

# Analyzing Bilingual Teaching and Learning in Madrid, Spain: A Fulbright Scholar Collaborative Research Project<sup>1</sup>

Análisis del Proceso de Enseñanza y Aprendizaje en Educación Bilingüe en Madrid, España: Un Proyecto de Colaboración Fulbright Scholar

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## Abstract

This study was carried out as an international cooperative research project supported by a Fulbright Scholar award to investigate attitudes and perceptions towards bilingual education, and to extract key findings on effective pedagogy in bilingual schools in the Region of Madrid, where expansion of bilingual programs has been rapidly increasing. The study sought to identify the attitudes of teachers, language assistants and students towards bilingualism and bilingual program development. It was also interested in identifying effective classroom practices and strategies for effective teaching in bilingual contexts. The results obtained reveal key findings and possible implications that should be taken into consideration in order to facilitate the future development and consolidation of bilingual programs that promote educational excellence.

*Keywords:* ALTBE, conceptual framework, best practices, bilingual programs, CLIL, perceptions and attitudes, Fulbright scholar collaboration, research surveys and protocols

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### Resumen

El presente estudio se llevó a cabo dentro del marco de un proyecto de investigación colaborativo internacional, apoyado por una beca Fulbright, con el objetivo de investigar las actitudes y percepciones hacia la educación bilingüe y extraer los principales resultados sobre una metodología de prácticas pedagógicas eficientes en colegios bilingües de la región de Madrid, donde la implantación de los programas bilingües ha aumentado exponencialmente en las últimas décadas. El estudio pretendía identificar las actitudes de los profesores, asistentes de idiomas y estudiantes hacia el bilingüismo y el desarrollo del programa bilingüe. Además se identificaron ejemplos de buenas prácticas docentes y estrategias eficientes de enseñanza-aprendizaje en contextos bilingües. Los resultados obtenidos ponen de manifiesto hallazgos fundamentales y sus posibles implicaciones que, se deberían tener en consideración para facilitar el futuro desarrollo y consolidación de programas bilingües que promuevan la excelencia educativa.

*Palabras claves:* ALTBE, marco conceptual, buenas prácticas, programas bilingües, CLIL, actitudes y percepciones; colaboración Beca *Fulbright*, cuestionario y protocolos de investigación.

### Resumo

O presente estudo foi realizado dentro do marco de um projeto de pesquisa colaborativo internacional, apoiado por uma bolsa Fulbright, com o objetivo de pesquisar as atitudes e percepções em direção à educação bilíngue e extrair os principais resultados sobre uma metodologia de práticas pedagógicas eficientes em colégios bilíngues da região de Madrid, onde a implantação dos programas bilíngues tem aumentado exponencialmente nas últimas décadas. O estudo pretendia identificar as atitudes dos professores, assistentes de idiomas e estudantes em direção ao bilinguismo e ao desenvolvimento do programa bilíngue. Além do mais, identificaram-se exemplos de boas práticas docentes e estratégias eficientes de ensino-aprendizagem em contextos bilíngues. Os resultados obtidos põem de manifesto descobertas fundamentais e suas possíveis implicações que se deveriam levar em consideração para facilitar o futuro desenvolvimento e consolidação de programas bilíngues que promovam a excelência educativa.

*Palavras chave:* ALTBE, marco conceitual, boas práticas, programas bilíngues, CLIL, atitudes e percepções; colaboração Bolsa *Fulbright*, questionário e protocolos de pesquisa.

## Introduction

### Bilingual Education in Spain

Over the past two decades, the educational community in Spain, supported by the National Spanish Ministry of Education, has made a powerful and passionate commitment to teach English in public schools using an additive bilingual education approach. Throughout Spain bilingual education is being promoted and developed in schools, with the objective of teaching a second language. Based on a collaborative agreement between the Spanish Ministry of Education and the British Council in 1996, the public school sector in Spain began its innovative and progressive foray into bilingual education through an immersion program. Over time, another variety to bilingual education in Spain known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was introduced, based on the Council of Europe Framework (Council of Europe, 2005). It is in this context that bilingualism and bilingual programs have been developed and teachers have begun the challenging process of teaching content in a second language.

