand with social, economic and political progress, and ample research is being conducted with this purpose (Ng & Cheung, 2022). Younger generations already perceive that the mastery of a language with international recognition will be decisive in their lives, and closer cooperation between the different stakeholders involved in education, i.e.,

teachers, parents and students, seems to be necessary in order to promote and facilitate the expansion of bilingual/multilingual individuals (Senra-Silva, 2021).

Consequently, bilingual education has been widely implemented in many countries across primary, secondary and tertiary education in recent decades (Mouboua et al., 2024). Multiple benefits have been reported in previous studies at several different levels, such as cognitive (Xia, 2024), academic performance (Creed et al., 2024), language acquisition (Fortune & Tedick, 2015) or long-term benefits (Palacios et al., 2024). Despite this fact, implementing these programmes is complex, and many challenges arise for teachers, students and families when it comes to effectively incorporating them into schools (Ljalikova et al., 2021; Ramos, 2023; Szczesniak, 2023). For example, families and students must decide whether to opt for bilingual or monolingual education. This can have significant implications for schools, potentially leading to the segregation of students. While there is a consensus that bilingual education can enhance students' language skills (Ryan et al., 2024), teaching subjects in a second language has raised concerns about students' learning outcomes (Martinez Agudo & Fielden Burns, 2021).

Teachers are often at the centre of the discussion on the effectiveness of education, and they are perceived as the main actors in bilingual education programmes. Teachers have most responsibility for the success, or lack of success, of the teaching programmes and they frequently encounter pressure from the public administration and policy makers, students, and families (Senra-Silva & Ardura, 2023). Families must constantly make decisions regarding the education of their children (at what age to start learning a second language, how to do it, what educational centre to choose, etc.), and it is frequently not an informed decision as parents do not know in advance what it really means to join a bilingual education programme. And, finally, students, as the main beneficiaries and target group of the whole system, often do not know what to expect and how far they can get in

bilingual/multilingual development (Ardura & Senra, 2024).

People's attitudes towards learning a language have been proven to be one of the key factors for successful language learning in bi/multilingual programmes in different contexts, including bi/multilingual education (Artamonova 2020; Rubio-Alcalá et al., 2009; Salmon & Menjívar, 2019). Within the context of the tripartite model, attitudes encompass a set of beliefs, feelings, and behaviours towards different language varieties (Dragojevic, 2016; Li & Wei, 2022a), and play a crucial role both in students' self-perceived language proficiency and language performance (Botes et al., 2020; Garret et al., 2003; Li & Wei, 2022a, 2022b). Besides, positive attitudes towards learning a second language boosts learners' motivation (Merisuo-Storm, 2007; Oxford, 2001).

Several studies have compared CLIL vs. non-CLIL students' attitudes towards learning a second language. For instance, Lasagabaster & Sierra (2009) or Merisuo-Storm (2007) found some advantages in CLIL students' attitudes compared to non-CLIL students. This finding was attributed to the fact that CLIL classrooms provide an authentic language learning context. In the same fashion, De Smet et al. (2019) reported some results in a study conducted in Belgium, in which a comparison was made between English and Dutch as second languages for CLIL students. This study found better attitudes in English CLIL students than in Dutch CLIL students. As a result, these authors state that the better attitudes found in students may not only be attributed to the CLIL approach but may also be affected by contextual variables and individual differences. In a longitudinal study carried out in order to follow the evolution of students' attitudes, San Isidro & Lasagabaster (2019) noted students' positive attitudes towards a second language both in CLIL and non-CLIL students. However, the CLIL students were able to develop more sustainable attitudes over time than the latter.

Previous research observed high levels of CLIL teachers' satisfaction and motivation across different countries in Europe

such as Poland (Czura et al., 2009), Austria (Ackerl, 2007), Estonia (Mehisto & Asser, 2007), Italy (Infante et al., 2009) and Spain (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2017; Lorenzo et al., 2010; Pladevall-Ballester, 2015). Other studies revealed that teachers' attitudes may be affected by a set of concerns such as, for instance, the lack of support, adequate teaching materials, unified curricula (Lazarević, 2022), preparation time, teachers' linguistic skills, or methodological training (Senra-Silva, 2021).

Parents' participation in schools has been considered crucial for the success of bilingual programmes (Cloud et al., 2000). Despite this important role they play in children's education, only a few studies have been conducted on parents' perceptions about bilingual education (San Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2022). A study carried out in Estonia (Mehisto & Asser, 2007) revealed that families of CLIL students were generally satisfied with the bilingual programme. However, in the context of Spain, the parents' perspectives were not uniform, as some stated their satisfaction while others expressed concern about a possible loss of their children's content knowledge because of using the second language as a communication vehicle (San Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2022).

## 2. Purpose and description of the study

Stakeholders' attitudes may be crucial to explain the success of bilingual education. However, there is a paucity of studies comparing these traits across different countries and stakeholders. After decades of the presence of bilingual education at schools, comparative studies may be helpful to transfer experiences in different contexts. The study presented in this paper aimed to compare bilingual education stakeholders' (students, teachers and parents) attitudes towards bilingual education across four countries (Spain, Italy, Romania, and Lithuania). This contrast was meant to contribute to the ultimate goal of learning about bilingual education from different countries and sociolinguistic contexts.

## 2.1. Method

### 2.1.1. Study design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This approach encompassed two phases. First, the quantitative phase was undertaken and comprised the data collection and subsequent analyses regarding the participants' attitudes towards bilingual education. The second phase consisted of qualitative data gathering through a series of interviews and their textual analyses to elaborate on the results found in the quantitative phase.

