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Bilingual Education in Spain: Analysis and Assessment  
of the Present Model

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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout the years, bilingual education has been increasing exponentially in importance. In 1996 a preliminary bilingual education model is established in Spain, and later on is adapted to the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The aim of this study is to deeply analyze the Spanish bilingual education model and, based on that analysis, make a thorough assessment, stating the model's advantages and shortcomings, and to propose solutions that may help students get better results. Before that, however, some background on bilingual education is going to be given, explaining its benefits and hindrances.

Keywords: Bilingual Education, Spain, BEP, CLIL, English.

## **RESUMEN**

La enseñanza bilingüe está siendo cada vez más importante con el paso de los años. En 1996 se establece en España un modelo preliminar que, posteriormente, se irá adaptando a las directrices del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar en profundidad el modelo español de enseñanza bilingüe y, en base a ese análisis, realizar una evaluación exhaustiva del modelo, exponiendo sus ventajas y desventajas, y proponer una serie de soluciones que puedan ayudar a los estudiantes a obtener mejores resultados. Como punto de partida se ofrece una reflexión sobre la enseñanza bilingüe en general, destacando sus principales beneficios e inconvenientes.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza bilingüe, España, BEP, CLIL, inglés.



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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of bilingualism has been studied for many years, and even nowadays, defining it might be problematic. According to Weinreich (1953: 29), bilingualism consists in the habit of using two languages, and the people who do so are called bilinguals. Also, Haugen (1966: 89), states that “bilingualism starts in the moment in which the speaker is able to produce a complete and meaningful message in a language other than their mother tongue.” The L2 proficiency of bilinguals is hugely varied, from basic to advanced command of the language.

However, when the bilingualism level of a person is to be decided, several problems arise. There are four different skills in every language, which are listening, speaking, writing, and reading; these skills can be further subdivided into vocabulary, grammar, meanings, pronunciation and style, and people’s command of those skills vary a lot (Baker, 1988: 2-3). Measuring the overall level of every person is a very difficult task, so the previous definition by Haugen is useful to know who is bilingual and who is not.

Bilingual education has already been implemented in most countries, so that the upcoming generations of children will, hopefully, be bilingual – or even trilingual – by the time they reach the adult age. According to Eurydice<sup>1</sup> (2005), bilingual education is described as an educational system in which the curriculum is taught in two languages, being one of them the mother tongue of the students, and the other one the language of general communication.

The goal of this project is to explain thoroughly what bilingual education is and how it has been implemented in Spain in contrast with the models applied in other European countries. In order to do that, the debate on bilingual education that has been going on over the last decades will be analyzed first by comparing the arguments put forward by its advocates and by its detractors; secondly, the model of bilingual education followed in primary and secondary schools in Spain will be examined in detail, paying special attention to the Spanish Bilingual Education Project (BEP), the CLIL approach to

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<sup>1</sup> Eurydice is a network of 42 national units whose task is to explain how education systems are organized in Europe, as well as how they work.

teaching and learning, the reasons for its increasing importance, and its relevance within language learning; and finally, it is going to be assessed whether bilingual education in Spain has so far achieved a desirable degree of attainment, including a final reflection upon the need for improvement in some respects.



## 1. THE DEBATE ON BILINGUAL EDUCATION: FOCUSING THE ISSUE

Even though bilingual education may seem a straightforward topic, leaving no much room for debate, *OccupyTheory*, a website specialized in stating pros and cons of a wide selection of topics, remarks that “it is a much more complicated issue than most realize. What is considered a pro by one person may be considered a con by another. Different people in different parts of the country have different language needs.”

Because of this disparity of opinions, it is necessary to explain the advantages and disadvantages with an objective point of view in order for everyone to understand them and then taking a side or another.

According to two websites – the previously mentioned *OccupyTheory* and *Asia-Pacific Economics Blog*, or APECSEC –, there are four pros of bilingual education. First of all, in the future, speaking multiple languages is going to make it much easier to apply successfully to the job market. Anghel (2012: 1) explains that “knowledge of a second language is widely believed to be essential for workers to succeed in an increasingly interconnected business world.” The number of speakers of Spanish, English, and Chinese rises at a dramatic pace, so having one of these as an L2 will be a well-considered skill, and will be an important advantage over their monolingual “enemies.” As Baker and Prys Jones (1998: 7) have argued, “a person with two languages may have a wider portfolio of jobs available. As international relationships become closer, an increasing number of jobs are likely to require a person to be bilingual or multilingual.” Furthermore, for the main target of bilingual education, that is, children, it is much easier to learn a second language, since language experts concur that the peak time for a person to learn a new language is during their younger years.