Also included in this perspective of promoting two languages was the focus on encouraging an awareness of cultural diversity. An important variable in these bilingual programs was the infusion and inclusion of native English speaking language assistants. These assistants were required to possess a college diploma, and would serve as linguistic models and cultural ambassadors in bilingual classrooms. Most language assistants working in bilingual programs in Spain were natives of the United States, but there were many from Great Britain and Ireland as well.

In one of the regions where this zeal for bilingualism was evident was in Madrid and its environs, officially known as the *Comunidad de Madrid* (CAM), whose official order for bilingual education began by stating that “the *Comunidad de Madrid* is convinced that bilingualism is imperative for their students to be effective and integrated participants in the European Union and that the Ministry of Education is demanding renewed efforts to achieve this goal” (Consejería de Educación, Juventud y Deporte, 2009, para. 1). CAM’s Regional Department of Education made bilingual program development and expansion top priorities for pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of education. As a result, the pace and scope of bilingual program development and implementation in the *Comunidad de Madrid* was rapid (Ramírez-Verdugo, 2010; Ruiz de Zarobe & Lasgabaster, 2010).

According to local educational experts (Frijols 2010; Gisbert, 2010), in 2007 there were approximately 250 primary bilingual public

schools, 2015 native English speaking teaching assistants and 880 officially trained and certified bilingual teachers in the *Comunidad de Madrid*. By the year 2015, the goal is to have over 3000 teachers and 100% of early childhood centers, 50% of primary and 30% of secondary and high schools fully developed as bilingual centers. The target is to prepare the students in the *Comunidad de Madrid* to become fully competent in English.

## Literature Review

### Bilingual Education and CLIL

There has been an increasing interest in bilingual education throughout Europe, offered mainly in a variety of CLIL forms with different languages as the L2 (Ramírez-Verdugo, 2010). Most research that has been conducted on these programs lies within the context of applied linguistics rather than teacher pedagogy, effective practices or participant perceptions. Studies have focused largely on classroom discourse in a CLIL context (Dalton-Puffer 2007; Nikula, Dalton-Puffer & Linares, 2013), effective theory-based practice, tools, techniques, resources, and L2 pedagogy in CLIL contexts (De Graaff, Koopman, Anikina & Westhoff, 2007; Escobar, 2013; Gerena, 2012a; Gerena, 2012b; Hillyard, 2011; Ioannou-Georgiou & Ramírez-Verdugo, 2010; Ramírez-Verdugo & Sotomayor, 2012), and evaluation of bilingual secondary education and student gain and learning outcome, motivation and affective factors (Admiraal, Westhoff, & de Bot, 2006; Coyle 2011; Lasagabaster, 2011; Merisuo-Storm 2006; Seikkula-Leino, 2007).

### Attitudes and Perceptions

Student perceptions and attitudes are important variables to effective teaching and learning (Eiko, 2005). Research on other program models have found positive relationships between students' attitudes and willingness to study foreign languages (Elyildirim & Ashton, 2006), as well as improved language competences (Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Genesee, 2002; Lasagabaster, 2008; Marsh, 2008; Moore, 2006). In this respect, Lindholm-Leary and Ferrante (2003 and 2005) document how student attitudes affect academic success and learning. Lindholm & Borsato (2001) reveal that factors that lead to academic success, achievement, and adjustment of successful Hispanic students in the United States include motivation, a belief in academic competence, a school environment that is safe and supportive, family support, and a peer group that values education. Additionally, listening to the voices of

learners has been found to be a critical aspect to successful educational programs (Coyle, 2013).

Teacher preparation is a critical aspect to student learning. In 2002, in a report to the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, the research team of Kelly, Grenfell, Gallagher-Brett, Jones, Richard and Hilmarsson-Dunn (2002) reported that language teachers should be trained in language skills and pedagogic strategies that meet the needs of all age and language level groups, from primary to adult vocational and beyond. Research consistently points to better teacher preparation as a key component of successful and effective bilingual and CLIL programs (Coyle & Marsh, 2001; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010; Lyster, 2007; Maljers, 2007).