### 2.1.2. Quantitative phase

*Participants*. A convenience sampling based on the accessibility of the families was used to collect the data. The sample comprised a total of 499 parents of secondary school students (110 men, 386 women, and 3 parents who preferred not to declare their sex). Only 12.2% of parents declared that more than one language is used at home. The same analysis by country rendered the following results: Spain: 9.3%, Italy: 5.6%, Romania: 22.4%, and Lithuania: 8.9%. The sample also comprised 892 secondary school students (378 boys, 484 girls, and 30 students who preferred not to declare their sex). On average, the students in the sample had spent 5.10 years using a vehicular second language in class with an average of 5.0 hours per week. Then, 476 secondary school teachers involved in bilingual education (142 males, 323 females, and 11 teachers who preferred not to declare their sex) filled in the questionnaire. On average, the teachers in the sample declared 17.4 years of teaching experience (Spanish: 14.9, Italian: 18.9, Romanian: 18.0, Lithuanian: 19.5) and 5.9 years of bilingual teaching (Spanish: 6.1, Italian: 4.5, Romanian: 6.1, Lithuanian: 7.5). Table 1 shows the participants' distribution by country together with their mean age.

Table 1. *Participants' distribution and mean age by country.*

|  | Spain | | Italy | | Romania | | Lithuania | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | N | Age | N | Age | N | Age | N | Age |
| Parents | 182 | 45.9 | 71 | 49.3 | 134 | 44.8 | 112 | 42.2 |
| Students | 259 | 14.4 | 135 | 17.9 | 316 | 16.6 | 182 | 14.0 |
| Teachers | 170 | 44.1 | 120 | 49.1 | 101 | 43.1 | 85 | 45.1 |

*Data collection*. Participants' attitudes towards bilingual education were measured using a semantic scale proposed by Gardner (1985). A series of antonyms, unnecessary-necessary; awful-nice; unappealing-appealing; unpleasant-pleasant; insignificant-important; useless-useful; boring-interesting; and, relaxing-stressful were presented to the persons in the sample. Participants registered their answers on a 6-point Likert scale. For example, regarding the measurement of interest, 1 and 6 would mean totally insignificant and totally important, respectively. The survey was administered online by the schools. All the participants gave their informed consent after being informed of the objectives of the investigation. Data was collected and held anonymously and treated confidentially. After the collection, data was held securely by one of the members of the research team. Prior to the data collection, the research project was approved by the UNED's Research Ethics Committee ensuring the fulfilment of all ethical requirements for projects involving human beings.

*Analyses*. A descriptive analysis was performed to present the total average of the variables, the results disaggregated by country and the standard deviation of the distributions. Mean comparisons across countries were analysed using the analysis of the variance (ANOVA). The effect-size was estimated by means of $\omega^2$ being the cut-off reference values: < 0.01 very small, 0.01-0.05 small, 0.06-0.13 moderate, > 0.14 large (López-Martín & Ardura, 2023). All quantitative analyses were carried out using SPSS (IBM Corp., 2020).

### 2.1.3. Qualitative phase

*Participants*. The participants in the qualitative phase were selected so as to show a wide range of opinions about bilingual education. A total of 16 parents and 16 teachers – 4 from each country (Spain, Italy, Lithuania, and Romania) – were chosen as representatives. Students were not included in the qualitative phase of the study due to their status as minors and the associated challenges in obtaining the necessary informed consents.

Interview protocol and data collection. Three semi-structured interviews were designed to extract information about each target group's attitudes towards bilingual education involved in this phase (teachers and parents). The interviews were initially written in English and then translated into the national language of all the countries involved in the study. To ensure validity, the interviews were subjected to a back-translation into English reaching a very good agreement with the original interviews (Muñiz et al., 2013).

*Analyses*. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Then, the transcriptions in the mother tongues were translated into English to analyse the text. The qualitative analyses included the following steps: (1) preliminary reading of the interviews and writing memos, (2) segmentation and codification of the text, (3) aggregation of the themes that emerged from the text, and (4) designing the case narrative of the themes. Two broad themes were defined during the analyses to study the participants' attitudes: positive and negative. In each case, two sub-themes allowed the categorisation of both types of attitudes in instrumental and intrinsic attitudes. All the analyses were carried using the software Atlas.ti (2022).