Secondly, once a person has managed to learn a second language, it becomes easier for them to learn subsequent languages, because being bilingual implies an increase on concentration, on the focus on new task learning, and on the ability of multitasking. The area of the brain that is responsible for learning new materials and encouraging spatial growth is further stimulated with bilingual education. A video by *Univision Noticias*, an

American Spanish language cable news channel, remarks that “research has found that the minds of bilinguals are better at adapting to changing stimuli than the minds of monolinguals, especially at a young age, since the brain’s command center, which is responsible for problem solving, planning, and directing one’s attention, is nimbler in bilinguals than it is in monolinguals.” This type of education entails an increased brain growth and, as it has been aforesaid mentioned, an increased ability to multitask. Baker and Prys Jones (1998: 8) state that “Research has shown that bilinguals may have some advantages in thinking, ranging from creative thinking to faster progress in early cognitive development and greater sensitivity in communication.” In a world which is globalizing at a startling rate, children who are able to communicate fluently with a variety of cultures and peoples are the ones who will rise to the top.

Thirdly, children who follow a bilingual education receive many personality benefits, such as the following: their ability to process new sounds is increased; they are less likely to suffer from personal disorders, like anxiety; they are generally less lonely than children who only speak one language, which leads them to possess a higher self-esteem; and they are much less aggressive, as well as more reasonable, thus being less likely to get into arguments with other people.

Last but not least, apart from being able to learn other languages in a faster and easier way, bilingual children can also understand other worldwide cultures much better, thereby being more cultured. “Bilingualism provides the opportunity to experience two or more cultures. Monolinguals can experience lots of cultures as well, but in a passive way, since to participate and become involved in the core of a culture requires a knowledge of the language of that culture, which monolinguals do not have.” (Baker and Prys Jones, 1998: 7). Ofelia García (2009) states that bilingual education does not only deal with language learning, but also with aiding students to be able to understand other different cultures. This way, they experience a personal growth, which will be a result of them interacting successfully with other races; and, furthermore, they are able to study abroad and gain more from the experience than those who study abroad without being able to speak the predominant language of the country.

Nevertheless, as it has been mentioned before, nothing is perfect, so everything that has pros has cons as well. The *OccupyTheory* and APECSEC websites made a list of drawbacks of bilingual education; but before approaching them, two problems falsely attributed to it are going to be stated.

Baker and Prys Jones (1998) propose the following problems: one is that when children exhibit language problems (e.g. delayed speech) or personality problems, bilingualism is sometimes blamed; and the other is that educational failure may be wrongly attributed to bilingualism. For instance, the parent of a monolingual child may lay the blame with the child's intelligence or standard of teaching, among others, while the parent of the bilingual child may lay the blame with the previous issues plus the child's bilingualism. Those two problems are sometimes attributed to bilingualism and bilingual education with no conclusive evidence, since language, personality, and education issues are not always the fault of being bilingual. Of course, in some cases it may be as a result of that, but it is far from being always the case: how and in what environment the child is raised are two relevant factors for the development of that child, not only the fact of being monolingual or bilingual.

After having explained the problems falsely attributed to bilingualism and bilingual education, the actual possible disadvantages are going to be stated. To begin with, running a bilingual program is much more expensive than running a dominant language one – that is, education in only one language –. “The teachers may need to be hired, trained, or retrained, and given the market value of English knowledge they will be more costly than other teachers.” (Anghel, 2012: 1). In most cases, if a student does not have a strong understanding of the language they are being taught, all of the money spent on establishing the bilingual program is a complete waste. Besides, spending money on bilingual education programs takes away valuable funding which could be used for other things. For this reason, many schools have elected to stick with their current dominant language programs.

Next, one of the most common criticisms of bilingual education is that it “helps” foreign language students to avoid complete and total assimilation into the culture where they currently live; in order to fully adapt to the current culture of their country of residence, a person needs to make certain sacrifices (chief among these sacrifices is their

dominant language and culture). When bilingual education is offered, it serves to widen the cultural gap instead of bridging it. Furthermore, it becomes more difficult for the student to experience success in other school subjects, such as math or science. Those who speak a minority language should be able to learn English while also holding onto their native tongue and their own cultural traditions.

Another important disadvantage is that when a child is forced to spend a great deal of time learning a second language, their ability to develop other skills may be hindered. Specializing in one particular area is considered to stunt the child's overall development and can actually lead to a lack of well-rounded learning. Besides, if a child's two languages are both underdeveloped, it will lead to inability to cope with the school curriculum in either language (see Baker and Prys Jones, 1998). Teaching a child to be bilingual is an extremely time-consuming pursuit, and can be really frustrating for both the teacher and the student; this frustration will lead the children to do worse with the other subjects. Some children respond well to learning a second language, while others do not. For this reason, it is crucial that one is able to read the warning signs in the child they are trying to teach, so that the children can have the chance of reaching their true potential and focusing on the career that they desire.

Finally, one of the main issues that continues to arise in the world of bilingual education is the severe lack of qualified teachers who are able to handle the subject. Quality bilingual education requires firm, patient, expert teachers who can take care of all the issues that appear. Unfortunately, these teachers are in very short supply: many of them are already very busy teaching their usual subjects and do not have the time to add the teaching of a second language to their tight schedule. For instance, the Spanish digital newspaper *La Réplica* published an article regarding this issue in Spain, explaining that most of the teaching staff which gives lessons at Spanish bilingual schools do not reach the near-native level which should be mandatory to teach because, as there is an increase on bilingual centers, there is also a need to fill up vacancies, thus accepting certifications like the one issued by Trinity College, which, according to Sara Madrigal Castro – the person who wrote the article – is far from qualifying teachers for teaching at bilingual centers.

