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**The impact of bilingual educational
programmes on students' academic
performance in Spain**

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ABSTRACT

English is nowadays the most widely taught foreign language in Spanish schools, particularly through bilingual programs such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). However, the impact of these programs on student academic performance remains controversial. This final degree project aims to analyze how bilingual education affects both subject comprehension and language learning. For that purpose, a survey was given to students to assess different key areas: linguistic competence, content comprehension, and level of satisfaction with the bilingual system. The results reveal that, although bilingual education improves English skills and intercultural awareness, it also register challenges, especially for those with lower language. In addition, teacher training and the socioeconomic context influence its effectiveness. The study concludes that bilingual education has great potential, whenever it is implemented with equity and methodological support.

Keywords: Bilingual Education, CLIL, Academic Performance, Second Language Acquisition, Educational Equity, Student Perception

RESUMEN

Actualmente el inglés es la lengua extranjera más enseñada en los centros educativos de España, especialmente a través de programas bilingües como el AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras). No obstante, el impacto de estos programas en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes sigue siendo controvertido. Este trabajo de fin de grado tiene como objetivo analizar cómo afecta la educación bilingüe tanto a la comprensión de las asignaturas como al aprendizaje del idioma. Para ello, se realizó una encuesta a estudiantes que evalúa distintas áreas clave: competencia lingüística, comprensión de contenidos y nivel de satisfacción con el sistema bilingüe. Los resultados revelan que, aunque la educación bilingüe mejora las habilidades en inglés y la conciencia intercultural, también presenta retos, especialmente para quienes tienen menor dominio del idioma. Además, la formación del profesorado y el contexto socioeconómico influyen en su eficacia. El estudio concluye que la educación bilingüe tiene un gran potencial, siempre que se implemente con equidad y apoyo metodológico.

Palabras clave: Educación bilingüe, AICLE, Rendimiento académico, Adquisición de la segunda lengua, Equidad educativa, Percepción estudiantil

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the intercultural age in which we live now, languages, among other cultural aspects, have an important role in our lives, not only for communication but also to understand other cultures, to make access to employment easier, and to regulate society. Therefore, the ability to communicate in several languages has become an essential. The importance of bilingualism has been recognized by many education systems of different countries, having as a consequence the implementation of bilingual education. One of the bilingual models adopted in Spain is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). This includes learning a foreign language, most of the time English, and teaching non-linguistic subjects. The adoption of this bilingual model generates debate: does it improve students' academic development or, on the contrary, add extra challenges in their learning process?

Due to the potential to improve students' linguistic competence and their cognitive abilities, bilingual education has become a topic of great interest. However, its impact on academic development in other school and high school subjects, particularly among those students who have less linguistic proficiency, could be a disadvantage.

In this Final Degree Project I will analyze whether bilingual education in Spain is a successful model that enhances students' academic performance or whether it represents a pedagogical challenge that could hinder their learning in certain areas. To do so, a detailed review of the existing literature will be conducted, examining the legal and institutional framework, the different bilingual education models implemented in Spain, and their impact on students' academic results. Additionally, a research study will be carried out in which data will be collected through surveys to assess students' opinions of their language proficiency, subject comprehension, and overall academic performance in bilingual programs.

This research will be structured into several sections. First, the theoretical framework will address the history and development of bilingual education in Spain, defining the CLIL model and other existing approaches. Then, we will explore the benefits and limitations of bilingual education in Spain, particularly its effects on language acquisition and content learning. After this, the research study will be presented, explaining the methodology used to collect and analyze data. The results will be discussed

to determine whether bilingual education contributes positively to students' academic success or whether it presents significant challenges.

Moreover, to understand bilingual education, it is necessary to examine the theories about the acquisition of second language (SLA). The input hypothesis of Krashen makes a point about the necessity of a comprehensible input, the ones that CLIL contexts give in a natural way through subject contents. The output hypothesis of Swain highlights the need of students' production to improve their linguistic skills. These theories suggest that learning through content in a second language promotes a deeper acquisition. Although they also highlight the necessity of fundamentals to support students with different levels of competence.

As a final point, the concluding comments will reflect on how this research can contribute to the debate on bilingual education in Spain and its performance. It will also be addressed the study's limitations and recommendations for future research and possible improvements to go further with bilingual education.

This study has as main objective evaluate the influence and efficacy of bilingual education programs in Spain, giving special attention to the academic performance and the linguistic development in students. Through a deep combination of theoretical and juridical background with data compiled by means of surveying students, this final degree dissertation pretends to evaluate if bilingual education builds a successful educational model or if it brings about considerable obstacles both for pupils and educators.

2. A SUCCESSFUL MODEL OR A PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGE?

Bilingual education has become a relevant factor in the Spanish educational environment over the last two decades. Under the influence of European linguistic policies, globalization and the exponential development of English as an international lingua franca, Spain has adopted many bilingual education programmes, above all through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The main aim of the CLIL approach is to teach non-linguistic subjects, such as History, Science or Geography, using a second language, most often English, as instructional language. This has sparked great interest but also important inversion in language teaching policies; nevertheless, it has

also enhanced some paramount pedagogical questions. Is bilingual education a successful model that enriches students' cognitive and linguistic development, or does it raise challenges that might commit the content domain and education equity?

On one hand, there is evidence supporting the bilingual education benefits. One of the main arguments in favor of CLIL and similar models is the capacity to improve the learners' domain of L2 (second language) through a substantial exposure. Contrary to the traditional language lessons, the CLIL immerses students in the TL (target language) during the content learning. This fosters the acquisition and the natural use of the language. As Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) stated, CLIL allows students to "experience the language in use", leads to a more functional and authentic development of English skills. Students are exposed to vocabulary, grammatical structures and specific talking practices of each subject; this enriches linguistic abilities but also prepares students for communication in real situations.

As well as these linguistic advantages, bilingual education has been associated with cognitive benefits. The studies about bilingualism suggest that people who use two languages develop a higher executive control, a greater capacity to solve problems, and more cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, 2001). These skills are more than meaningful, not just in order to improve the academic performance, but for permanent learning and employability. Alongside, these programs tend to drive a better cultural consciousness among all the inhabitants. By learning through a second language, students might have many views of the world, other cultural references different from their own. As Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009) claim, bilingual education contributes to reform tolerance and to becoming a more open-minded person. These features are very important nowadays because we live in a world that, as time passes, becomes more and more interrelated.

Motivation is another beneficial aspect that is named frequently in bilingual education's favor. Several studies have demonstrated that students who participate in CLIL programmes are more implicated and motivated to learn another language, but also content (Lasagabaster, 2011). The new idea of using a foreign language to teach different subjects other than English often results in curiosity or in a challenge, which usually

motivates young learners. This motivational rising may lead to a better academic performance, not only in language learning but also in all the educational plans.