### 3. Results

### 3.1. Parents' attitudes towards bilingual education and the challenge of bilingual education

Table 2 presents the mean values and standard deviations of the parents' attitudes towards bilingual education. The parents' attitudes towards bilingual education are positive, as the scores in almost all of them remain higher than 5 on a 6-point Likert scale. Overall, the most positive parents' attitudes were found in usefulness, importance, and niceness (See Table 2 and Figure 1). ANOVA revealed the existence of significant mean differences across countries in necessity (F=241.26, p<.01, $\omega^2$=.059), niceness (F=4.55 , p<.01, $\omega^2$=.021), appeal (F=9.15 , p<.01, $\omega^2$=.061), pleasantness (F=3.04, p=.04, $\omega^2$=.012), importance (F=4.21, p<0.01, $\omega^2$=.019), interest (F=4.86, p<.01, $\omega^2$=.020), and stressfulness (F=3.95, p<.01, $\omega^2$=.017). Overall, the parents find bilingual education very useful in general, but significant mean differences were also found across countries (F=2.38, p=.014, $\omega^2$=.015). Post hoc analyses found the highest attitude mean values in Lithuania followed by Spain and Italy. Interestingly, Lithuanian parents scored significantly lower in necessity and appealingness than the rest of the countries.
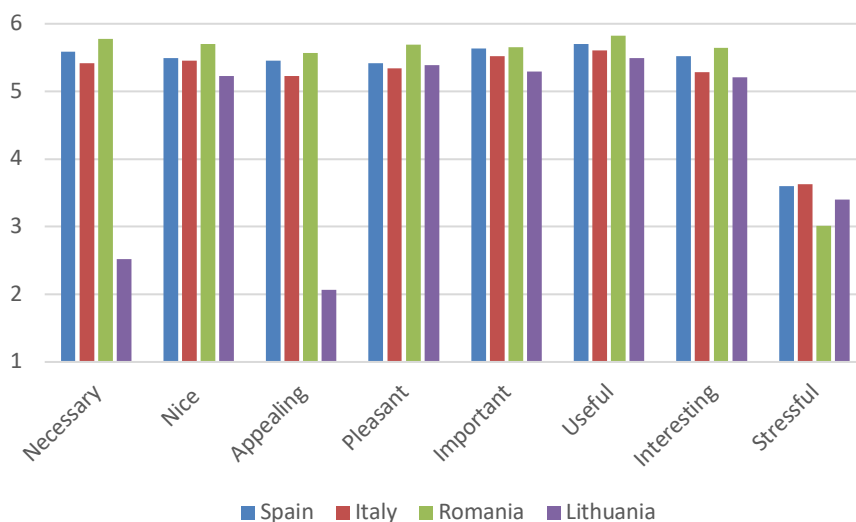
Table 2: *Parents' attitudes towards bilingual education.*

| Attitudes | Total | | Spain | | Italy | | Romania | | Lithuania | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Necessary | 4.92 | 1.69 | 5.59 | 0.97 | 5.42 | 0.89 | 5.78 | 0.66 | 2.52 | 1.63 |
| Nice | 5.48 | 1.01 | 5.49 | 1.06 | 5.45 | 1.17 | 5.70 | 0.69 | 5.23 | 1.07 |
| Appealing | 4.69 | 1.80 | 5.45 | 1.05 | 5.23 | 1.16 | 5.57 | 0.79 | 2.07 | 1.49 |
| Pleasant | 5.47 | 0.98 | 5.42 | 1.07 | 5.34 | 1.19 | 5.69 | 0.72 | 5.39 | 0.92 |
| Important | 5.54 | 0.92 | 5.63 | 0.96 | 5.52 | 1.01 | 5.65 | 0.77 | 5.29 | 0.94 |
| Useful | 5.67 | 0.82 | 5.70 | 0.90 | 5.61 | 0.92 | 5.82 | 0.63 | 5.49 | 0.79 |
| Interesting | 5.45 | 1.05 | 5.52 | 1.09 | 5.28 | 1.27 | 5.64 | 0.83 | 5.21 | 1.05 |
| Stressful | 3.40 | 1.64 | 3.60 | 1.68 | 3.63 | 1.32 | 3.01 | 1.82 | 3.40 | 1.45 |

Parents do not consider bilingual education very stressful, especially in the case of Romania. Interestingly, post hoc analyses found significant mean differences in necessity between Lithuania and the rest of the countries as the mean value for these variables

is remarkably lower in the case of Lithuania (2.52) compared to Spain (5.59), Italy (5.42), and Romania (5.78). A similar effect was found regarding the appeal of bilingual education since Lithuanian parents scored only 2.07 whereas the scores in the rest of the countries were significantly higher.

Fig. 1. *Parents' attitudes towards bilingual education in the four countries.*



From the data analysis it can be concluded that, overall, parents' attitudes towards bilingual education are mostly positive in the four countries (see Figure 1). The data gathered shows that positive attitudes (necessary, nice, appealing, pleasant, important, useful and interesting) are generally high whereas negative attitudes, namely, stressfulness, is medium on a 6-point Likert scale in all four countries. The comparison of mean values across countries revealed that Romania slightly stands out over the rest of the countries in positive attitudes, which is interesting as this is one of the specific contexts where bilingualism seems to be commonplace

due to the fact that more than one language outside the classroom context is common. Besides, bilingual education is considered less stressful in Romania than in Spain, Italy or Lithuania. The case of Lithuania is also interesting to note as in this context the perceptions are rather low in terms of necessity and appeal.

A sample of the qualitative data gathered in this research shows a general satisfaction on the part of the parents because they believe that bilingual education widens students' horizons. Parents even demand more intensity in bilingual programmes. Overall, families are satisfied with bilingual education, and their opinions are mainly based on the benefits for their children. For instance, Spanish parents believe this type of education helps their children with something they find key, namely, mastering a second language. Spanish parents even ask for the possibility of extending this sort of education as much as possible:

> *I am very satisfied, and I would like them to have more subjects in the foreign language because it helps them to learn specific vocabulary about those subjects.* (SPA_FAM_02)

In the same vein, an Italian mother highlights the importance of bilingual education and how it should be offered in public schools across the country:

> *I am satisfied and, indeed, I would be happy if the subjects done in a second language were more than just one. I am referring to the case of my daughter who only did Physics in English in the last school year. For me this had to happen earlier, from the first year of high school but, unfortunately, this did not happen. I am from Lucca, and I learned that an experience of this type was made in my city, and after so many years of studying this possibility, it was already realized in the nursery school. Years ago, I also evaluated this opportunity for my daughter before enrolling her in the high school that she then attended. Unfortunately, this school is private and is therefore very expensive. I am very much in favour of this, and I hope that it also happening soon in*

*public schools because today it is indispensable.* (ITA_FAM_04)