To sum up, there are several disadvantages regarding bilingualism and bilingual education which can mean a real nuisance when taking that educational method; its huge expenses and worrisome lack of qualified teachers are issues which must be solved as soon as possible. Sadly, this is not something which may be solved from one day to the next, but at least, things can be done to fix this situation. However, the benefits that bilingualism and bilingual education offer to people who embrace it make up for the obstacles that stand on their way; according to Dr. Peeter Mehisto, a bilingual education consultant and specialist in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at the University of London, there is an extraordinary number of benefits on a personal level of taking a bilingual education: opening new doors, opening new horizons, and giving people new opportunities. Because of this, taking a bilingual education program is worth a try.



## 2. BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SPAIN

Bilingual education in Spain started in 1978, when the article 3 of the Spanish Constitution considered languages like Catalan, Basque, and Galician as official; because of that, the affected autonomous communities acquired a bilingual status. Nevertheless, this is not the only case of bilingualism in Spain: there are many cases of immigrants coming to the country who speak several languages which are different from Spanish, Catalan, Basque, or Galician, and the number of immigrants gets higher and higher as years pass. All these people share a number of psychological, social, and educational characteristics that should be taken into account when establishing educational policies which promote bilingualism among Spanish citizens (Aparicio García, 2009: 1). Also, García Zamora (2014: 123) states that the social change produced in Spain affects the Spanish classrooms actively, since it is a proof of a variation in the country's system. This cultural plurality should lead to a change in the teaching methodology, focused on strengthening a universal language (English) which will help people communicating and getting a better professional, commercial, and social development.

Teaching foreign languages in Spain – as well as in many other parts of the world – is a very difficult task because of its linguistic and cultural diversity (Freeman, 1998). Every culture needs to be united around a single language, since it is essential to create a form of expression which will open up opportunities for students, as well as go across borders. There is one thing that will make the teaching task even more challenging: in most of the cases, immigrants who come to Spain and take a bilingual education program have to face the fact that they will be forced to learn not one, but two foreign languages at the same time, as well as integrating in the new society. Teaching a child who does not speak their country of residence's mother tongue may prove really difficult and exhausting.

Many factors will determine the success or failure of the immigrants' integration into society, such as their financial status, social abilities, and the environment of the new place, among others. Because of that, it is important to give these people as much help as possible, in order for them to find it easier to join the Spanish society. Everyone needs that help, but Aparicio García (2009: 1) explains that there are some groups which need it the

most, which are the child population in educational age and the adults who are included in the group of the active population. Those two groups need to be integrated as fast as possible, since children will be studying at a school foreign to them, and adults will most probably need to learn the new language in order to keep their jobs.

When bilingual education started in Spain, the Ministry of Education set forth the main goals for teaching a foreign language, which were within the framework of its educational laws. Those goals are the following: developing the comprehensive and expressive skills in the foreign language; encouraging students to have a positive attitude towards communication in the foreign language; and making them be more interested in that language, as well as its culture, so that the cultural gap between both languages will be bridged. These aims make it easier to get a quality education, with the purpose of preparing students for an increasingly global society.

## ***2.1 BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROJECT (BEP)***

Although bilingual education began in 1978, according to the British Council (2010), bilingual education was considered as an educational model in 1996 under the name of Bilingual Education Project (BEP), where the British Council and the Spanish Ministry of Education decided to collaborate in that endeavor, signing an agreement to introduce an integrated curriculum<sup>2</sup> in Spanish state schools. The British Council also states that one of the reasons for initiating an early bilingual education program was a huge feeling of dissatisfaction among teachers and parents in Spain with the outcomes of the traditional model of teaching a Modern Language (or foreign language) at Primary School, which were not positive since, despite the good attitude of the students towards that subject, there were few who actually reached a good command of that foreign language. There were other purposes for establishing the project, though. There was a big social pressure in the country, and the Ministry decided that following the guidelines of the Common European

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<sup>2</sup> An integrated curriculum deals with making connections between different subjects. Teachers design learning experiences that are relevant to student interests, with the student achievement as a primary focus (Drake & Burns, 2004). Furthermore, according to García Zamora (2014), it gives methodological coherence to teaching and learning, and it removes repetitions in order to reinforce the different subjects.



Framework of Reference for Languages – Learning, Teaching, Assessment – would be a good choice, since it would give an integrated curriculum between languages and non-linguistic areas which would be accepted by educational administrations of other European countries.