Despite these promising results, bilingual education isn't exempt from pedagogical drawbacks. People who are against CLIL and other possible bilingual systems maintain that the use of a second language to teach content might provoke a superficial comprehension, especially in students who don't have a high linguistic competence. In many cases, students have difficulties to comprehend complex concepts due to their scarce vocabulary and their limited grammatical knowledge in L2. As a result, there is the threat that the learning of contents is sacrificed due to the exposure to the language. As Lorenzo Casal and Moore (2010) had warned, the CLIL programs should avoid becoming "language-focused at the expense of subject mastery."

Another challenge is the teachers' formation. To teach an efficient education of CLIL, educators must domain the target language and be competent to integrate language and content into lessons. However, in practice, many teachers haven't gotten enough formation in these areas. According to Fernández Fontecha (2014), teachers often feel shattered because of the double responsibility of teaching content as language, especially if they don't receive the adequate methodological support. This could result in the instability of the education quality and of the academic performance of the learners.

The educational inequality is also a preoccupation. Although bilingual programs are spreading all over the country, access to a bilingual education in Spain isn't delivered in an equitable way. Urban and accommodated schools often have more resources, better qualified teachers, and more solid supporting systems, which help them to include CLIL in a more efficient way. On the contrary, rural schools, or the ones where people with fewer economic resources attend, could have problems offering good bilingual programs. As San Isidro (2018) points out, this disparity might increase the educational gap that exists, giving an advantage to students who already enjoy socioeconomic privileges.

A usual conflict of bilingual education is with linguistic identities and local cultures. Spain is a multilingual country, which has co-official languages such as Catalán, Euskera and Gallego. The possibility of adding another language, in this case English, could be perceived as a possible hazard to regional languages and cultures. While some

communities of the country have adopted trilingual educational models; others reject this idea because of the possibility of linguistic heritage dissolution. So, linguistic policies should balance English promotion with the rich linguistic diversity in Spain.

Overall, these challenges should not elide bilingual education. What is more, its effectiveness depends on how they are implemented. When it is supported by well-designed curricula, continuing teacher training, and adequate evaluation procedures, CLIL and other possible similar models can be enriching from a linguistic and educational point of view. It is fundamental to recognize that bilingual education is not the solution for all cases. Different regions, schools, and students require personalized strategies that take into account the specific necessities of each person.

In this sense, it is very important to follow researching and evaluating the system. Politicians responsible for making education laws and educators should evaluate in a systemic way the results of these bilingual programmes, not only about the language domain but also in content knowledge, equity, and students' welfare. As Lorenzo et al. (2010) suggest, policies based on empirical data could help to improve practices in bilingual education and guarantee that they are useful for all students.

Additionally, it is crucial to include learners', teachers' and families' opinions in the process of evaluation. Their experiences give important information about how the system works and might help to identify the better practical areas and how they could be improved. For instance, students' comments could reveal if they feel comfortable while they are using English in content subjects.

As Spain is still on the way to improving bilingual policies, it is fundamental to give a balanced focus. As these possible challenges and advantages are presented, I decided to take a step forward and ask students about their perception of our bilingual educational model.

3. BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SPAIN

In order to evaluate the bilingual education impact on the students and their academic approaches, it is necessary to have a legal framework which guides us on how the

bilingual education in Spain has improved over time and what models and theories does Spain follow.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations: Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

The evolution and implementation of the bilingual education programs, especially the ones that are based on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) perspective, are based on different theories about Second Language Acquisition (SLA). These theories show a fundamental view of the cognitive, social and psychological processes that children undergo when they acquire a new language, and they also help to explain how language performance and academic learning could be influenced by bilingual education.

Earlier explanations about language acquisition were influenced by conductive theories, which regarded the acquisition process as a way of creating habits based on stimulus- response and reinforcement. Nevertheless, this view was queried by some linguists, such as Noam Chomsky, who was the first to identify the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a theoretical mental competence which allows people to acquiring language as an effortless activity. Following this point of view, the learning relies on both external factors and cognitive internal structures.

Stephen Krashen, based on these ideas that Chomsky came up with, introduces the Monitor model, which gives importance to the comprehensible input role. This input role is named “the linguistic input”, which is over the student’s actual level of competence (usually named “i+1”). According to Krashen, a great exposure to this kind of input facilitates the natural acquisition of a language. This is really substantive in the classrooms of CLIL. Here, students acquire academic content through a second language. In these contexts, learners face up to the real use of the language acquired but in contexts beyond the linguistic development, which is also good for the content comprehension.

Another relevant contribution to the SLA theory is that of Cummins, who has distinguished between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS are the conversational fluency in daily possible conversations that learners could acquire with quickness. In contrast, CALP refers to the linguistic abilities that are necessary for academic success, as for instance, comprehension and production of some technical terms of a subject. This distinction is the key to being able to understand the challenges that students who received a bilingual

education must deal with. So, the academic content requires a high competence level in linguistics that goes further than the basic communication in language. The Interdependence Hypothesis was also stated by Jim Cummins. This hypothesis suggests that management of the mother tongue could be a great point to encourage L2 (second language) acquisition; thus, reinforcing the students' L1 (first language) might have a positive effect on their bilingual progress.

Conversely, Lev Vygotsky inspired some sociocultural theories of language acquisition, which highlight the importance of social interaction. This point of view states that language is acquired by collaborative conversations and significant social activities where the learner has to intervene. In the CLIL settings, it is indispensable the part of teachers and mates as people who make learning easier, because both groups give them enough cognitive and linguistic support that allows students to undertake complex contents in TL (target language).

Eventually, the SLA investigation underlines the importance of the output that, is to say, what it means, the language production, based on the output hypothesis of Merrill Swain. Swain maintains that active language production through oral and written expression helps learners to find gaps in their knowledge and have the chance to improve their linguistic skills, so this hypothesis is supported in CLIL classrooms, giving the students the chance to debate on a topic, explain some concepts, or write in L2.

3.2. Legal and institutional framework

Bilingual education in Spain is set in legal and institutional complex framework formed by national educational laws, European political guidelines and regional autonomy. In the last 20 years, the evolution of this framework has been very relevant for supporting the development of bilingual programs which are meant for the improvement of students' linguistic competences, without leaving aside the point of maintaining a high academic level in all subjects that are taught.

Bilingual education bases at the national level have been established by two important laws: the Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE, 2006) and the Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (LOMCE, 2013). The LOE had introduced, for the first time in early education, the concept of foreign language incorporation, recognizing the importance of multilingualism both for individual evolution and for national

competitiveness. This law encourages schools to adopt foreign language instruction aside from the usual linguistic subjects and fostered experimental bilingual projects. The LOMCE, to a certain extent, reformed the LOE. This perspective has been reinforced by the insertion of the development of communicative competence in at least one foreign language, inside the key aims. Likewise, LOMCE made a point of the important fact of preparing children for being part of a globalized and multicultural society.