Interestingly, Lithuanian parents highlight not only the benefits of mastering a second language but also its impact on cultural aspects:

*What it means to be bilingual is that I think it opens up double possibilities – to get acquainted with the culture of another country and customs, and to be able to communicate.* (LIT_FAM_02)

Finally, Romanian parents seem to be the most enthusiastic about bilingual education:

*I am more than satisfied, I am thankful. It is one of the factors that determined me to enrol my child at this school and is an extra occasion to diversify the contexts in which he can use the foreign languages that are in the curriculum, English, German, and Chinese.* (ROM_FAM_04)
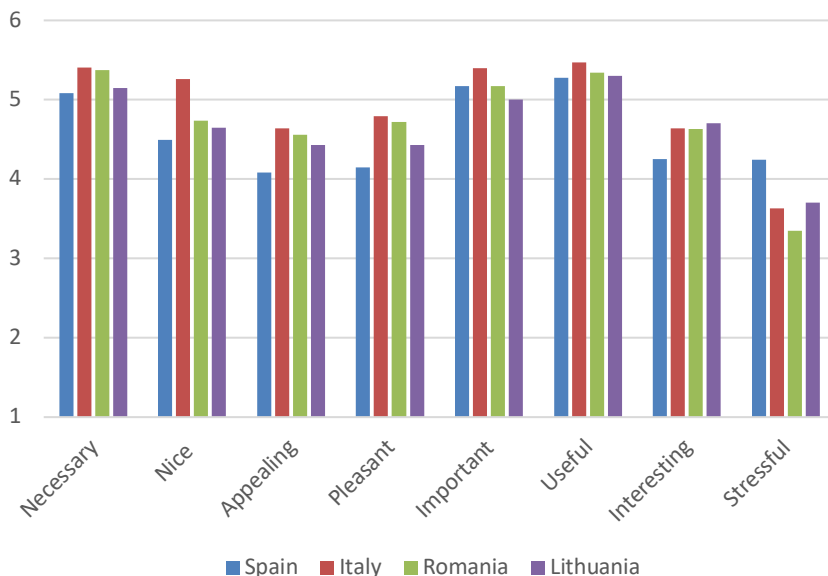
## 3.2. Students' attitudes towards bilingual education and the challenge of bilingual education

Students' attitudes towards bilingual education were also very positive. Overall, the highest scores were found in usefulness, necessity, and importance. Table 3 presents the mean values and standard deviations of the students' attitudes towards bilingual education. ANOVA revealed the existence of significant differences across countries in necessity ($F=4.42$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.011$), niceness ($F=12.04$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.036$), easiness ($F=7.94$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.023$), appeal ($F=9.15$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.027$), pleasantness ($F=13.33$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.040$), importance ($F=2.80$, $p=0.039$, $\omega^2=.006$), interest ($F=6.36$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.018$), and stressfulness ($F=21.60$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.065$). However, students find bilingual education very useful regardless of the country they live in ($F=0.80$, $p=.494$, $\omega^2<.001$). In general, post hoc

analyses revealed higher positive attitudes in Romanian students. For instance, Spanish students believe that this approach to education is less necessary than Italian (p=.004) and Romanian (p=.014) students. Spanish students also find bilingual education significantly more stressful, less interesting, less appealing, and less pleasant than students in other countries. In the case of the negative attitude (stressfulness associated with bilingual education), Romanian students presented the lowest score.

Table 3: *Students' attitudes towards bilingual education.*

| Attitudes | Total | | Spain | | Italy | | Romania | | Lithuania | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Necessary | 5.25 | 1.36 | 5.08 | 1.42 | 5.41 | 1.23 | 5.37 | 1.35 | 5.15 | 1.32 |
| Nice | 4.73 | 1.43 | 4.49 | 1.43 | 5.26 | 1.31 | 4.74 | 1.57 | 4.65 | 1.27 |
| Appealing | 4.43 | 1.51 | 4.08 | 1.57 | 4.64 | 1.24 | 4.56 | 1.60 | 4.43 | 1.52 |
| Pleasant | 4.51 | 1.46 | 4.15 | 1.50 | 4.79 | 1.24 | 4.72 | 1.49 | 4.43 | 1.36 |
| Important | 5.17 | 1.41 | 5.17 | 1.40 | 5.40 | 1.08 | 5.17 | 1.49 | 5.01 | 1.47 |
| Useful | 5.33 | 1.39 | 5.28 | 1.50 | 5.47 | 1.17 | 5.34 | 1.48 | 5.30 | 1.21 |
| Interesting | 4.53 | 1.49 | 4.25 | 1.53 | 4.64 | 1.33 | 4.63 | 1.55 | 4.71 | 1.36 |
| Stressful | 3.73 | 1.60 | 4.24 | 1.57 | 3.63 | 1.27 | 3.35 | 1.68 | 3.70 | 1.51 |

