

Bilingual programs and language interventions: the challenges

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



INTRODUCTION:

A large problem with bilingual education programs is they simply do not work. Most do not take into account the social and cultural factors that weigh heavily on being able to learn a second language (Berry and Williams, 2004). There is too much variability in the programs to be effective. The earlier the intervention takes place the more likely, the program will work. The goal is to develop a more uniform early grade intervention.

Children are more likely to learn more languages as their cognitive functions are still in their primitive development stages and are therefore able to pick up more information than an adult mind. The capacity to learn new words is higher in a child than in an adult (Franquiz, 1998). Therefore, any linguistic programs that are introduced in the early ages are more likely to succeed.

Why Problem Exists

There is a large discrepancy in the number and quality of English acquisition programs in the United States. Many teachers in these areas are not properly qualified and there are little resources available to them in this area.

Teacher and peer interaction is vital in the development of English for both native and non-native English learners (Haworth et al, 2006). The lack of knowledge of English language is not only present in the foreign students or children with different mother tongue, but has also been seen in children of English speaking families.

The lack of vocabulary is the single determinant cause of poor language development that can take place in any child. The lack of vocabulary may

make it difficult for these children in language or knowledge acquisition. (Silverman, 2007) Children who are not used to story reading, read alouds, and good instructions on use of words are likely to suffer from poor language skills. Experiments have shown that good vocabularies improve language with almost equal speed in English speakers and non speakers alike. (Silverman, 2007)

The role of teachers and their characteristics seem to have an important bearing on the quality of teaching that they possess. Many studies now prove the positive outcomes of a good teacher on a child. These positive outcomes are independent of the social or the home background the child may have (Franquiz, 1998). While in the past these studies were limited to other subjects, there are researches that have shown a somewhat similar outcome in language teachers as well. A good teacher is seen to improve the outcomes of children regarding the different language tasks such as phonation, letter and word use, grammar and composition etc. (Cirino et al, 2007)

Many countries in the world look towards English speaking countries as the best places for education. Along side studies in these countries help in improving the proficiency of English language among these people, which in turn can help them advance in their professions. While this dream may be the best intentions of a parent, they are not ideal in nature. There seems to be a stigma placed on bilingualism and biculturalism. Children of different cultures when exposed to an English speaking environment may feel out of

place to their social and cultural norms. This can directly effect how a student performs in the classroom.

The research carried out by Barry and Williams was aimed to identify the problems that many Hong Kong children face when they are exposed to international English speaking environments. The students surveyed outlined many issues that cause problems in the language learning. These included linguistic problems such as listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary and reading. Such children were in the listening end to understand what others were saying. (Berry and Williams, 2004) Many teachers need to know the benefits of having a bilingual classroom and the how to better support their students (Macrory, 2006).

This lack of quality programs, ill prepared informed teachers, and high variability between programs produces very poor results by the students. Some studies show that almost a quarter of students in bilingual education do not become bilingual (Pearson, 2006). The goal of this intervention is to provide a more effective program for bilingual students. More so, interventions require teachers who are proficient in teaching children English and other languages properly (Ng, E., 1999).

Language acquisition is an innate quality of an individual, and is an individual capacity of each human mind to learn it. There are many factors that govern the ability to learn a language. Apart from the innate ability of an individual to do so, metalinguistics, consciousness, teaching methods at school and acquisition of written system of language are also important deciding factors

in the language learning.(Collier, 1995) Also of help in this area are issues such as phonology, vocabulary, the grammar, meaning and discourse etc. The acquisition of a second language is therefore a high thought process that requires a positive and continued quality feedback in order to be successfully learned. (Collier, 1995)

The concept of provision of meaningful education among the children is an important concern for the educational boards. Yet the proper education teaching practices remain unknown. There are many reasons why these policies have been unsuccessful (Tencer Garrity, T. L. 2003). The first and the foremost problem was failing to identify language as part of the social context and social issues and that English may not be the mother tongue of many children.(Collier, 1995)

Intervention

The intervention will focus on trying to improve English ability at a young age. The goal is to try to increase the English ability of the students quickly and effectively. Research has shown that students learn faster in single language classrooms (Páez, Tabors, and Lopez, 2007). For the purpose of this intervention, the classrooms will then be monolingual. The students will be taught all week in almost all Spanish. The intervention will be a daily English vocabulary lesson. They will learn the pronunciation, spelling, and meaning a few new English words every day. Since they will have a frame of reference since knowing the vocabulary in Spanish, they will be better able to process this information. A study by Silverman showed that English

learner children can learn English at a similar if not faster rate than native English speakers. This intervention should be effective (Franquiz, 1998).

Testing

- The intervention will be tested on if the English ability of the students improved after the intervention.
- To do this the students will be given an English vocabulary pre and posttest.
- This will take place in three classrooms at three schools
- The SES of each class and school will be roughly the same
- There will be two English learner groups and one Native speaker group
- Quasi experimental since you cannot control for some variables such as some children being more familiar with English than others.
- The measure will test how much vocabulary the children in the program were able to learn.
- To be effective the English learner children should have learned the vocabulary at a similar rate as the native English speakers.

DISCUSSION:

These interventions in many ways depict the conceptual models that were introduced in the past, which comprised of essentially four components. Language in the past was not recognized as part of the cultural and social practices (Ng, E., 1999). This misidentification has led to the apparent failure of the language acquisition and language teaching procedures. According to Collier (1995), the acquisition and learning of a

second knowledge is based on socio-cultural, linguistic, academic and cognitive processes, which in turn may be different for different children. These factors are so interdependent that examining one without the influence of the other is impossible. (Collier, 1995)

The sociocultural facet of language acquisition is in many ways similar yet dissimilar to the social factors of the society. Each individual has exposure to different societal influences, and thereby may have variable exposure to a certain language (Berry and Williams, 2004). In a class room environment, these exposures can lead to increase in confidence or increase in anxiety in the language development (Tencer Garrity, T. L. 2003).

While those exposed to a certain language may feel at home with their own language studies and may perform well, others may feel anxiety and may not respond to it at all. The society's pretext and manner towards the minority also causes many effects on the individual's performance, for discrimination and prejudice may cause negative outcomes within an individual about his or her identity. It is in this context hypothesized that the introduction of positive environments may help in achieving results sooner, and thereby improves outcomes in language acquisition. (Collier, 1995)

Language learning can also lead to affective problems in learning. These affective problems include lingual affective problems and social cultural affective problems as mentioned above. The confidence levels may not be very high in such cases, and this can affect their progress in their studies. (Berry and Williams, 2004) The role of a teacher under such circumstances

becomes empirical, as it is them who will help build up the confidence of the children from different social and cultural backgrounds. (Berry and Williams, 2004)

Language learning therefore is the method where proper learning also requires understanding and “ learning” the culture of the language. If a person is to achieve bilingual competency, he or she must be able to carry out three processes. He or she must first learn the controls of linguistic rules of both languages. He or she must be able to encompass new cognitive dimensions associated with language. