Bilingual education is a broad term that refers to the presence of two languages in instructional settings. The term is, however, "a simple label for a complex phenomenon" (Cazden and Snow, p. 9) that depends upon many variables, including the native language of the students, the language of instruction, and the linguistic goal of the program, to determine which type of bilingual education is used. Students may be native speakers of the majority language or a minority language. The students' native language may or may not be used to teach content material. Bilingual education programs can be considered either additive or subtractive in terms of their linguistic goals, depending on whether students are encouraged to add to their linguistic repertoire or to replace their native language with the majority language (see Table 1 for a typology of bilingual education). Bilingual education is used here to refer to the use of two languages as media of instruction.

Need for Bilingual Education

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, proficiency in only one language is not enough for economic, societal, and educational success. Global interdependence and mass communication often require the ability to function in more than one language. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 9.7 million children ages five to seventeen—one of every six school-age children—spoke a language other than English at home. These language-minority children are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. school-age population. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of language-minority children increased by 55 percent, while the population of children living in homes where only English is spoken grew by only 11 percent.

Language-minority students in U.S. schools speak virtually all of the world's languages, including more than a hundred that are indigenous to the United States. Language-minority students may be monolingual in their native language, bilingual in their native language and English, or monolingual in English but from a home where a language other than English is spoken. Those who have not yet developed sufficient proficiency in English to learn content material in all-English-medium classrooms are known as limited English proficient (LEP) or English language learners (ELLs). Reliable estimates place the number of LEP students in American schools at close to four million.
Benefits of Bilingualism and Theoretical Foundations of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is grounded in common sense, experience, and research. Common sense says that children will not learn academic subject material if they can’t understand the language of instruction. Experience documents that students from minority-language backgrounds historically have higher dropout rates and lower achievement scores. Finally, there is a basis for bilingual education that draws upon research in language acquisition and education. Research done by Jim Cummins, of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, supports a basic tenet of bilingual education: children’s first language skills must become well developed to ensure that their academic and linguistic performance in the second language is maximized.

Cummins’s developmental interdependence theory suggests that growth in a second language is dependent upon a well-developed first language, and his thresholds theory suggests that a child must attain a certain level of proficiency in both the native and second language in order for the beneficial aspects of bilingualism to accrue. Cummins also introduced the concept of the common underlying proficiency.

TABLE 1

*model* of bilingualism, which explains how concepts learned in one language can be transferred to another. Cummins is best known for his distinction between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS, or everyday conversational skills, are quickly acquired, whereas CALP, the highly decontextualized, abstract language skills used in classrooms, may take seven years or more to acquire.

Stephen Krashen, of the School of Education at the University of Southern California, developed an overall theory of second language acquisition known as the monitor model. The core of this theory is the distinction between acquisition and learning—acquisition being a subconscious process occurring in authentic communicative situations and learning being the conscious process of knowing about a language. The monitor model also includes the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. Together, these five hypotheses provide a structure for, and an understanding of how to best design and implement, educational programs for language-minority students. Krashen put his theory into practice with the creation of the *natural approach* and the *gradual exit model*, which are based on a second tenet of bilingual education—the concept of comprehensible input. In other words, language teaching must be designed so that language can be acquired easily, and this is done by using delivery methods and levels of language that can be understood by the student.
Bilingual Education around the World

It is estimated that between 60 and 75 percent of the world is bilingual, and bilingual education is a common educational approach used throughout the world. It may be implemented in different ways for majority and/or minority language populations, and there may be different educational and linguistic goals in different countries. In Canada, immersion education programs are designed for native speakers of the majority language (English) to become proficient in a minority language (French), whereas heritage-language programs are implemented to assist native speakers of indigenous and immigrant languages become proficient in English.

In Israel, bilingual education programs not only help both the Arabic-and Hebrew-speaking populations become bilingual, they also teach Hebrew to immigrants from around the world. In Ireland, bilingual education is being implemented to restore the native language. In many South American countries, such as Peru and Ecuador, there are large populations of indigenous peoples who speak languages other than Spanish. Bilingual education programs there have the goal of bilingualism. Throughout Europe, bilingual education programs are serving immigrant children as well as promoting bilingualism for speakers of majority languages.

Bilingual Education in the United States

Since the first colonists arrived on American shores, education has been provided through languages other than English. As early as 1694, German-speaking Americans were operating schools in their mother tongue. As the country expanded, wherever language-minority groups had power, bilingual education was common. By the mid-1800s, there were schools throughout the country using German, Dutch, Czech, Spanish, Norweigan, French, and other languages, and many states had laws officially authorizing bilingual education. In the late 1800s, however, there was a rise in nativism, accompanied by a large wave of new immigrants at the turn of the century. As World War I began, the language restrictionist movement gained momentum, and schools were given the responsibility of replacing immigrant languages and cultures with those of the United States.

Despite myths to the contrary, non-native English speakers neither learned English very quickly nor succeeded in all-English schools. A comparison of the high-school entry rates based on a 1908 survey of public schools shows, for example, that in Boston, while 70 percent of the children of native whites entered high school, only 32 percent of the children of non-native English-speaking immigrants did so. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century one could easily find a good job that did not require proficiency in English.
By 1923, thirty-four states had passed laws mandating English as the language of instruction in public schools. For the next two decades, with significantly reduced immigration levels, bilingual education was virtually nonexistent in the public schools, although parochial and private schools continued to teach in languages other than English.