These legal restorations gave school centres and autonomous communities certain flexibility at the time to design and establish bilingual programs based on the local necessities. When it comes to carrying out this, it has allowed the creation of several Spanish bilingual education models, many of them based on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL tries to teach non-language subjects, such as Mathematics or Physical Education, using a foreign language, most commonly English. The aim, apart from improving the students L2 competences, is to promote representative learning by engaging students with educational content in that language.

One of the first biggest proposals for the support of bilingual education in Spain was the MEC/British Council bilingual project initiated in 1996. This program created bonds between the British Council and the Spanish Ministry of Education to set up in public schools the bilingual education model. The proposal introduced a bilingual curriculum where both languages, Spanish and English, were used to teach several subjects, mainly in primary education classrooms. Through these years, there has been an extended version of the program, and it is set as a reference model for consecutive regional bilingual proposals.

In addition, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages has played a crucial role in the bilingual education Spanish policy configuration. The CEFR language levels have been used as a reference for both teacher training and student outcomes. The majority of bilingual programs, mostly the ones who used the CLIL, required teachers to demonstrate that their level in the TL is over B2. This condition has led to the official certification language programs' development and also continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives to ensure that educators are well prepared to talking about linguistics for a bilingual education.

The influence that the European Union has on Spanish linguistic policy is considerable. Barcelona European Council of 2002 emphasized the European inhabitants' needs of learning two foreign languages apart from the mother tongue, with the aim of incentivizing mobility, employability, and understanding among the member states. Spain answered this need with the linking of its educational policies to this multilingual point of view. So, primary education and high schools established bilingual education strategies. Moreover, Spanish participation in Erasmus+ and eTwinning European programs has increased the integration of language learning through curricular content, stimulating international collaboration and intercultural awareness.

Despite these legal improvements, the bilingual education implementation has not been identical throughout Spain. Here in Spain, the educational system is not centralized; what it means is that each autonomous community has power over certain decisions. This created the range of bilingual models. For instance, Madrid and Castilla y León have been tougher, which has resulted in schools with between 30% and 50% of their total subjects taught in the second language, English. Other communities, such as Cataluña or País Vasco, decided to give priority to their regional languages, “Catalán” and “Euskera”, rather than English.

This variability between regions exposes important facts about bilingual learning, equity and coherence. The fact of having well-qualified bilingual teachers and well-funded programs is an advantage that benefits students that have these over those students who have neither and are factors that influence students' learning.

Therefore, the legal framework in bilingual Spanish education is the result of multiple forces working together: national legislation, European linguistics policy and regional autonomy too. This framework has allowed the different models of bilingual education to flourish, among which the most important are those based on the CLIL approach. However, it has also introduced the teacher's formation in English and an education equity, which are factors to consider when evaluating the global impact of the national bilingual programs.

3.3 Sociolinguistic and cultural implications of bilingual education

Bilingual education in Spain, especially through the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model, has significantly transformed the sociolinguistic and cultural Spanish context. In a country where the different co-official languages, such as “Catalán”, “Gallego” or “Euskera”, are a distinctive signal of identity, the introduction of English as a vehicular language in education has brought with it new adversities. These difficulties could have positive and negative consequences, mainly in what linguistic identity is, but also in social integration.

The promotion of the English language by means of establishing programs such as CLIL in autonomous communities has increased students’ linguistic register. It creates, in several cases, trilingual students. In Cataluña, for instance, the coexistence of Spanish, Catalán and English in school environments shows the great prospective multilinguistic competence of bilingual or trilingual education. Despite this, this education also questions some major issues about linguistic hierarchies and the possibility of removing regional languages, such as “Catalán.” Currently, English is presented as a powerful language that helps to obtain good opportunities at the time to apply for a job, so there is some underestimation of “mother languages”. This might contribute at the same time to the awakening of native languages in actual generations.

Scholars, such as Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010), have pointed out that the implementation of this type of education demands a series of linguistic policies that opt for fairness, without giving privileges to foreign languages above regional or national languages.

At the same time, bilingual education offers the opportunity to develop intercultural competence between pupils. Through the integration of foreign languages in content subjects, students, apart from acquiring linguistic knowledge, also relate with other cultures, crossing the lines of their own cultures. This method encourages a great consciousness about cultural distinctions while it promotes empathy and open-mindedness. In nowadays society, intercultural learning is very relevant, just because the ability to manage yourself in several cultural contexts is more and more appreciated in personal life but also in professional life. According to Gómez-Parra (2019), the importance of introducing cultural content into bilingual education is highlighted in order

to guarantee that the linguistic development is assisted by a significant intercultural comprehension.

Even with these advantages, the implementation of this type of education brings with it some challenges talking about equity in education, as I mentioned before. In many cases, CLIL programs are less common in rural schools or schools that are situated in low-income communities; this fact limits the access to this kind of program. On the other hand, CLIL is more common in schools with great economic resources. This creates an inequality situation in which privileged scope students have more possibilities of getting benefits from bilingual education; this exacerbates the existing inequalities. This painful distribution of resources, well-qualified teachers, and support systems contributes to the big contrast in language acquisition and in content dominance. As a result, bilingual education must be managed with caution to ensure equity and inclusion in different social contexts, so it has a great change role.

A fundamental factor in dealing with these problems is the teacher's formation. An efficient bilingual education must have great educators who domain both, TL and subject content. Teachers must also be familiarized with methodologies that combine language and content learning. Professional development programs must be designed to give teachers enough tools to give high-quality CLIL teaching. This includes formation in formative assessment and management of a class in multilingual environments. According to Juan Rubio and García Conesa (2022), well-prepared teachers are essential to guarantee that pupils benefit linguistically and cognitively from bilingual programs instead of feeling overwhelmed due to the double exigency of learning content and another language different from their native language.

Besides, bilingual education in Spain is also interrelated with more extensive issues that are related to national and regional identities. Linguistic policies are a subtle political matter, particularly in autonomous communities with strong linguistic and cultural identities. The insertion of English as a third language occasionally produces some resistance, since it could be noticed as an obstacle to the dynamization of regional languages. This tension evidences the necessity of implementing linguistic policies in education, ones which act in response to local linguistic realities and that support multilingualism as an inclusive objective instead of a homogenizing force.

Therefore, the sociolinguistic and cultural implications of bilingual education in Spain are multifaceted and they depend on the context. While the CLIL model promotes linguistic competence, it also proposes challenges related to language maintenance, social equity, and teacher's preparation. In consequence, politicians should tackle bilingual education as a tool to improve linguistic skills but also as a mechanism to encourage social inclusion, cultural respect and linguistic diversity.