This model of bilingual education was implemented in 43 state schools from all around Spain, where 1,200 pupils aged three and four had 40 percent of the teaching hours in English. García Zamora (2014) explains that, soon after, the French Embassy and the Goethe Institut made an agreement to include French and German respectively in several schools as other options for bilingual education in Spain. Nowadays, bilingual education is not just for children from three to four, but from three to sixteen. Thus, the number of students and bilingual centers have increased dramatically throughout the years, going from 1,200 students in 1996 to 1,218,374 in 2016, and from 43 centers in 1996 to 7,413, according to data published by the Spanish Ministry of Education. This rise in number shows the ever-growing interest that the country has to provide students with a quality education in order for them to have a better, brighter future, as well as a much higher chance to obtain the job which they dream of.

However, this is not the only reason for that increase in the number of students and centers: the newspaper *La Réplica* argues that it is also due to the fact that the Ministry wants to adjust the Spanish education system to that of the rest of Europe, that is, a bilingual educational model; this is far from being true, though, since that educational model is rarely found in the other countries of Europe. In the continent, there are two linguistic models: the first and the main one consists in a double school network which allows citizens to choose one language among the official ones of each country (e.g. in Finland, there is a Finnish school network and a Swedish one; in Wales, a Welsh school network and an English one; and in Slovakia, a Slovak school network and a Hungarian one), and the second one consists in a minority model of multilingual education – which can be bilingual or trilingual –, that only takes place in territories like France, Poland, and the Netherlands, and only in higher grades, never in Primary Schools or early stages of Secondary School. However, the Spanish bilingual model solely consists in reinforcing the knowledge of a foreign language – in this case, English, French or German – through the

teaching of non-linguistic subjects like Social Science or History; this makes the model be a *rara avis* within the European framework. The educational authorities established the bilingual education system as if improvising, in a hurry, which made it suffer from several shortcomings (e.g. lack of qualified teachers), thus complicating the fulfilment of the goals of the model.

Obviously, the British Council and the Ministry of Education established the BEP with several aims in mind. The aims enumerated by the British Council (2010) are the following: to promote the acquisition and learning of both languages through an integrated content-based curriculum; to encourage awareness of the diversity of both cultures; to facilitate the exchange of teachers and children; to encourage the use of modern technologies in learning other languages; and to promote the certification of studies under both bilingual and non-bilingual educational systems.

Apart from having clear aims, a project must lay down a specific scope and well-defined stages to be implemented, and the BEP has certainly established all these, which are the following: it functions in state schools and not in private or fee-paying schools; it begins at an early age, when pupils are three or four years old; it is based on a whole-school<sup>3</sup> approach, in order to ensure that all children at the school have the same opportunity, regardless of their circumstances; it is supported by a set of guidelines made by staff of the Ministry and British Council, as well as some teachers; before a school joined the BEP, the staff of the British Council discussed with the staff of that school what the project meant and if they agreed with it; the additional language is taught for 40% of each week at school, allowing pupils to learn subjects like Science, History and Geography in English; the skills of reading and writing in English are introduced early to complement the listening and speaking ones, and to promote a well-rounded competence of the foreign language; the BEP pupils from primary school will continue receiving a bilingual education when they enter secondary school; a good number of teachers were made available to each participating school in order to support implementing the early bilingual education (EBE)

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<sup>3</sup> When a primary school begins the BEP, all groups in the first year receive the same early bilingual education (EBE), avoiding this way a mainly monolingual education. When first year students move up to the second year, the EBE goes on, so that in the end, the whole school is being educated bilingually.

program; and further support was provided with through the appointment of key people who oversee the project by visiting schools, and of staff who develop a BEP website and produce a magazine under the title of *Hand in Hand*.

## **2.2 CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL)**

### **2.2.1 A NEW EDUCATIONAL APPROACH**

The *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) consists in teaching subjects like Science and History in a language which is different from the mother tongue (García Zamora, 2014: 124). Coyle et al (2010) explain that the term was adopted in 1994 within the European context to describe and design more thoroughly a good practice which had been already achieved in different school environments where subjects are taught in an additional language. There are many approaches related to the CLIL, such as content-based instruction and immersion; this specific term had been created in order to define more clearly the nature of this method. The CLIL is an approach in which several methodologies are used in order to pay attention to both language and content; those methodologies will facilitate an educational experience which is very difficult to carry on in the classrooms.

The basic principles of CLIL, according to the British Council (2006), are that in the classrooms, language is used to learn as well as to communicate, and it is the subject matter which determines the language that is needed to learn<sup>4</sup>. “CLIL is an approach which is neither language learning nor subject learning, but an amalgam of both.” (Coyle et al, 2010: 4). A good CLIL lesson should be a combination of the elements included in the 4Cs curriculum stated by Coyle (1999), which are the following: content, which is a progression in knowledge, skills and understanding; communication, which is using language to learn while learning to use language; cognition, which is improving thinking skills that link concept formation, understanding and language; and culture, which is the exposure to different perspectives and shared understandings, helping to expand knowledge about other

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<sup>4</sup> This means that the content of the subject is going to impose which lexicon, structures, and vocabulary are going to be learnt.

countries' customs. Also, García Zamora explains the main goal of the CLIL in the following statement:

“The main goal of the CLIL is to provide the students with the basis for a more active and stimulating learning. The guidelines of this approach remark the benefits of creating a learning environment where the students' abilities on problem solving and know-how in another language are boosted.” (124-125)

CLIL lessons should fulfill several requirements which will help achieve all the principles and goals which have been previously mentioned; these requirements have been enumerated by the British Council (2006). First, they integrate language, receptive and productive skills; these lessons are usually based on reading or listening texts; also, the language focus does not take into account structural grading<sup>5</sup>; and in CLIL lessons, language is functional, and it is focused on the lexical part rather than on the grammatical one.