Fig. 2. *Students' attitudes towards bilingual education.*



### 3.3. Teachers' attitudes towards bilingual education and the challenge of bilingual education

Table 4 and Figure 3 collect the teachers' responses mean values and standard deviations. Table 4 presents the mean values and standard deviations of the teachers' attitudes towards bilingual education. The scores corresponding to the positive attitudes were reasonably high ranging from 4.95 to 5.21, being the highest scores in usefulness, importance, niceness, and pleasantness. ANOVA revealed the existence of significant differences across countries in all the attitudes: necessity ($F=17.24$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.093$), niceness ($F=9.58$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.014$), appeal ($F=17.25$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.093$), pleasantness ($F=17.01$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.092$), importance ($F=15.49$, $p=0.039$, $\omega^2=.084$), usefulness ($F=15.41$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.079$), interest ($F=17.34$, $p<.01$, $\omega^2=.090$), and
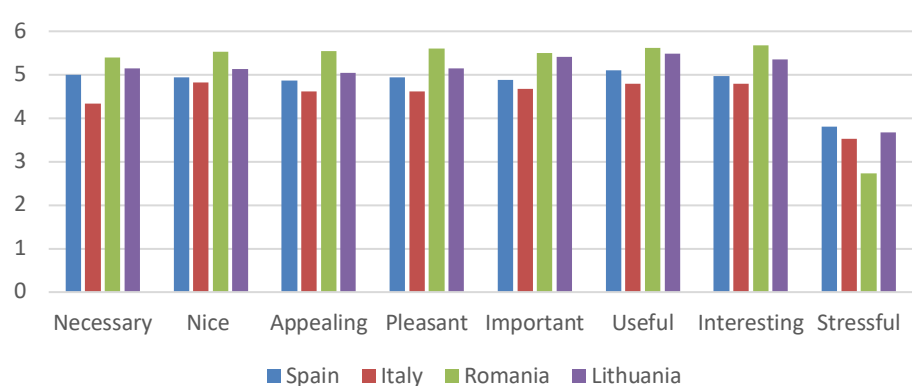
stressfulness (F=15.32, p<.01 , $\omega^2$=.083). Post hoc analyses revealed statistically significant better attitudes towards bilingual education in teachers from Romania and Lithuania compared to Italy and Spain. Stressfulness was higher in the latter two countries than in the former.

Table 4: Teachers' attitudes towards bilingual education.

| Attitudes | Total | | Spain | | Italy | | Romania | | Lithuania | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Necessary | 4.95 | 1.20 | 5.00 | 1.08 | 4.34 | 1.44 | 5.40 | 0.95 | 5.15 | 1.04 |
| Nice | 5.07 | 1.09 | 4.94 | 1.21 | 4.83 | 1.14 | 5.53 | 0.88 | 5.13 | 0.91 |
| Appealing | 4.98 | 1.08 | 4.86 | 1.08 | 4.61 | 1.15 | 5.55 | 0.78 | 5.05 | 0.89 |
| Pleasant | 5.04 | 1.11 | 4.94 | 1.12 | 4.61 | 1.27 | 5.60 | 0.83 | 5.15 | 0.81 |
| Important | 5.05 | 1.11 | 4.88 | 1.11 | 4.68 | 1.11 | 5.50 | 0.96 | 5.41 | 0.68 |
| Useful | 5.21 | 1.10 | 5.11 | 1.06 | 4.79 | 1.24 | 5.62 | 0.80 | 5.48 | 0.84 |
| Interesting | 5.14 | 1.07 | 4.97 | 1.11 | 4.79 | 1.22 | 5.67 | 0.72 | 5.35 | 0.80 |
| Stressful | 3.49 | 1.37 | 3.81 | 1.20 | 3.53 | 1.38 | 2.73 | 1.33 | 3.68 | 1.40 |

After an analysis of the data, positive attitudes were found to be higher in Romania, followed by Lithuania, Spain and Italy. With regards to stress, bilingual education was found less stressful in Romania, followed by Italy, Spain and Lithuania.

Fig. 3. *Teachers' attitudes towards bilingual education.*

Good attitudes towards working in a bilingual classroom were found in all the countries. In agreement with the findings in the quantitative phase, these attitudes seem to be based on instrumental reasons, as most of the teachers refer to the importance of second language learning for students in a globalised world.

> *It is a way of giving meaningful learning, that is, giving meaning, first of all to the English language and then to its use in a world increasingly oriented to the use of the English language. I don't see, therefore, negative sides* ITA_TEACHER_01.

> *The benefits for children are large. First of all, they exercise a foreign language, that they have already studied, in a new context. In English, for example, they don't study History or Civic Culture. (…) Then, they are confronted with another teacher that speaks the language, not the teacher he is used to in English class. I think that from these perspectives, for the student there is a real benefit to learning, to be taught and that the whole learning process is realised in a bilingual environment.* ROM_TEACHER_04

Romanian teachers comment that students in their country are keen on learning new languages, and this fact triggers their motivation in bilingual classrooms as students perceive bilingual education as having a high instrumental value.

> *Simply put, they feel extremely at ease. All young people, and I mean those who are under 35 years old, have been born with English. Most feel more at ease communicating in English rather than Romanian. (…) They use it everywhere and it can act as a medium that provides them with nourishment, fun, and lots of activities.* ROM_TEACHER_02

Similarly, a Lithuanian teacher stated how young people easily get involved with English.

> *I think kids are very involved in learning English today. Even during breaks they often speak English. Therefore, they are even more motivated to improve through lessons in global education.* LIT_TEACHER_03

In Italy, one of the teachers mentioned that she has learned teaching methodology because she teaches in the bilingual classroom. She also highlights the fact that bilingual education helps improve both interaction with students and diversity outreach.

> *Certainly, the adoption of many methodologies: when I started CLIL I thought that CLIL was just teaching mathematics in a foreign language, English. That's not the case at all. It means to teach mathematics in English using many methodologies: debate, cooperative learning, etc. In my opinion, all this helps a lot, because there are many strategic and methodological choices behind it, the so-called scaffolding, in a few words the support I have to give to my students, especially the weaker ones.* ITA_TEACHER_04

Spanish teachers also remark that, for most students, the challenging nature of bilingual education is motivating. However, Spanish teachers' positive attitudes heavily depend on the compulsory/non-compulsory nature of this type of approach to education and the student-teacher ratios. They also highlight the difficulties that arise in diversity outreach in the case of students with learning difficulties. Additionally, teachers believe that some problems emerge when secondary bilingual schools receive students from monolingual primary schools.