In the post–World War II period, however, a series of events—including increased immigration, the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision, the civil rights movement, the Soviet launch of the Sputnik satellite, the National Defense Education Act, the War on Poverty, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—led to a rebirth of bilingual education in the United States. In 1963, in response to the educational needs of the large influx of Cuban refugees in Miami, Coral Way Elementary School began a two-way bilingual education program for English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students. In 1967, U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough introduced a bill, the Bilingual Education Act, as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, noting that children who enter schools not speaking English cannot understand instruction that is conducted in English. By the mid-1970s, states were funding bilingual education programs, and many passed laws mandating or permitting instruction through languages other than English.

In 1974, the Supreme Court heard the case of Lau v. Nichols, a class-action suit brought on behalf of Chinese students in the San Francisco schools, most of whom were receiving no special instruction despite the fact that they did not speak English. The Court decided that these students were not receiving equal educational opportunity because they did not understand the language of instruction and the schools were not doing anything to assist them. The Court noted that "imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic [English] skills is to make a mockery of public education."

While there has never been a federal mandate requiring bilingual education, the courts and federal legislation—including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in federally assisted programs and activities, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, which defines a denial of educational opportunity as the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs—have attempted to guarantee that LEP students are provided with comprehensible instruction.

The population of the United States became more and more diverse as immigration levels reached record levels between the 1970s and the turn of the century, and bilingual education programs were implemented throughout the country. The Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized in 1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, 1994, and 2001, each time improving and expanding upon the opportunities for school
districts and institutions of higher education to receive assistance from this discretionary, competitive grant program. The 2001 reauthorization significantly changed the program, replacing all references to bilingual education with the phrase "language instruction educational program" and turning it into a state-administered formula-grant program.

**Characteristics of Good Bilingual Education Programs**

Good bilingual education programs recognize and build upon the knowledge and skills children bring to school. They are designed to be linguistically, culturally, and developmentally appropriate for the students and have the following characteristics:

1. High expectations for students and clear programmatic goals.
2. A curriculum that is comparable to the material covered in the English-only classroom.
3. Instruction through the native language for subject matter.
5. Multicultural instruction that recognizes and incorporates students' home cultures.
6. Administrative and instructional staff, and community support for the program.
7. Appropriately trained personnel.
8. Adequate resources and linguistically, culturally, and developmentally appropriate materials.

**Debate over Bilingual Education**

The debate over bilingual education has two sources. Part of it is a reflection of societal attitudes towards immigrants. Since language is one of the most obvious identifiers of an immigrant, restrictions on the use of languages other than English have been imposed throughout the history of the United States, particularly in times of war and economic uncertainty. Despite claims that the English language is in danger, figures from the 2000 Census show that 96 percent of those over the age of five speak English well or very well. Rolf Kjolseth concluded that language is also closely associated with national identity, and Americans often display a double standard with regard to bilingualism. On the one hand, they applaud a native English-speaking student studying a foreign language and becoming bilingual, while on the other hand they insist that non-native English speakers give up their native languages and become monolingual in English.
Much of the debate over bilingual education stems from an unrealistic expectation of immediate results. Many people expect LEP students to accomplish a task that they themselves have been unable to do—become fully proficient in a new language. Furthermore, they expect these students to do so while also learning academic subjects like mathematics, science, and social studies at the same rate as their English-speaking peers in a language they do not yet fully command. While students in bilingual education programs maintain their academic progress by receiving content-matter instruction in their native language, they may initially lag behind students in all-English programs on measures of English language proficiency. But longitudinal studies show that not only do these students catch up, but they also often surpass their peers both academically and linguistically.

Proposition 227, a ballot initiative mandating instruction only in English for students who did not speak English, and passed by 63 percent of the 30 percent of the people in California who voted in 1998, is both a reflection of the public debate over bilingual education and an example of the impact of public opinion on education policy. Although only 30 percent of the LEP students in California were enrolled in bilingual education programs at the time (the other 70 percent were in all-English programs), bilingual education was identified as the cause of academic failure on the part of Hispanic students (many of whom were monolingual in English), and the public voted to prohibit bilingual education. Instead, LEP students were to be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally to exceed one year. Three years after the implementation of Proposition 227, the scores of LEP students on state tests were beginning to decline rather than increase.

**Research Evidence on the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education**

There are numerous studies that document the effectiveness of bilingual education. One of the most notable was the eight-year (1984-1991) Longitudinal Study of Structured English Immersion Strategy, Early-Exit and Late-Exit Programs for Language-Minority Children. The findings of this study were later validated by the National Academy of Sciences. The study compared three different approaches to educating LEP students where the language of instruction was radically different in grades one and two. One approach was *structured immersion*, where almost all instruction was provided in English. A second approach was *early-exit transitional bilingual education*, in which there is some initial instruction in the child’s primary language (thirty to sixty minutes per day), and all other instruction in English, with the child’s primary language used only as a support, for clarification. However, instruction in the primary language is phased out so that by grade two, virtually all instruction is in English. The third approach was *late-exit transitional bilingual education*, where students received 40 percent of their instruction in the primary language and
would continue to do so through sixth grade, regardless of whether they were reclassified as fluent-English-proficient.