4.EVALUATING THE IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Upon examining the legal framework, pedagogical models and sociolinguistic implications inside Spanish bilingual education, it is crucial to shift from the theoretical point to the practical evaluation. As well as academic literature, information offers great perspectives about the benefits and issues of bilingual programmes, particularly the ones which are based on CLIL. It is also important to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes in real educational contexts. With this aim, this section wants to assess the real impact and the effectiveness of the bilingual educational experience that students have.

This study brings together two complementary approaches. First of all, it will be presented a review of the existing research to explore bilingual education results as they are documented in academic studies, with special focus on academic performance, language development and content comprehension. Secondly, it will analyze original data compiled through a survey answered by learners of the educational Spanish system. The survey has as its main objective gathering students' perceptions about their second language domain, their comprehension of non-linguistic subjects that are taught in English, and general issues or advantages that students encountered. By incorporating both external evidence on how bilingual education works in practical terms and whether it achieves the educational objectives that are set.

There are several open questions and others that have been answered by choosing any of the possible answers. To sum up the results, I will analyze the answers and interpret them in percentages and graphs. Firstly, I will identify and analyze closed questions and then the open ones.

4.1 General information about survey participants

The survey is answered by 76 people, who are or have been students of the educational Spanish system recently. In the first section of the survey, there are four questions about general information of the participants: range of age, type of educational centre they attend or have attended, location and finally the key question, if they have been or are currently participating in a bilingual educational program (see figure 1 below).

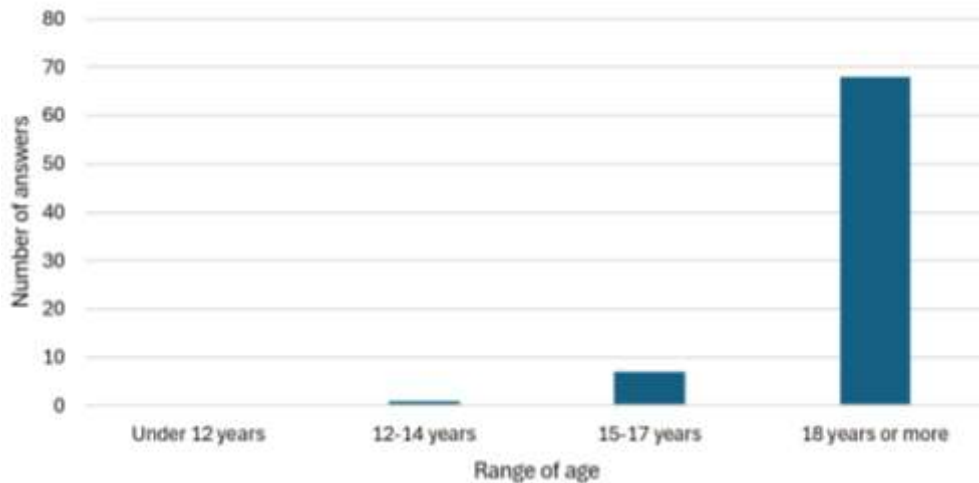


Figure 1: the chart shows the distribution of ages among survey participants

Of the total number of people surveyed, 68 people are 18 years old or older, 7 are between 15 and 17 years old, and only 1 person is between 12 and 14 years old. The age range suggests that the survey has been answered by both, students who are still in the education system and people who have already completed their schooling. This means that the answers to the next questions are going to be from two different points of view, ones from inside the actual bilingual system and others from what the bilingual system used to be (see figure 2 below).

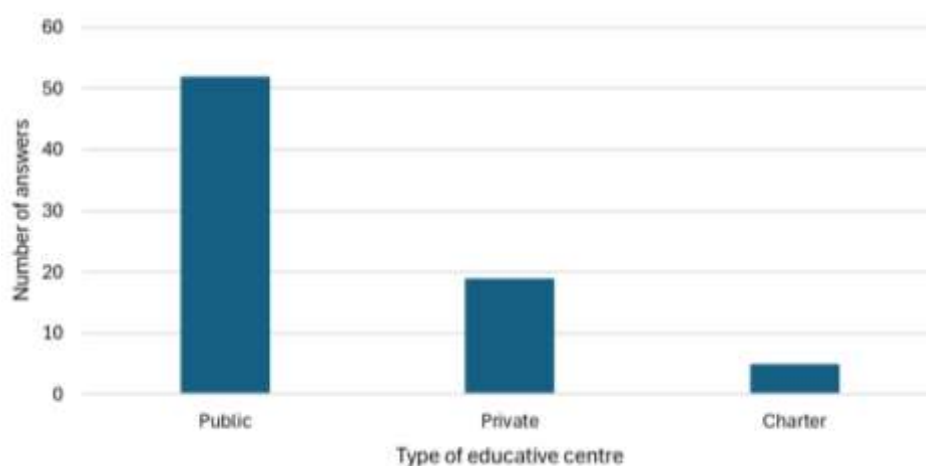


Figure 2: the chart illustrates the type of educational centre attended by the survey participants

Most of the participants attend public schools, 52 people out of the 76 total participants; 19 people attend charter schools and 5 people attend private schools. About location, most of the surveyed people are from “Castilla y León”, maybe due to the limited fact that I cannot spread the survey along other communities. The most important question of this section is about how many of them are part of a bilingual education system. The answers provided that 46 people out of the 76 answers are or were participants in a bilingual program and 30 people were not or are not into this kind of education. This is quite a difference between the ones who are inside the bilingualism and the ones who are outside; it can be due to the fact that changes in education are very difficult and need some years to be totally and correctly implemented.

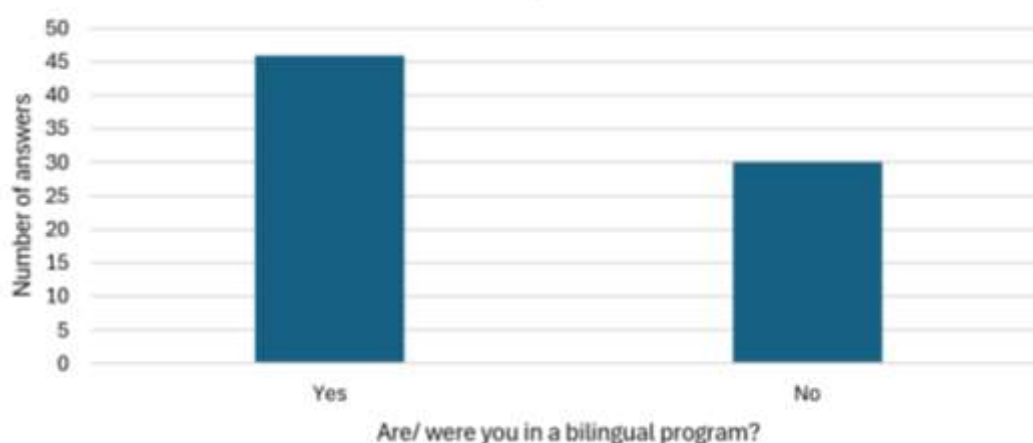


Figure 3: the chart depicts whether the survey participants have been in a bilingual program or not

4.2 About the bilingual system that surveyed people are in

About the second section of the survey, I have asked about some information on the bilingual systems that participants have been part of. From the section of questions onwards, only the answers of those who have participated in a bilingual education program will be taken into consideration, meaning that the total amount of answers will be 46.