> (…) *However, in the last few years, as bilingualism is compulsory at our school, the situation has changed a lot. On the one hand, some students have many difficulties passing the subject even in their mother tongue, and they do not have an adequate level of English to be able to follow the lesson if we use the CLIL methodology as established by the bilingual model.* SPA_TEACHER_02

> *Our educational action today is going in that direction, to incorporate all kinds of students into bilingualism and, however, I find that those children who either have difficulties or who come with few habits, I see it as very difficult, I don't know. I see a problem there.* SPA_TEACHER_03

> *[…] we receive students who, sometimes, don't come from bilingual primary school and, therefore, do not have a bilingual formation, so when we have to reach higher levels in which contents are more difficult, it is more complicated to put it into practice and, in addition, because of the ratio which we most times have, it is very difficult to explain such complex things as feudalism in English, and then use that in a class where we have more than 30 students.* SPA_TEACHER_01

Teachers in the rest of the countries do not mention student-teacher ratios. However, one of the teachers from Lithuania mentioned that it could be a good idea to group students who join a bilingual class according to their second language ability.

> *I do think that there has to be greater segregation. That is a bad word, but I do think that you have to choose students that will be able to learn a foreign language, I do think that it is not for every student.* LIT_TEACHER_01

Finally, some negative attitudes in Lithuania arise from the worries of the teachers about students losing their skills in their mother tongue.

> *I'm not entirely in favour of it being 100% done, because children, some of them don't know Lithuanian very well. They lack self-expression in the Lithuanian language, which I think they cannot forget.* LIT_TEACHER_02

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

This paper presents part of the results of a project aimed at carrying out international research which allows contrasting attitudes towards bilingualism and bilingual education in various educational contexts in four European countries with different historical, sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this study, we aimed to explore the attitudes towards bilingual education, examining the perceptions of parents, teachers and students. The findings reveal several key insights into the current landscape of bilingual education and its perceived benefits and challenges.

In general, the data shows that the bilingual context does affect bilingual education, and students', families', and teachers' attitudes towards bilingualism. The sociolinguistic situation and the context outside the classroom do have an effect on attitudes towards bilingual education. A greater familiarity with languages, which may be languages in use in the context, contributes to the perception that languages do not pose a problem in the learning of content. In such contexts, the bilingual situation is perceived as a natural and daily experience, as opposed to situations of bilingualism or contact between two or more languages circumscribed to the classroom context, without this having a manifest presence in society. In fact, our finding aligns with Rojo & Echols (2017) who showed how children exposed to other languages presented advantages in language awareness and willingness to learn.

In the case of families, the respondents in all the countries agree on the importance of learning a second language, and the reasons are mainly instrumental. This aligns with existing literature that suggests bilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and cultural awareness (Cummins, 2000; Bialystok, 2001). The attitudes towards learning content in a foreign language are better in Romania and Lithuania. However, through the questionnaires and interviews it was also perceived that parents need more information about what bilingualism and bilingual

education entail in order to make informed decisions as regards their children's schooling.

According to the students' answers, it can be inferred that they think bilingual education is mainly necessary, useful, and important, three criteria related to extrinsic motivation, whereas the negative attitude which stands out is stressfulness, which is scored as medium. As far as the attitudes of students are concerned, again Romania stands out from the rest of the countries with higher positive attitudes (necessary, pleasant, and appealing) and lower negative attitudes (difficult and stressful).

Students' positive attitudes towards bilingual education may be shaped by factors such as the perceived relevance of bilingualism to their future careers, the availability of bilingual programmes, and the attitudes of their peers and families. However, further research is necessary to better understand these influences. This would underscore the importance of creating an environment that not only supports bilingual education but also fosters its perceived value among students. When students see bilingualism as a practical asset, they may be more likely to engage with and benefit from such programs.

For educators, bilingual education is often viewed as a tool for promoting inclusivity and supporting diverse learning needs, as it allows students to access content in their first language while acquiring proficiency in a second language. Among the benefits reported by teachers, four main ideas were identified in the qualitative data gathered after the interviews: (a) the importance of learning a second language; (b) the development of communication skills; (c) learning from other cultures; and (d) learning a second language in context. And as far as the benefits for teachers themselves, the sampled population addressed the learning of new classroom methodologies, and the cultural (Son, 2024) and diversity outreach (Raymond et al., 2024).

However, there were also notable concerns, particularly regarding the implementation of bilingual education programmes

and the fact that student-teacher ratios are too high. Many teachers expressed frustration with limited resources, insufficient professional development opportunities, and the lack of clear policy support. These findings resonate with previous studies that highlight the gap between the theoretical benefits of bilingual education and the practical challenges faced by educators (Thomas & Collier, 2002). This suggests that, while there is widespread support for bilingual education at the conceptual level, the challenges related to its implementation require further attention both at policy level (Kirss et al., 2021) and educational institutions (Padron & Waxman, 2016).

The sociolinguistic context plays a very important role in the development of attitudes towards bilingualism and bilingual education and parents, students, teachers, and school administrators in a monolingual context can learn from the experience of the same stakeholders more familiarised with bilingualism as it represents a reality in their out-of-school environment.

As a result of this data analysis, good practices have been incorporated in three UNED Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) so that families can learn what bilingualism entails, and what to expect from bilingual education programmes so that they can make informed decisions before enrolling their children in a bilingual school.