Effective practices in bilingual, CLIL, and second language education have been identified throughout the literature. Effective practices include integration of content and language, active teaching, student engagement, scaffolding, developing cognitively challenging and higher order thinking skills, providing comprehensible input through the use of visuals, graphic organizers and other student centered materials, and monitoring and assessing student progress (□De Graaff, et al 2007; Naves, 2009; Walqui, 2006).

## Methodology

### Research Design

The methodology used in this study included mixed methods: quantitative surveys, descriptive and analytical field observations, and qualitative interviews and written reflections. The goal was to develop a conceptual framework based on current practices, yet linked to established best practices to provide support and encouragement for future bilingual program development.

The research design and the data gathered were an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and beliefs of teachers, students, and language assistants toward bilingualism and bilingual program implementation?
2. What effective practices can be observed in bilingual classrooms? Are these practices aligned to student linguistic and content achievement?
3. How can the data gathered be used to promote bilingualism and future bilingual program development?

## Context and Participants

The project began by constructing an electronic survey that asked teachers, secondary students, and language assistants to respond to questions that were geared to investigating bilingual teaching practices and program perspectives. Following this, schools were contacted and permission was requested to observe practicing bilingual teachers and language assistants in bilingual education programs in select schools in the northern area of Madrid. Bilingual classes at both primary and secondary levels were observed during field site visitations.

Twenty-two primary and secondary bilingual teachers, eighty secondary students, and fifty-three language assistants completed electronic surveys. Twenty-seven classrooms were visited with each visit lasting approximately one hour, with sixteen primary classes and eleven secondary classes observed. Thirteen teachers and administrators were interviewed individually, on a one to one basis. Seventy-nine of the eighty secondary students completed the written reflection surveys that focused on the bilingual education that they had received in primary school and were continuing to receive in secondary school.

## Data Collection

All research instruments and data collection materials were original and specifically prepared for this research project. They were field tested and revised over several iterations until the researchers believed they would support the goals of the project.

Throughout the project, both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered. Quantitative data was gathered from electronic Likert style surveys that were distributed to teachers, students and language assistants. Classrooms were visited and descriptive field observations were recorded using an observational protocol. Data from these field observations were then analyzed and organized using a follow up analytical protocol. Open response questions and focused interviews with teachers and administrators, along with structured reflective written responses with secondary students, provided qualitative data. These interviews and reflective responses provided first person narratives concerning bilingualism and bilingual education. The objectives of all data collection tools were to identify effective classroom practices and strategies for effective teaching, to explore the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers, students, and language assistants (Yin, 2009).

**Surveys.** The Likert style survey topics included items that measured participants' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of

accomplishments and achievements, the role of English language assistants, ongoing challenges and obstacles, and future goals. The surveys included items that pertained to teaching and assessment practices, oral and written language use, development of language skills, perceived successes and gains in language and content, perceived challenges or difficulties, the role and effectiveness of language assistants, and the need for professional development.

**Observations.** Over a series of five months, targeted schools were visited, and teachers were observed in their classroom settings. Classroom observations were prearranged with the schools and teachers. Primary classes ranged from 1st through 6th grade, and the secondary classes include 1st, 2nd, and 4th levels of E.S.O (*educación secundaria obligatoria*, or required secondary education).

To accomplish a thorough examination of pedagogy, an original classroom observation protocol the “ALTBE Observation Protocol,” was created to serve as a consistent tool to observe classrooms across the grade levels. It was used to record and annotate both teacher pedagogy and student engagement found in bilingual classrooms at both the primary and secondary levels. All field observation notes were taken using the ALTBE Observation Protocol.

**Interviews and written reflections.** The third aspect of the study was to interview key stakeholders to capture first person, narrative voices in the context of additive bilingualism. Teachers and administrators were interviewed to gain insights into their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. An interview protocol was designed to assure consistency of questions. Secondary students who had participated in a bilingual primary school program were asked to respond in writing to a set of six reflective questions that focused on their perceptions of the benefits or advantages of being bilingual in the future, successes and challenges of having participated in bilingual programs, what they liked and disliked about being in a bilingual program, the role and perceived usefulness and effectiveness of language assistants, and future benefits of their participation in a bilingual program .