Although the outcomes were not significantly different for the three groups at the end of grade three, by the sixth grade late-exit transitional bilingual education students were performing higher on mathematics, English language, and English reading than students in the other two programs. The study concluded that those students who received more native language instruction for a longer period not only performed better academically, but also acquired English language skills at the same rate as those students who were taught only in English. Furthermore, by sixth grade, the late-exit transitional bilingual education students were the only group catching up academically, in all content areas, to their English-speaking peers; the other two groups were falling further behind.

Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, professors in the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University, have conducted one of the largest longitudinal studies ever, with more than 700,000 student records. Their findings document that when students who have had no schooling in their native language are taught exclusively in English, it takes from seven to ten years to reach the age and grade-level norms of their native English-speaking peers. Students who have been taught through both their native language and English, however, reach and surpass the performance of native English-speakers across all subject areas after only four to seven years when tested in English. Furthermore, when tested in their native language, these bilingual education students typically score at or above grade level in all subject areas.

Ninety-eight percent of the children entering kindergarten in California's Calexico School District are LEP. In the early 1990s, the school district shifted the focus of its instructional program from student limitations to student strengths—from remedial programs emphasizing English language development to enriched programs emphasizing total academic development; from narrow English-as-a-second-language programs to comprehensive developmental bilingual education programs that provide dual-language instruction. In Calexico schools, LEP students receive as much as 80 percent of their early elementary instruction in their native language. After students achieve full English proficiency, they continue to have opportunities to study in, and further develop, their Spanish language skills. By the late 1990s, Calexico's dropout rate was half the state average for Hispanic students, and more than 90 percent of their graduates were continuing on to junior or four-year colleges and universities.

The evidence on the effectiveness of dual immersion (or two-way) bilingual education programs is even more compelling. In dual immersion programs, half of the students are native speakers of English and half are native speakers of another language. Instruction is provided through both languages and the goal of these programs is for all students to become proficient in both languages.
In her research, Kathryn Lindholm-Leary, a professor of child development in the College of Education at San Jose State University, found that in developing proficiency in the English language, both English and Spanish speakers benefit equally from dual-language programs. Whether they spend 10 to 20 percent or 50 percent of their instructional day in English, students in such programs are equally proficient in English. Mathematics achievement was also found to be highly related across the two languages, demonstrating that content learned in one language is available in the other language. Despite limited English instruction and little or no mathematics instruction in English, students receiving 90 percent of their instruction in Spanish score at or close to grade level on mathematics achievement tests in English.

Bilingual education offers great opportunities to both language-majority and language-minority populations. It is an educational approach that not only allows students to master academic content material, but also become proficient in two languages—an increasingly valuable skill in the early twenty-first century.

See also: BILINGUALISM, SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE; FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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<a href="http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1788/Bilingual-Education.html">Bilingual Education - Need for Bilingual Education, Benefits of Bilingualism and Theoretical Foundations of Bilingual Education</a>

User Comments

✏️ Chelsey B. over 6 years ago
This is a very good study and point that you made. Bilingual Education is important for all students and needs to be better addressed. Every student deserves a good education, not matter what language is being used!

✏️ michele over 6 years ago
Who is the author of this article?

✏️ yustian ucok sikumbang almost 7 years ago
great study, thanks a lot

✏️ Emily Jeffery over 6 years ago
I am certainly glad that more people recognize the importance of an equal opportunity education. That is what the United States is all about--giving everyone a chance. It is hard to believe that at some points in our nation's history, this was not true. We, as a nation, are known for diversity. At least now people are beginning to embrace it. Bilingual education is more helpful to students in the 'real world,' where they will use what they have learned.

Sara Dodson  
over 6 years ago

This was an interesting article. It is scary how many people are close-minded and do not want to give these students a chance to succeed. Everyone has a relative that was an immigrant at some point that had to learn English. These modern day immigrants need to be given the same chances as our ancestors did.

kskjkk  
almost 5 years ago


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Thank you. Nicole

Brian Paewai  
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Characteristics of good bilingual education programme.

Really enjoed. I work total immersion Māori language and am interested in language acquisition. I Currently reading Foundations of Bilingual educationn

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over 6 years ago

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sfgsdfgdfsdfgdfsdfasdasdasd

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Jani Randall
All I know is that living 5 minutes from the border of Mexico hindered my education as there were non-English speaking students in the ENGLISH HONORS class. I was always put by the way-side when it came to questions being asked as all the non-English speaking students were seen to first to give them an "equal opportunity." Yeah right...

DAmn
NO MEXICANS EVER ALLOWED! lawls

(asthma symptoms)
Bilingual education does make it easier for those who have a second language as their mother tongue; however it needs to be borne in mind that in today`s world most of the World`s business is conducted in english

3
xjbxjkbx

Tarya P.
n/a

Cody Hazzard

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