## 5. Limitations and future directions/prospective research

The findings presented in this paper should be interpreted in light of the limitations commonly encountered in educational research. For example, the quantitative phase involved data collection through self-reported instruments, which may introduce a degree of bias in the responses of stakeholders. While the information gathered and analyzed during the qualitative phase, as well as the sample size in the quantitative phase, were intended to mitigate

these effects, it remains possible that the responses to the questionnaires were influenced by misperceptions among the participants.

Given the contributions made, the undertaking of further research may be a viable proposition. For instance, it would be a worthwhile endeavour to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of bilingual education in other countries worldwide. Furthermore, in future investigations, a focus on aspects other than stakeholders' attitudes, such as motivation towards bilingual education, satisfaction with bilingual education, or bilingual education outcomes, is recommended. In order to achieve the desired level of understanding, it is recommended that interviews be conducted with students, if this is feasible.

## Acknowledgment

## References

Ackerl, C. (2007). Lexico-grammar in the essays of CLIL and non-CLIL students: Error analysis of written production. *Vienna English Working Papers, 16*(3), 6-11.

Ardura, D. & Senra-Silva, I. (2024). The impact of student choice in shaping their bilingual education attitudes and perceptions. *Porta Linguarum, 43,* 217-233. https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.vi43.31248

Artamonova, T. 2020. L2 Learners' Language Attitudes and Their Assessment. *Foreign Language Annals 53* (4), 807-826.

https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12498

ATLAS.ti (2022). Scientific Software Development GmbH [Computer program].

Bialystok, E. (2001). *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Botes, E., J. M. Dewaele, & S. Greiff (2020). The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and Academic Achievement: An Overview of the Prevailing Literature and a Meta-Analysis. *Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning, 2*(1), 26-56. https://doi.org/10.52598/jpll/2/1/3

Creed, E., Filippi, R., & Holliman, A. (2024). Teaching bilingually: Unlocking the academic and cognitive potential—Teachers' insights. *Education Sciences, 14*(4), 406.

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications.

Cloud, N., Genesee, F. & Hamayan, E. (2000). *Dual Language Instruction: A Handbook for Enriched Education*. Heinle & Heinle.

Cummins, Jim. (2000). *Language, power, andpedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Czura, A., Papaja, K., & Urbaniak, M. (2009). Bilingual education and the emergence of CLIL in Poland. In D. Marsh, P. Mehisto, D. Wolff, R. Aliaga, T. Asikainen, M. J. Frigols-Martín, S. Hughes, & G. Langé (Eds.), *CLIL practicce: Perspectives from the field* (pp. 172-178). University of Jyväskylä.

De Smet, A., Mettewie, L., Hiligsmann, P., Galand, B., & Van Mensel, L. (2019). Does CLIL shape language attitudes and motivation? Interactions with target languages and instruction levels. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 26*(5), 534–553.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1671308

Dragojevic, M. (2016). Language Attitudes. In H. Giles, and J. Harwood (Eds.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Intergroup Communication* (Vol. 1) (pp. 263-278). Oxford University Press.

Fortune, T. W., & Tedick, D. J. (2015). Oral proficiency assessment of English-proficient k–8 Spanish immersion students. *The Modern Language Journal, 99*(4), 637-655. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12275

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*: Arnold.

Garrett, P., Coupland, N., & A. Williams. (2003). *Investigating Language Attitudes Social Meanings of Dialect, Ethnicity and Performance*. University of Wales Press.

IBM Corp. (2020). IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (29.0) [Computer software]. IBM Corp.

Infante, D., Benvenuto, G., & Lastrucci, E. (2009). The effects of CLIL from the perspective of experienced teachers. In D. Marsh, P. Mehisto, D. Wolff, R. Aliaga, T. Asikainen, M. J. Frigols-Martín, S. Hughes, & G. Langé (Eds.), *CLIL practice: Perspectives from the field* (pp. 156-163). University of Jyväskylä.

Johannessen, B. G. G. (Ed.). (2019). *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education: Politics, Policies and Practices in a Globalized Society*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05496-0

Kirss, L., Säälik, Ü., Leijen, Ä., & Pedaste, M. (2021). School effectiveness in multilingual education: A review of success factors. *Education Sciences, 11*(5), 193. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11050193

Lasagabaster, D., & Doiz, A. (2017). A Longitudinal Study on the Impact of CLIL on Affective Factors. *Applied Linguistics, 38*(5), 688-712.

Lasagabaster, D. & Sierra, J. M. (2009). Language attitudes in CLIL and traditional EFL classes. *International CLIL Research Journal 1*(2), 4-17.

Lazarević, N. (2022) CLIL teachers' reflections and attitudes: surviving at the deep end, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 25*(2), 571-584. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1703897

Li, C., & Wei, L. (2022a) Language attitudes: construct, measurement, and associations with language achievements, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2137516

Li, C., & Wei, L. (2022b). Anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom in language learning amongst junior secondary students in rural China: How do they contribute to L2 achievement? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 1*-16. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263122000031

Ljalikova, A., Meristo, M., Alas, E., & Jung, M. (2021). Narrative analysis as a means of investigating CLIL teachers' meaningful experiences. *Qualitative Research in Education, 10*(3), 228-259. http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/qre.7511

López-Martín, E., & Ardura, D. (2023). *The effect size in scientific publication. Educación XXI, 26*(1), 9-17. https://doi.org/10.5944/educxx1.36276