The graph showed in figure 3, answers to the question “what subjects are taught in foreign language?” and allows to observe which are the subjects more taught in foreign language inside a bilingual program. According to the data visualized, the subject more taught in a foreign language is Natural Science, with 36 answers, followed by History with 32 and Physical Education with 29. These numbers reveal a clear tendency to the use of foreign language in subjects of academic content and not only in language area.

Other subjects such as Arts with 17 answers, technology with 14 answers and the possible answers which says “other subjects” with 20 answers, also appear in the graph representation; this suggests diversity in the implementation of the bilingual focus. It is important to highlight that 27 participants have indicated they have not been part of a bilingual program, which depicts a significant portion of participants (see figure 4 below).

This graph not only gives a quantitative point of view, but also it allows to interpret which areas of the curricula are being prioritized for teaching in a foreign language. The predominance of subjects like Natural Science or History suggest a CLIL focus, in which students learn contents while they develop linguistic skills, thereby strengthening their competence in a foreign language through the learning of real content.

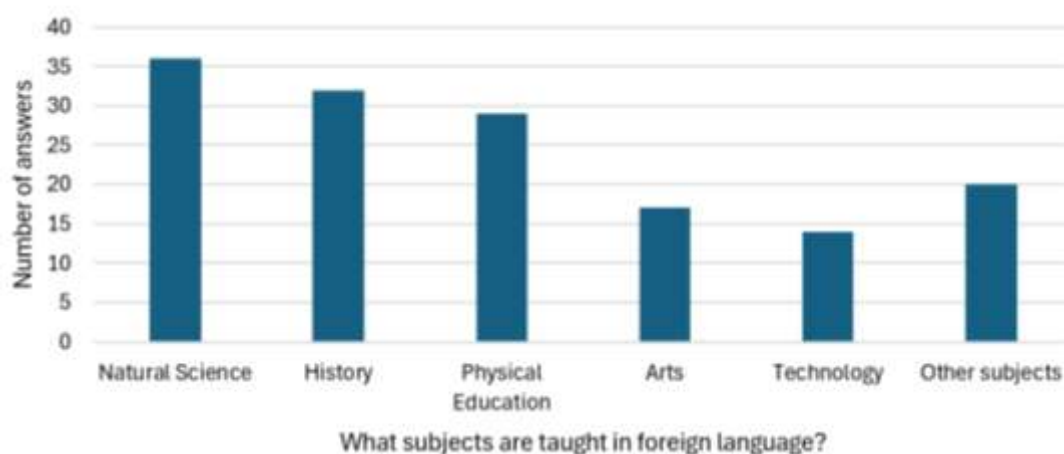


Figure 4: the chart depicts the different subjects taught in foreign language and their trends

The question that answers about the language that their bilingual program uses is answered by the 46 participants who are included in a bilingual education in which they all learn content in English (see figure 5 below). Therefore, with the answers obtained, it can be said that English is the language that is most advanced in bilingual education.

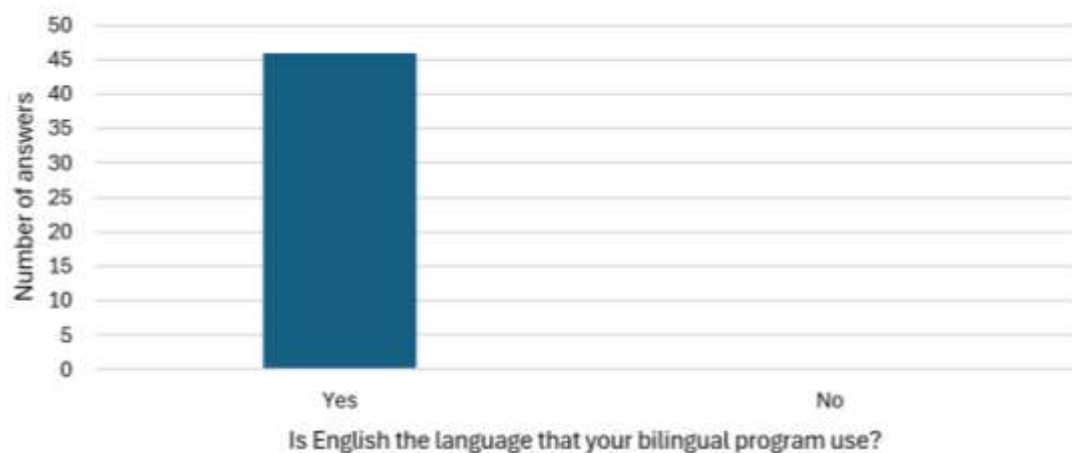


Figure 5: the chart contrasts whether English is used as the language in the bilingual program

The graphic representation shows the number of years participants have been part of a bilingual program. The graph shows clearly three time categories: “1-2 years”, “3-5 years” and “more than 5 years”. According to the data gathering, the majority of the participants, 21 people, have been in the bilingual program between 3 and 5 years. This number highlights the stability and permanence of a significant group inside the program, which might point to the satisfaction of the students. Secondly, 17 participants have been part of the program for more than 5 years. This is relevant because it shows that a considerable proportion has maintained long-time participation, which could be interpreted as a positive indicator of the program’s effectiveness.

On the other hand, only 8 people have been in the program between 1 and 2 years. Overall, the graph allows us to conclude that the main part of the participants has a significant experience in the bilingual system, which could influence learning outcomes in a positive way (see figure 6 below).

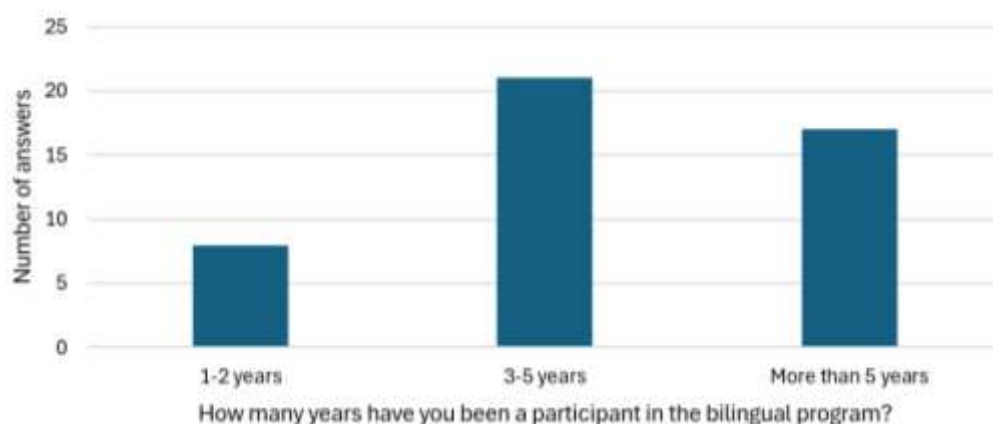


Figure 6: the chart reveals the length of time participants were in the program

4.3 Perceived effectiveness of bilingual teaching by students

The third section of the survey is about the students' feelings, if they think that bilingual systems are effective from their point of view, or, on the contrary, they are not efficient.