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

A follow up analysis tool, the “ALTBE Data Analysis Protocol 1,” based on Armas and Lavadenz’ (2011) Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL), was developed to examine, organize, and analyze the data obtained from each classroom observation, to ultimately construct a framework of effective practices from a broad

range of grade levels and content areas. This tool organized the raw data into five domains: (a) lesson introduction; (b) teaching strategies, methods and techniques; (c) critical thinking, higher order thinking and cognitive development; (d) effective use of language assistants; and (e) assessment. Each domain contained 3-5 performance indicators. Anchor definitions were established for scoring consistency.

## **Results**

Once data was collected and analyzed from each set of instruments, findings were organized into the following categories.

### **Effective Pedagogy**

Using the “ALTBE Data Analysis Protocol,” and based on the literature related to effective practices, lessons were found to include some effective practices in varying degrees. Most lessons included some comprehensible input, such as demonstrations, modeling, videos, use of realia and visuals. Vocabulary development was paramount in most lessons, and listening skills were developed more than speaking skills. Clarification and scaffolding support were provided when needed, and technology, such as smart boards, was present in most classrooms and used to varying degrees. However, practices that were not as frequently encountered included previewing or activating prior knowledge before teaching the main lesson, use of higher order thinking questions and activities, student centered instruction, group or partner work, or hands-on interactive activities. Most lessons focused on listening, reading, and writing rather than speaking.

### **Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions of Bilingualism and the Bilingual Program**

Teachers and language assistants were mostly enthusiastic about their roles in the bilingual programs. Teachers saw bilingualism as the future of professionalism in Spain and a way to better prepare children for a global world. Language assistants saw their role as promoters of English so that students would be enthusiastic and excited about becoming bilingual and learning more about American customs and culture. Survey responses to open ended questions revealed that the areas that both teachers and language assistants felt were most successful were student motivation and interest in becoming bilingual in general.

Students' survey responses indicated that learning another language and being bilingual was important to students now and for their future. They were aware of the benefits of bilingualism and felt a sense of pride and comfort when speaking English, and they were not afraid to make mistakes. An overwhelming majority saw themselves as future bilingual adults, confident that their futures would be better because of their participation in the bilingual program. They perceived bilingualism as the key to acceptance to university, future careers, better jobs and opportunities, increased competitiveness and preparedness, and greater advantages and future options.

English was viewed as an important global language and the ability to communicate with others would result in improved personal language abilities in English, along with travel ease and inter cultural and communicative abilities. Almost all students reported that they liked the fact that their levels of English were high, their overall language abilities were well developed, and that they learned much more English than students in the regular programs. Learning vocabulary was considered easy, and as a result, their vocabulary was extensive and rich, especially in science, history and technology, and communicative abilities. They liked that the books were shorter and that there was less bookwork. When the students felt that the content was difficult, they thought the teachers were supportive and allowed them time to adjust.

The social aspects were also positive. Students preferred working in groups and making friends, and establishing relationships with native English speakers. On a personal level, they expressed higher levels of self-confidence, comfort level, feelings of accomplishment and a sense of pride in being able to communicate and learn in another language. They felt that they learned more and that the bilingual program was more challenging than regular programs. They generally liked their teachers, thought they were very competent, and found the classes more entertaining.

Additionally, students enjoyed learning English in History, Art/Music, PE, Science, and Geography classes. They appreciated learning with videos, the Internet, songs, and games, and they liked classes to be "fun" and not "boring." Students believed the language assistants were very important to their mastering English and credited them with being kind, sensitive, and extremely helpful. Positive adjectives students used to describe their participation in the bilingual program ranged from "excited, satisfied, interested, to comfortable, and confident".