### **2.2.2 DRIVING FORCES BEHIND *CLIL***

This educational approach is becoming more and more important as years pass because of its innovative methods for teaching and learning. Coyle et al (2010) explain, in a detailed way, two main sets of reasons which arise interest in CLIL in a specific place: reactive and proactive.

With regard to reactive reasons, there are countries where the language of instruction is unknown to most students in schools and colleges. As a result, an official language will be adopted as the medium of instruction, and it will act as a language of national unity. For instance, Africa has approximately 2,000 languages, but only three of them – English, French and Portuguese – are used as medium of instruction. However, this is a huge issue within the classrooms: in South Africa, it is estimated that some 75 per cent of children fail school (Heugh, 2000), and one of the reasons for that is the non-adaptation of classroom methodologies to the demands of learning through an additional language.

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<sup>5</sup> In the structural grading model, the teaching and learning do not follow the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, since the vocabulary taught depends on the topic, and the language level is not put in order; in other words, the content is the same in bilingual and non-bilingual education.

These are alarming numbers, considering that building human competence is essential for the development of any country.

Regarding language policy<sup>6</sup>, the question is if the medium of instruction is responsible for that worsening of the educational development. Nonetheless, it does not only happen there, but in countries all over the world, which face big challenges such as adapting to the needs of migrant children who are far from being fluent in the major language of instruction. If a country wants to transform a language problem into language potential, then things must change within the classrooms, since the success or failure of a community depends on the social microcosm of the classroom, as well as the learning practice. CLIL plays an important role in giving a pragmatic response to overcoming linguistic deficiency, and in supporting equal access to education for students of all ages. Language-supportive methodologies<sup>7</sup> may be put in for the teaching of several subjects through the curriculum. If CLIL methodologies are inserted in both teaching and learning, any language problem which students have may be lightened at a great extent.

Moving on to the proactive reasons, CLIL is so important because it helps proactively identifying solutions by which improve language learning, as well as other aspects of educational, personal or social development. For instance, in the case of Canada, in order to fortify bilingualism, French immersion was developed. It is said that this happened because traditional French language teaching was a failure, and because Canadian society was undergoing a big pressure for change in the 1960s; this resulted in the making of the Official Languages Act, which transformed Canada into a country with two official languages: English and French.

However, the fact that the country became bilingual does not mean that the educational methods improved together with it: educational practice must adapt to the cultural demands of learners, teachers and communities, and integration has become a key

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<sup>6</sup> A language policy is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, group or system (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Also called “language-sensitive.” In these methodologies, teachers must take responsibility for language development through a dual focus when teaching other subjects (Coyle et al, 2010).

concept, essential to be included in all educational approaches in the current age. Both reflect the experience of increasing numbers of students, and are included within the CLIL.

Also, the appearance of new technologies entails a huge change throughout the world: they develop at such a fast rate that educational systems must adapt even faster than they have done in the past – it is argued that a change of educational system takes between 15 and 20 years, but nowadays, in a world of swift transition, it is too long a period. This fast pace that new technologies are taking is having a great impact on the lives and aspirations of most people; due to that, it is fundamental that many communities have better access to learning methods for improving students' overall performance.

### **2.2.3 THE RELEVANCE OF *CLIL* IN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The CLIL approach, as it has been previously explained, had been established in order for students from all around the globe to improve their performance in the different subjects given in a medium of instruction other than their first language. Also, it might be of importance to remind that CLIL involves not only learning, but also teaching, and this section is going to focus on the immense importance of the latter.

A teacher who educates young people in a CLIL classroom needs to fulfil some requirements. Firstly, Whitty (1996: 89-90) enumerates the qualities that a CLIL teacher should have, which are “professional values, professional development, communication, subject knowledge, understanding of learners and their learning.” Also, the teacher ought to have the ability to teach one or more subjects included in the curriculum in a language different from the common language of instruction and, apart from that, teach that language (Eurydice, 2006). Another requirement, according to Papaja (2013: 147), is that “teachers involved in CLIL should also recognize the need to change established habits which might be used in the L1 when teaching the same content in L2.” Finally, Hall (2001: 120) remarks that “it is very important to remember that being able to use an L2 does not mean being able to teach in that L2 in a given situation.” Most people think that speaking a foreign language automatically enables someone to teach any subject in that language; this is a

huge mistake, since not having qualifications to teach a particular subject will not help learners, but hinder their learning.