The graphical representation corresponds to the results of a survey regarding the perception of the impact of bilingual education on the general academic performance of students. The main question is, do you think bilingual education improved your overall academic performance? and there are three possible answers (see figure 7 below).

Analysis of the results shows that the answer most selected is "yes" with 24 votes, considering that bilingual education has improved their academic performance. This suggests that, among those who participate in a bilingual program, there is a positive perception regarding its impact. The improvement is seen as "to some extent" is answered by 12 individuals, suggesting a more moderate view. In contrast, only 10 people considered that bilingual education does not improve their performance.

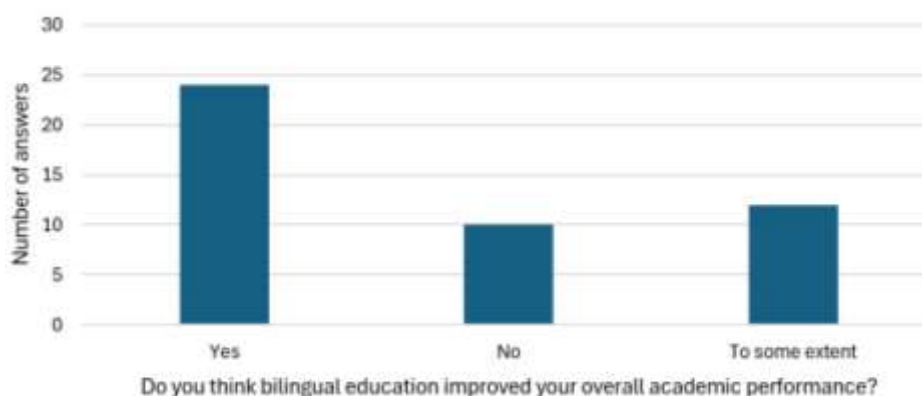


Figure 7: the chart shows the participants' opinions about the improvement in their academic performance

The graph illustrates the students' answers for a survey question about rating their competence level in a foreign language, specifically English. There are four possible answers: basic, intermediate, advanced and similar to a native speaker.

According to the data, 5 individuals consider that their English level is basic, 17 people place themselves in the intermediate level and 18 in the advanced level. Finally, only 6 individuals feel they have a similar level to that of a native speaker (see figure 8 below).

These results reveal an interesting distribution: the majority are in the intermediate and advanced levels, which can be interpreted as a positive indicator of the language domain among those who are in a bilingual program. The fact that only 6 people considered themselves like a native speaker indicates that achieving the highest competence is still a challenge, so, in a general view, the graph highlights in an indirect way the importance of strengthening linguistic competences.

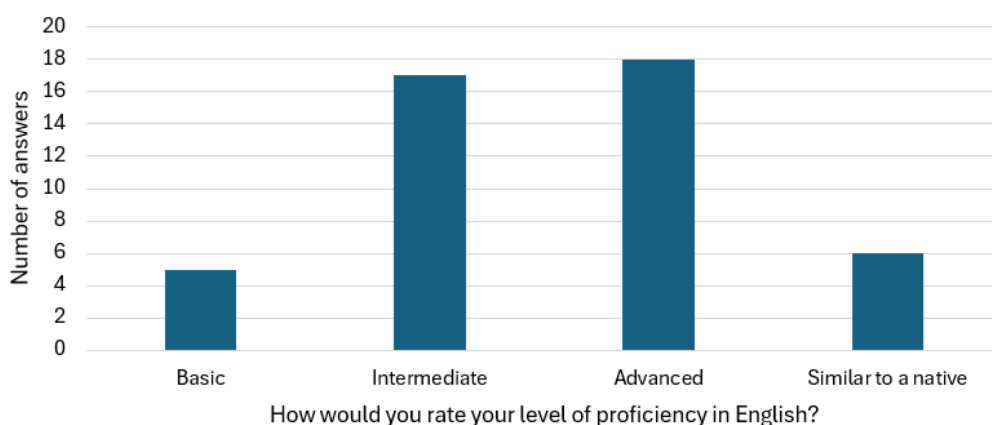


Figure 8: the chart shows the participants' English proficiency ratings

The following graph corresponds to the question of whether participants feel that their English level has been improved due to the bilingual system or not. There are four answers.

Obtaining the following answers: 18 people feel that their English level has been improved "somewhat", while 15 individuals consider that their level has improved "a lot". On the other hand, 11 participants feel that their level has not improved much and only 2 individuals think that their level has not improved at all. These low numbers might suggest negative perceptions about these programs are a minority.

So, the answers reflect a mainly positive assessment of the bilingual system among the participants, although, as it is said before, there are 30 individuals who are not exposed to this system, so this limits the generalization of the results (see figure 9 below).

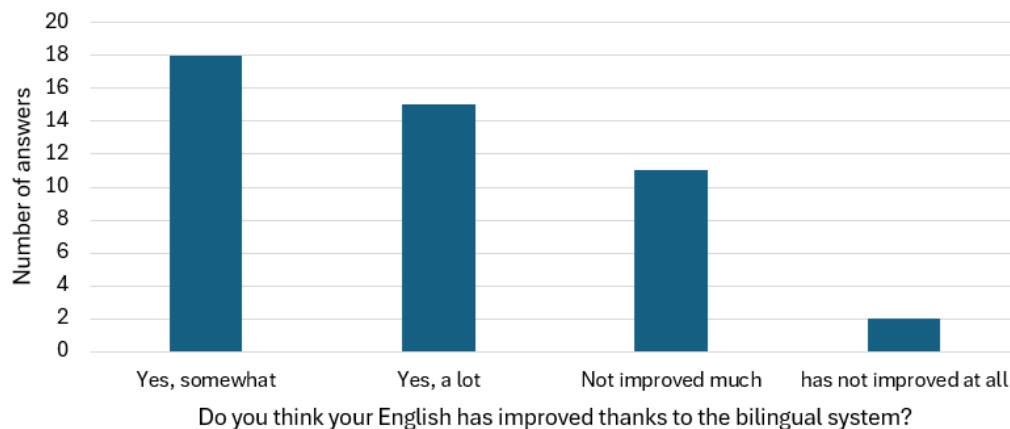


Figure 9: the chart shows whether participants believe that their English level has improved thanks to bilingual programmes

The following graph corresponds to the question, “Has learning subjects in another language made it difficult for you to understand the content?” The answers are divided into three categories.