Lorenzo, F., Casal, S., & Moore, P. (2010). The effects of content and language integrated learning in European education: Key findings from the Andalusian bilingual sections evaluation project. *Applied Linguistics, 31*(3), 418-442. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amp041

Martínez Agudo, J. D. D., & Fielden Burns, L. V. (2021). What key stakeholders think about CLIL programmes: Commonalities and differences of perspective. *Porta Linguarum, 35*, 221-237.

https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.voi35.15320

Mehisto, P., & Asser, H. (2007). Stakeholder perspectives: CLIL programme management in Estonia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 10*(5): 683–701. https://doi.org/10.2167/beb466.0

Merisuo-Storm, T. (2007). Pupils' attitudes towards foreign-language learning and the development of literacy skills in bilingual education. *Teaching and Teacher Education 23*, 226-235. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.024

Mouboua, P. D., Atobatele, F. A., & Akintayo, O. T. (2024). Multilingual education and social equity: A comparative study of integration policies in multicultural societies. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews, 19*(2), 32-42. https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.19.2.0165

Muñiz J., Elosúa P., & Hambleton R. K., (2013), Directrices para la traducción y adaptación de los tests: segunda edición. *Psicothema, 52*(2), 151-157.

Murillo, F. J., Almazán, A., & Martínez-Garrido, C. (2021). La elección de centro educativo en un sistema de cuasi-mercado escolar mediado por el programa de bilingüismo. *Revista complutense de educación, 32*(1), 89. http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rced.68068

Murillo, F. J., & Martínez-Garrido, C. (2021). Profundizado en la segregación social de los centros de secundaria en la Comunidad de Madrid. *Revista de Sociología de La Educación-RASE, 14*(3), 348–369. https://doi.org/10.7203/RASE.14.3.18149

Ng, C. H., & Cheung, Y. L. (2022). Teaching and Learning English in the European Union: A Research. *English Language Teaching: Policy and Practice Across the European Union*, 11-31. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2152-0_2

Oxford, R. L. (2001). Language learning strategies. In R. Carter, & D.

Nunan (Eds.), *Teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 166-172). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667206.025

Padron, Y., & Waxman, H. (2016). Investigating principals' knowledge and perceptions of second language programs for English language learners. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management, 4*(2), 127-146.

Palacios, N., Bohlmann, N. L., Bell, B. A., Oh, M. H., & Yue, Y. (2024). Does Early Elementary Dual Language Instruction Deliver as Promised? *AERA Open, 10*, https://doi.org/10.1177/232858424126

Pladevall-Ballester, E. 2015. Exploring primary school CLIL perceptions in Catalonia: students', teachers' and parents' opinions and expectations. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. 18*,1: 45–59.

Ramos, P. R. (2023). Attention to diversity in bilingual education: Stakeholder perceptions in a bilingual region. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 14*(4), 1094-1107. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1404.28

Rojo, D. P., & Echols, C. H. (2017). Accepting labels in two languages: Relationships with exposure and language awareness. *OLBI Journal, 8*, 19-35. https://doi.org/10.18192/olbiwp.v8io.2115

Rubio-Alcalá, F. D., Arco-Tirado, J. L., Fernández-Martín, F. D., López-Lechuga, R., Barrios, E., & Pavón-Vázquez, V. (2019). A systematic review on evidences supporting quality indicators of bilingual, plurilingual and multilingual programs in higher education. *Educational Research Review, 27*, 191-204. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.03.003

Raymond, K., George, R., Cadez, R., Follows, M., Neveux, N., Hipfner-Boucher, K., … & Chen, X. (2024). A School-Based Professional Learning Community Improving Equity and Inclusion for At-Risk Readers in French Immersion. *Canadian*

*Journal of Applied Linguistics, 27*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2024.33252

Ryan, È., Botter, P., Luna, M. L., Bailey, A. L., & Darriet, C. (2024). Bilingual oral language development among dual language immersion students: Use of a Bayesian approach with language learning progressions. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 45*(3), 435-466. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716424000067

Salmon, W., & Menjívar, J. G. (2019) Setting and Language Attitudes in a Creole Context. *Applied Linguistics, 40*(2), 248-264. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx017

San Isidro, X., & Lasagabaster, D. (2019). Monitoring of Teachers' Views on Both CLIL and the Development of Pluriliteracies: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study. *English Language Teaching, 12*(2), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2020.1724185

San Isidro, X., & Lasagabaster, D. (2022). Students' and families' attitudes and motivations to language learning and CLIL: A longitudinal study. *The Language Learning Journal, 50*(1), 119-134. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2020.1724185

Senra-Silva, I. (2021) A study on CLIL secondary school teachers in Spain: Views, concerns and needs, *Complutense Journal of English Studies, 29*, 49-68. https://doi.org/10.5209/cjes.76068

Senra-Silva, I. & Ardura, D. (2023). The impact of the mandatory nature of bilingual programmes on the attitudes and perceptions regarding bilingual education among secondary education content subject teachers. *Revista de Educación, 403*, 67-96. https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2024-403-607

Szczesniak, A. (2023). How do in-service teachers perceive clil implementation at schools in spain? A systematic review. *Elia: Studies in Applied English Linguistics/Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada, 23*, 151-187. https://doi.org/10.12795/elia.2023.i23.05.

Son, M. (2024). Content and languages integration: Pre-service Teachers' culturally sustaining social studies units for emergent bilinguals. *Education Sciences, 14*(8), 915. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14080915

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement. UC Berkeley: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/65j213pt

Xia, N. (2024). The impact of bilingual education on young children's cognitive development. *Transactions on Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 11*, 919-928. https://doi.org/10.62051/p2j7f435