Not only did students share what they liked about the bilingual program, they were forthcoming in reporting what they did not like as well. Students did not like that learning content in English meant more

concentration and cognitive stamina during classes, and more studying and homework after school. While most students believed they could learn as much in English as in Spanish, some students reported that they felt they were losing content knowledge and vocabulary in Spanish due to learning in a non-native language. As in the survey, they reiterated the fact that grammar and writing were the most difficult areas of language to learn, and they did not like grammar exercises, bookwork, workbooks, or flash cards. They did not like that their schedules included an extra period a day, and they perceived the bilingual teachers as being stricter than the non-bilingual teachers. Negative adjectives students used to describe their participation in the bilingual program included “tired, confused, and distracted.”

### **Effective Use of Language Assistants**

Language assistant responsibilities varied by schools, and some teachers stated that team teaching and their integration into the class dynamics and design took a significant amount of time and effort. Many language assistants’ tended to be university graduates in diverse fields such as science or arts who were willing to spend a year abroad in a foreign country and hence, lacked prior teacher training and experience. This lack of preparation was perceived as a shortcoming by both primary and secondary school teachers.

Notwithstanding, language assistants were regarded as having an extremely important role to play in the bilingual program implementation. Students overwhelmingly stated that the language assistants were irreplaceable and that they were absolutely responsible for their linguistic and cultural advancements. The areas they felt the language assistants were most helpful were in speaking, intonation and pronunciation, grammar, fluency, communicative skills, and preparing for exams.

### **Areas to be Developed**

Although interview responses from both primary and secondary school teachers yielded very positive perceptions and strong beliefs in the bilingual programs implemented in the region, a large majority of bilingual education teachers considered there was not sufficient teacher or language assistant training. Both teachers and assistants consistently asked for more training and support on not only teaching methodology and pedagogy, but on how to integrate the assistants into the classroom structure.

Higher order thinking, student centered, and hands-on, interactive teaching strategies were not as commonly reported as might have been expected. In addition, there was an apparent mismatching of perceptions. The language assistants responded that hands-on and interactive activities were not typically used in teaching, yet teachers responded that they were satisfied with the level of student centered and participatory activities provided in their teaching strategies.

Although vocabulary development in students was high, students had difficulty in expressing their thoughts and conceptual understandings fluently due very few opportunities to predict, infer, compare or contrast. Questioning techniques needed to include more higher order thinking questions and pedagogy needed to shift from a teacher centered environment marked by an abundance of teacher talk and teaching by the book, with students focused on rote learning, to a more student centered pedagogy, where student engagement and participation were encouraged. Oral language needed to be developed, since there was very little student speaking, and classwork consisted mostly of reading, writing and note taking. Finally, language assistants should be more fully integrated as linguistic and cultural resources, as they were often seen assessing individual students, or doing menial chores, such as preparing materials or making copies.

Even though there has been an outstanding investment in the bilingual program over the last decade, teachers considered the recent cuts in education were seriously affecting the implementation of the program at schools. Two of the most repeated responses gathered from the interviews with teachers were the increased teaching load and the lack of scheduled school times for planning with team teachers and language assistants. Other challenges included a perceived loss of content rigor due to language limitations, and a wide range of linguistic and general academic ability in students.

### **Ten Best Practices**

Based on the analysis of the data, a concept map outlining a variety of effective teaching practices in bilingual programs was developed by analyzing the data from each of the three data gathering tools (surveys, observations and interviews) for themes, key findings were extrapolated, and implications that would help facilitate future development of bilingual programs (Yin, 2009). This resulted in a concept map entitled “Ten Best Practices,” which included the following necessary criteria for effective teaching: (a) plan lessons to include both language and content objectives; (b) preview or activate