Apart from these requirements, CLIL teachers ought to have a number of idealized competencies, which are enumerated by Marsh et al. (2001: 78-80) and are divided into six types: language and communication, theory, methodology, learning environment, materials development, and assessment. First of all, they need sufficient target language knowledge and pragmatic skills for CLIL, as well as sufficient knowledge of the language used; secondly, they should understand the differences and similarities between the concepts of language learning and language acquisition; thirdly, CLIL teachers ought to possess different abilities, such as identifying linguistic difficulties, using communication methods that facilitate the understanding of meaning, using strategies for correction and for modelling good language usage (e.g. repetition), and using dual-focused activities which cater for language and subject aspects; fourthly, they should have the ability to work with learners of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds; next, teachers must have the ability to adapt and exploit materials, as well as to select complementary materials on a given topic; and eventually, they ought to have the ability to develop and implement evaluation and assessment tools.

Coyle et al (2010: 10) explain that, to achieve this, the teacher will need to adapt subject-specific methods in order to accommodate the additional language focus. These needs of a CLIL teacher, if fulfilled, will produce an increase in linguistic competence, a stimulation of cognitive flexibility, and an impact on conceptualization, which enhances the understanding and association of concepts, and gives the learner an opportunity to receive a more sophisticated level of learning.

Both language teaching and language learning are mostly carried on within the classrooms through textbooks. While this is obviously essential to learn the basics of every language – grammar and vocabulary –, learning a language involves much more than that: learning a foreign language ought to have a part where students “acquire” it. This is clearly explained by Coyle et al (2010: 11), who state that “successful language learning can be achieved when people have the chance to receive instruction, and at the same time experience real-life situations in which they can acquire the language more

naturalistically.” However, this is easier said than done: there are many subjects within the curriculum, and time is limited. Because of that, the time which can be dedicated to teaching a language is restrained, so in most cases, teachers are not able to educate their students beyond the basics of the foreign language.

The issues shown on the previous paragraph have been affecting many educational systems for years; here is where CLIL comes into play. It offers solutions to those issues, which are the following: it provides students of all ages with a natural situation that helps developing languages. This development leads to other ways of learning, which can result on a well-rounded student; furthermore, this natural use of language may encourage them to learn languages. Marsh (2000: 5) sums up the huge importance of all this in this statement: “It is this naturalness which appears to be one of the major platforms for CLIL’s importance and success in relation to both language and other subject learning.”

Formal language instruction<sup>8</sup> is not removed from the CLIL approach, so teaching through an additional language means extra exposure to it; this, together with the methods used and the motivation of the students, may enhance language teaching, as well as language learning.

#### **2.2.4 CLIL IN SPAIN**

In a world which is globalizing at a staggering speed, learning foreign languages has practically become a must, so that international relations are guaranteed to be successful. Because of that, during the last few years, the interest in the CLIL methodologies has risen dramatically in Spain, having received full support from educational authorities and having been implemented in mainstream schools (Frigols Martín, 2008: 221-222). This increase in CLIL interest, together with the great cultural and linguistic diversity of Spain, is making it become one of the top countries in Europe with regard to CLIL practice and research.

Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010: viii) state that “The richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity has led to a wide variety of CLIL policies and practices which

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<sup>8</sup> Formal language instruction is the traditional teaching of a foreign language. It was the only way of teaching the additional language in approaches previous to the CLIL.



provide us with many examples of CLIL.” Spain consists of 17 autonomous regions plus the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, and each of them has been granted political and administrative power by the Democratic Constitution of 1978; besides, in the bilingual communities, such as Catalonia and Galicia, the regional languages have been granted the official status, resulting in an inclusion to the educational systems of their respective communities. That is why many different CLIL approaches are needed in Spain, and that is why “the degree and characteristics of this implementation, however, vary greatly from one Region to another” (Frigols Martín, 2008: 222).

The CLIL models vary depending on the region where they are implemented; however, according to Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010: x), they can be divided into two main contexts: monolingual communities, where Spanish is the official language, and bilingual communities, where Spanish is the official language, and another regional language is the co-official one (e.g. Galician and Catalan). In the former, when CLIL comes into force, part of the education is done in Spanish, while the other part is done in one – or even two – foreign languages; in the latter, when CLIL is implemented, subjects are partly taught in the official language, partly in the co-official language, and the other part of the subjects are taught in one or two foreign languages.

There are three main objectives of the different CLIL approaches, enumerated by Frigols Martín (2008: 222): fostering bilingualism in a monolingual community; promoting multilingualism in an already bilingual community; and improving competence in English through the ‘Bilingual Education Project’ (previously explained in the section on BEP). For each aim, Frigols Martín illustrated a CLIL model.<sup>9</sup>

For the first objective, the Andalusian model has been explained, whose features are the following: the number of hours of CLIL in primary school is 3.5 per week, and about 4 in secondary school – of those 4 hours, a third is taught in English –; the balance between language and content in primary school is almost equal, being content slightly more important, while in secondary school, content is much more emphasized; regarding teacher training, there are no courses fully focused to CLIL, but there are many courses, seminars

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<sup>9</sup> Since we have already included a section dealing with BEP, the third model is not going to be explained here.