Taking into account the data, 8 people answered the question with “yes”, pointing out that learning subjects in other languages has made the comprehension of content difficult. The majority of the participants, 25 people, answered “sometimes”, which means that a great part of the participants occasionally found difficulties.

On the other side, 13 people chose to answer with “no”. This indicates that there is not any significant difficulty for this group of people.

These results reveal that although there are a number of students that have experienced some difficulties, the majority do not perceive a constant obstacle, but sometimes they have to deal with them. Therefore, this can be interpreted as a signal of the correct function of the bilingual system, although it presents challenges, it is more or less manageable for the main part of the students (see figure 10 below).

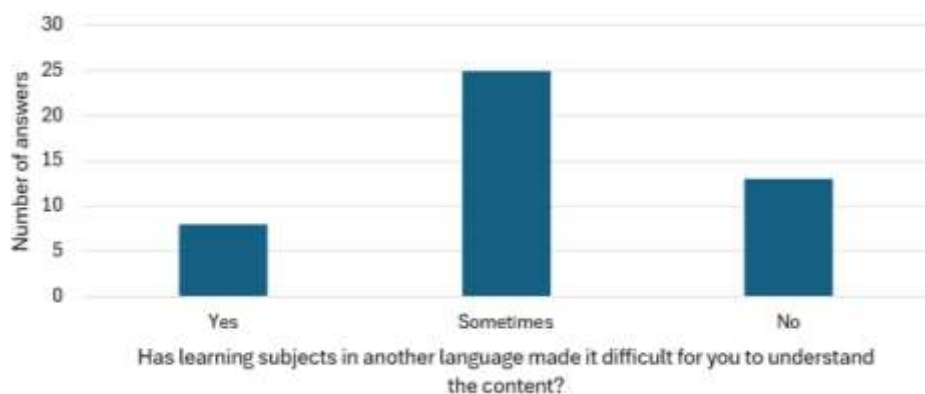


Figure 10: the chart represents whether participants experience difficulties understanding subjects taught in English

The chart present corresponds to the question, “Did you enjoy being part of a bilingual program?” According to data, 30 individuals answered affirmatively, indicating that they have enjoyed the experience of being part of a bilingual program. It is the option most voted, which reflects, a positive assessment and suggests that the majority of participants found satisfactory aspects in the program, whether due to learning, social aspects, or the development of new linguistic skills.

What is more, 10 individuals answered that they do not enjoy the experience. This group, which is a minority, is relevant to identify possible improvement areas inside the program, as the methodology or the adaptation to learning in other languages. Only 6 participants answered, “Don’t know/No answer”, which might indicate a lack of enough experience to have a clear opinion (see figure 11 below).

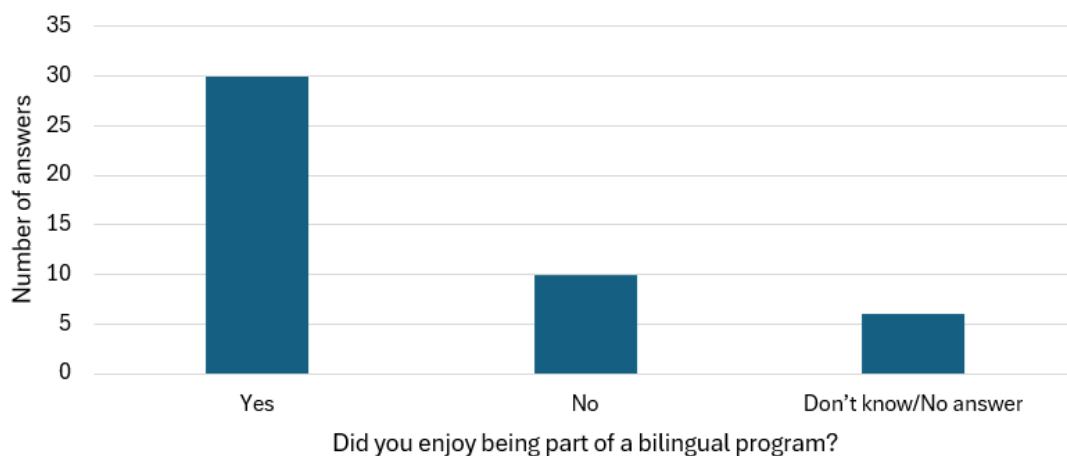


Figure 11: the chart shows whether participants enjoyed the program

4.4 Advantages and disadvantages

This final section of the survey discusses the advantages and disadvantages according to bilingual students.

The starting question is about the advantages that bilingual education brings to students. Most part of the answers coincide that there is an improvement in vocabulary. Other positive aspects that are remarkable based on students' opinion are comprehension, future employment, fluidity and production, among others.

For the question of disadvantages or the main challenge of bilingual education, the participants have several answers, such as these: "Some students have difficulty studying long topics in another language without always understanding what they are studying", "Vocabulary, as it can be very different from the native language and cause confusion" or "Adapting to students who often lack a solid foundation in English, as it has often been taught inefficiently or students have been unable to keep up with the teacher".

4.5 Personalized students' tips for improvement

As a final point of my survey, I wanted to give the option of giving a part of feedback in general some tips to improve the implementation of bilingual educational systems. Therefore, I asked the people that answered the survey how do they think it could be improved, and these are some of their answers: "There should be more oral content and less written content", "Formation for teachers that is more focused on bilingualism, and promoting more exchange programs in schools, as I believe this is the most useful way to make progress in the language", "Increase investment in education, reduce teachers' teaching hours, reduce student-teacher ratios, make the curriculum more flexible...", "I would incorporate audiovisual elements and replace exams with projects or presentations in which students could practice the spoken language".

5.CONCLUSIONS

Teaching English as an L2 in Spanish education presents many requirements and aims that, as has been shown in this dissertation, need to be covered by both acknowledging the current necessities and addressing actual issues to achieve proficiency in bilingual level. The CEFR (Common European Framework) defines proficiency as

“what someone can do/know in relation to the application of the subject in the real world”. Therefore, it has been that the choice of approaches and how they are implemented take an essential function in attaining it.

The conclusions taken out by means of academic literature and students’ perspectives suggests an accurate answer: bilingual education, although it is rich in potential benefits, also provides challenges that must be addressed in a critical way to guarantee equal and effective implementation.