prior knowledge before teaching the main lesson; (c) use a variety of comprehensible input techniques in teaching such as visuals, realia, and hands-on interactive activities, and include demonstrations, modeling, and use of technology (smart boards, videos, power points, etc.); (d) pose higher order thinking questions and develop critical thinking skills, such as predicting, inferring, comparing and contrasting; (e) encourage student participation, both in small groups and with partners, and devise an abundance of active student engagement strategies; (f) develop students' vocabulary levels, listening comprehension, and authentic speaking; (g) provide on going positive feedback and reinforcement with assessments used as a guide to student learning and future planning (h) make instruction student centered, with less teacher talk, and encourage teachers to facilitate learning by clarifying and scaffolding when needed; (i) include all four language modes, listening, speaking, reading and writing, evenly distributed in teaching; (j) establish ways to effectively use the linguistic and cultural knowledge of language assistants on a continual basis.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Taking this “Ten Best Practices” concept map one step further, a “Conceptual Framework” was also formulated that outlined the necessary variables to develop and implement an effective bilingual program: (1) Teacher and Language Assistant Professional Development, (2) Implementation of the “Ten Best Practices”, and (3) Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle of constant reflection and change for improvement.

Professional development would provide support for teachers to enhance skills and strategies that would infuse and incorporate the “Ten Best Practices” into future bilingual program development. This professional development could be delivered as in-person workshops or on-line modules, and would focus on methodology and strategies to encourage all of the “Ten Best Practices”, and especially student interaction, higher order thinking skills and questioning, cooperative group work, hands-on and active learning, participatory and student centered instruction, and non-traditional materials and assessments.

Professional development could also be provided on how to effectively use language assistants in the classroom. Language assistants would benefit from professional development that would delineate and demonstrate their roles and responsibilities. Assistants could also receive basic training on effective teaching strategies and classroom management strategies.

The Plan-Do-Check-Act portion of the conceptual framework draws upon Deming's PDCA Cycle of continuous improvement (1986) and has been accepted in practice in the field of professional continual improvement and teacher professional development (Kartikowati, 2013; Knight, 2012). It encourages action, assessment, and infusion of new ideas and methodologies in order to improve a process or product. The four phases, as explained by Brown and Marshall (2008), can be described as "Plan, Do, Check, Act". The PDCA cycle can be of particular use in designing, developing and implementing future programs.

### Conclusions

This project was an attempt to investigate attitudes and perceptions towards bilingual education, and to extract key findings on effective pedagogy in bilingual schools in the *Comunidad de Madrid* (CAM), where expansion of bilingual programs has been rapidly increasing. The research project focused on three populations involved in bilingual education: teachers, language assistants, and students.

The research questions in this study explored the perceptions and beliefs of teachers, students, and language assistants toward bilingualism and bilingual program implementation, effective practices in bilingual classrooms, and how the gathered data could be used to promote bilingualism and future bilingual program development. Data was collected throughout the study using various original tools. Analysis of the data led to the creation of a concept map of effective practices and a conceptual framework to support effective bilingual program development and implementation. Both the concept map and the conceptual framework can be used to inform future bilingual program planning, as well as assist teachers to provide students with a learning environment that will support student linguistic and content achievement.

From this perspective, these results may be used to facilitate future development and consolidation of those bilingual programs that promote and support an educative model and approach based on efficiency and excellence for a future generation of learners and citizens. The positive findings expounded on in this study are fully in line with the long-life learning perspective and philosophy that the European Commission has been encouraging across Europe for the last few decades, which supports the concept of multilingualism, or the ability to communicate in at least two foreign languages plus their mother tongue. In this context, the Spanish Ministry of Education, along with the Regional Departments of Education, such as Catalonia (with

Catalan, Castilian, English and French as the main spoken languages), Galicia (with Galician, Castilian and English) Valencia (with Valencian, Castilian, and English or French) or the Basque Country (with Basque, Castilian, and English or French) have provided strong support for bilingualism and bilingual education.

Nevertheless, in order to address issues of teacher education and professional development needs, as identified as a result of this study, and to operationalize the Conceptual Framework, a bilingual teacher and language assistant professional development program based on the ten effective practices, and incorporating the PDCA model, will be submitted to the Department of Education at the *Comunidad de Madrid* (CAM). It is hoped that it will be implemented as part of an on going professional development program in the *Comunidad de Madrid*, one that would positively impact teacher and program effectiveness.

This Fulbright senior scholar research agenda and results provide an opportunity to support bilingualism, to encourage international collaboration, and to engender powerful partnerships for future bilingual program development. It is hoped that the results of this project, when disseminated, will be applied to other bilingual contexts and experiences.

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