and meetings that will help teachers get the necessary training to teach in a CLIL context; in primary school, at least two subjects are taught through the CLIL approach (Science and another one which depends on the teaching staff available), while in secondary school, any subject is susceptible to being taught via CLIL; with relation to assessment, in primary school, students are evaluated for their content learning, while in secondary school, CLIL and non-CLIL subjects are assessed following the same criteria; the English language level of primary school pupils, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), starts as an A1 and ends as an A2 or B1, and the secondary school students' level starts as an A1 and ends as a B2; there are several reasons for the implementation of the CLIL programme, which are a bit different in primary and secondary schools. In the former, it is implemented to build intercultural knowledge, to enable students to get international certifications, and to encourage the learner to be more motivated towards learning English; in the latter, it is put into effect to give further value to content learning, and to prepare students for their future careers; with regard to materials and methodologies, the Internet has become the favorite source of teachers for getting educational materials – including games and songs, among others –, since the translations into English of textbooks of CLIL subjects do not help students to learn the content in an effective way; finally, there are some visible results of the CLIL approach, such as promotion of intercultural understanding, learners' increase in motivation towards learning English, as well as improvement of communication and expression skills, and creation of new methodological approaches.

For the second objective, the Valencian model<sup>10</sup> has been illustrated. The features of that model go as follows: the number of hours of CLIL in primary school varies depending on the cycle – 1.5 hours per week in the first and second cycles, and 1 hour per week in the third cycle –; the balance between language and content, as in the previous feature, varies with the cycle, being language the most important part in the first cycle, language and content equally important in the second cycle, and content slightly more important than language in the third cycle; in relation with teacher training, there is not any specific CLIL

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<sup>10</sup> Unlike in the Andalusian model, there are not data of secondary schools in the Valencian model.

education for teachers at university, so most of that training is in-service<sup>11</sup>, through courses, conferences, and seminars in Spain, as well as in English-speaking countries; the subjects taught via CLIL in this model is a decision based on the teachers who are available. Any subject can be taught via CLIL, except for Science, which must be taught in Valencian; regarding assessment, content is assessed in content subjects – like Science – by the teachers of those subjects, while language is evaluated in ELT (English Language Teaching) hours by the English teacher; the amount of English learnt by CLIL pupils is higher than the one learnt by non-CLIL pupils, and the difference in subject learning by CLIL and non-CLIL students is not fully certain, as there are not official data about that, but what is certain is that CLIL students' learning is not lower than that of non-CLIL students; as in the previous model, there are several reasons for the implementation of the CLIL approach in Valencia, such as improving English proficiency, giving added value to content learning, preparing for future careers, and rising the motivation of the student towards learning English – as it can be seen, they are very similar to those of the Andalusian model; lastly, with regard to materials and methodologies, teachers generally use their own materials in order for teaching and learning to be as effective as possible. To achieve that, the materials consist of visual aids, computer-based assignments, and realia<sup>12</sup>, which help motivating students to participate and be active in the classrooms.

To conclude this section, it is important to remark that, although the support for CLIL methodologies has increased enormously in Spain, they are not fully implemented in all the autonomous regions, since most of them have been put into effect through pilot or experimental programmes (Frigols Martín, 2008: 231). However, due to the great interest which CLIL has arisen in the country, it is most likely that this educational model is going to be improved at a swift pace.

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<sup>11</sup> Training carried out at the teachers' workplace.

<sup>12</sup> Objects or activities used to relate classroom teaching to the real life (Merriam Webster).



### **3. ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRESENT MODEL**

#### **3.1. CURRENT ATTAINMENTS**

The current bilingual education model started in 1996 under the name of Bilingual Education Project (BEP). This project arose with several goals which have been already stated. However, erecting such a big scheme from scratch is not an easy task whatsoever, and it had to face two main challenges, according to the British Council (2010: 141). The first one was to be successful across a big number of schools with a wide array of socio-economic situations, and the second one was to be successful in an environment where English is hardly ever used outside the classrooms – in European countries like Holland and the Nordic countries, English is largely used in society, so it is easier to learn it –.

The British Council investigated the development of the project for several years through sixteen studies carried out around Spain; the investigation was performed taking into account three areas: performance and attainments, good practice and perceptions. The outcomes of the different studies indicate that the BEP has attained noteworthy success in each and every one of the areas, which are explained individually by the British Council (2010: 142-143).

Firstly, regarding the performance and attainments, the entity concludes that most of the students are taking advantage of their bilingual education, attaining praiseworthy levels in their spoken and written English, their written Spanish, their performance in the classrooms, and even in the IGCSE examination<sup>13</sup>, where some of the students with Spanish as L1 have been successful in the “English 1” subject – which is intended for students with English as L1 –, and where learners showed better performances in content subjects like history and biology. Secondly, with regard to good practice, the British Council underlines that their research objective was to begin with the idea of successful classroom performance by BEP learners and, after that, take into account the practices that

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<sup>13</sup> According to the IGCSE center website, IGCSE is the abbreviation of International General Certificate of Secondary Education, the most popular international certification once you have completed secondary school. This examination is taken before proceeding to pre-university studies.

accompanied it, instead of the other way around. Those practices are divided into two groups: good general practices and good language-focused practices, which have been successful. Finally, with relation to perceptions, the entity has gathered evidence from many different groups, such as pupils, parents, and teachers from primary and secondary school, and the overall opinion is that the BEP is positive, bestowing a big number of benefits on the students, teachers, and even schools.