First of all, it is key to underscore the potential advantages that bilingual education offers, particularly CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Both theoretical aspects (Krashen input hypothesis, Swain’s output hypothesis, and Cummins’ distinction between BICS and CALP) and empirical academic evidence highlight that language learning inside significant contents contributes to a more natural linguistic competence. The exposure to academic subjects through a second language promotes a functional and contextual acquisition of L2 in the majority of cases. English passes the limits of traditional language lessons. Students do not only learn grammatical structures and vocabulary, but also, they are cheered up to apply the language in cognitive works, problems resolution and collaborative learning.

The research also shows that bilingual education could promote cognitive and personal development. Academics as Bialystok, have demonstrated that bilingual people often have more executive control, cognitive flexibility and more capacity to solve problems. These cognitive benefits could contribute in a positive sense to the academic performance of students, not only in subjects related to language but in all the study plan. Furthermore, the intercultural competence that bilingual education encourages is especially valuable in a globalized world. Via the integration of different references and cultural perspectives, students developed empathy, cultural consciousness and a wide view of the world.

From the survey data, it is evident that many students who have been participating in bilingual education programs showed positive results. A considerable percentage perceive an improvement in their general English domain and in their academic performance. As well as the main part of the participants enjoying being part of a bilingual system, this means that this focus is not only beneficial from the academic, personal and motivational point of view. Motivation, as Lasagabaster (2011) highlights, is a

fundamental factor for academic success, commitment and a defiant sense that might drive students to excellence.

Despite all of these advantages, the investigation also identifies a series of persistent challenges that are due to bilingual education. One of the most important issues is the hazard of sacrificing content comprehension due to language exposure. For students with a low competence level, the simultaneous cognitive charge of acquiring academic content and a second language might drive them to a superficial comprehension and an insufficient academic performance, which might result in obtaining bad marks. As Lorenzo, Casal and Moore (2010) state, bilingual programs must aim for a carefully balanced domain between the content domain and the language development to avoid focusing excessively on language.

Another great concern is the formation and training of teachers. The effectiveness of bilingual systems depends on the requirement of a dual competence in teachers: control of both the subject content and the target language. The survey revealed that many teachers are, from the students' point of view, not well prepared due to this double role. Without great professional development, methodological tools and institutional support, bilingual instruction cannot have success, so it directly affects students' experience of learning in L2.

Educational inequalities are also highlighted as a key issue. While the urban and well-funded schools often offer bilingual programs with great resources, rural area students or the ones who attend schools in economically disadvantaged areas often lack access to a quality bilingual education. This disparity supports the existing educational inequities, what supposes an additional advantage for students that already have socioeconomic privileges. As Saint Isidro (2018) pointed out, the inequality of access to bilingual education might increase the gap between different social groups.

Sociolinguistically, introducing English as a third language in communities with strong co-official languages, such as Catalán or Euskera, has raised some preoccupations about linguistic hierarchy and identity. While having trilingual competence skills is exciting, this should be accompanied by policies which control and protect regional languages and ensure that English does not overtake Spain's linguistic diversity.

The survey answered by students shows valuable information about how they perceive bilingual education as students. Whereas many students pointed out that they

think that this system has benefits, such as the vocabulary improvement, better fluidity and better formation for future employment, other students pointed out that the program has several challenges as the comprehension of contents, especially in technical subjects as science and history. These challenges should be related to a basic or not enough English knowledge or a mismatch between the learner's level of competence and academic subject requirements.

Oddly, although the main part of the survey participants considered that their English level had improved thanks to the bilingual education, fewer believed that their academic performance had significantly benefited from the program. This suggests that, even if the language acquisition has improved in general terms, the effect on the content learning remains more variable and might depend on other contextual factors, such as educators' quality, room size, teaching methodology, or students' motivation.

Another important contribution of the survey is the recompilation of improvement suggestions formulated by students. This recommends more oral activities, less written work, more use of audiovisual materials, interchange programmes and learning based on projects rather than traditional exams. These recommendations are aligned with the active learning principles and the communicative competence, and they should be considered by both the policymakers and educators.

As with any other academic research, this study is limited. The collection of data is based on a survey filled out by individuals who are or were part of the principal studied system. The answers are subjective, and they are limited by the personal experience of each participant. The length of the results, although it is enough for exploration purposes, is not big enough to allow general conclusions about all the Spanish education system. Alongside, the study has as its main aim bilingual English-Spanish programmes and it does not explore deeper other combinations of languages or regional linguistic dynamics. Future investigations should benefit of further surveys or possible observations in school rooms.

Bilingual education is a dynamic phenomenon, and it is always developing, which reflects the most extensive global tendencies inside language learning, mobility and intercultural communication. Even though the benefits of these types of programs, in particular in terms of linguistic competence and cognitive development, are well

documented, their implementation is still inequitable and often faces logistic, pedagogical and political challenges.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of bilingual education does not depend only on the theoretical solidity of its design but on how it is implemented in practical terms. It requires the commitment of political responsibility, the teachers' devotion and the families' and autonomous community's support. With cautious planning, adequate resources and a focus on the students, bilingual education might be a powerful tool to aim for excellence in academic performance and personal growth.

This study contributes to the debate about the bilingual education role in Spain, giving importance to the strong points, weak points and its improvement potential. Having these results, I hope that could contribute to generating a base for future and further research, which at the end will drive bilingual programmes more efficient and equitable for all the students but also as a better future system for teachers.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1- Survey on Bilingual Education in Spain

GENERAL INFORMATION

1.

- ☐ I am aware and give my permission for my answers to be used for academic purposes in a Final Degree Project in English Studies.

2. How old are you?

- ☐ Under 12 years old
- ☐ 12–14 years old
- ☐ 15–17 years old
- ☐ 18 years old or older

3. What type of school do you attend/did you attend?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private
- ☐ Charter

4. In which autonomous community did you study/are you studying? (OPEN ANSWER)

5. Are you or were you in a bilingual program?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

BILINGUAL PROGRAM

6. Which subjects are/were taught in a foreign language? (Click all that apply)

- ☐ Natural Science
- ☐ History
- ☐ Physical Education
- ☐ Technology
- ☐ Arts

- Others

7. Is English the foreign language used in your bilingual program?

- Yes
- No

8. How many years have you been part of the bilingual system?

- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- More than 5 years

9. Do you think bilingual education improved your overall academic performance?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

10. How would you rate your level of proficiency in the foreign language?

- Basic
- Intermediate
- Advanced
- Similar to a native speaker

11. Do you think your English has improved because of the bilingual program?

- Yes, somewhat
- Yes, a lot
- Not improved much
- Has not improved at all

12. Has learning subjects in another language make it difficult for you to understand the content?

- Yes
- Soemtimes

- No

PERSONAL PERCEPTION

13. Did you enjoy being part of a bilingual program?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/ No answer

14. In your opinion, what is the main advantage of bilingual education? (OPEN ANSWER)

15. In your opinion, what is the main challenge of bilingual education? (OPEN ANSWER)

16. What suggestions would you make to improve bilingual education in Spain? (OPEN ANSWER)