However, as with all other things, it is not all a bed of roses; the approach possesses some flaws which hinder its full success. An important flaw is the lack of qualified teachers. With the implementation of the CLIL model, many teachers have been forced to teach their content subjects in another language (English in this case) overnight. Teaching subjects like History or Social Science in a foreign language is an easy task for neither teachers nor learners, especially in primary school level, where the children's command of English is very limited. Being able to teach those subjects in English requires not only a good proficiency of the language, but also the ability to make pupils understand their content. In order to get training related to CLIL teaching, different public entities, such as the Autonomous Government, offered courses and masters in Bilingual Education so that teachers would obtain a certificate to keep on teaching. Nevertheless, in most cases following those courses was merely a way of complying with a formal requirement, rather than a training that would really enhance those teachers' performance in L2.

Another important flaw is that learning content subjects in English from an early age might hinder Spanish learning in some specialized fields. For example, children who study Natural Science in English from the age of six may end up not knowing how some birds, animals, and plants, among others, are called in Spanish, or they may know a word in both the L1 and the L2, but they do not know how to associate them. This flaw might be originated because the current educational system's exams focus a lot on filling gaps and match-up exercises, which do not require understanding, but only some studying time. This does not help much with the children's learning, since, in most cases, they will study the vocabulary, and forget about it after having taken the exam. A bilingual education approach in which children learn a foreign language in exchange for their mother tongue is not a very useful one.

The third significant flaw is connected to the students' success within the classrooms. This success is based solely on the marks they get, and that should not be enough to consider a student's performance as successful or unsuccessful. Language is a communication tool, so success should also be measured by the extent to which children acquire the L2, which is more important; after all, good marks may be achieved by learning the vocabulary by heart, but if it is forgotten soon after taking the exam, the goal of acquiring the language is not fulfilled at all.

All what has already been stated lead us to the conclusion that a different approach should be implemented in order to foster much more satisfactory results.

### **3.2. TIPS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

In the previous section, the different flaws of the bilingual education in Spain have been explained; thus, this section is going to focus on some proposals that might somehow contribute to improving the results.

For the first flaw, a possible solution would be that teachers who are required to teach in another language could receive effective training so as to learn specialized lexis for their subjects, as well as to reinforce their grammatical competence in L2.

A plausible solution for the second flaw would be that children began learning content subjects at about the age of eight instead of six, and also that they took exams which required understanding, rather than only memorizing. This way, they would acquire specialized vocabulary in their L1 in the first two years, and from the third year onwards, they would begin learning in their L2 and take this kind of exams more easily; as a result, their L2 proficiency may get better in comparison with the current bilingual education's improvement. Furthermore, it is not necessary that children in first and second grade learn content subjects in the L2, since they are going to learn the vocabulary dealt with in those grades later on in their foreign language learning subject.

The solution for the third flaw has already been explained in the preceding section. Students' success should be measured by two things: their marks, and their real competence in L2, that is, their actual ability to communicate in the foreign language in a real context.

In the current educational system, only the former – and less important – is taken into account, while the latter is overlooked. This results in students only focusing on getting good marks instead of actually learning the L2 when studying it. If real competence were an important part of getting through exams, the students' language proficiency would be higher.



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

After having analyzed the most important features of bilingual education and the Spanish bilingual education model, several conclusions have been reached, which are going to be brought together in this section.

Regarding advantages and drawbacks of bilingual education, its benefits are so numerous that they make up for its shortcomings by far; furthermore, the disadvantages of bilingual education can be solved with time, so receiving this kind of education is worth it.

The Bilingual Education Project (BEP) has been established in Spain with clearly positive objectives, such as promoting the acquisition and learning of both languages through an integrated content-based curriculum; however, it has been created in a hurry, so it needs to improve in some aspects.

The CLIL model is going to be a great help with regard to improving the students' proficiency in the foreign language, since it identifies solutions for the main problems while learning an L2. Nevertheless, this model has not been fully implemented yet, although the great interest it arose in Spain is likely to make CLIL develop at a fast pace.

In relation to the effectiveness of the BEP in Spain, students improved their L2 performance greatly, and the general assessment of the model is overall positive, because it grants benefits to both students and teachers. However, there are also several drawbacks to this model for the most part attributable to its hasty implementation, which affect both groups. In order to make an attempt to remove those hindrances – or, at least, to improve them –, solutions for each of the disadvantages have been proposed, so that the Spanish bilingual education model gets better for future generations.

It is essential to be continuously looking for solutions to the problems which arise in such a big project like this, especially when created in such little time; patience and hard work are going to make the BEP much better, as well as make the most of the bilingual education of future generations of students.



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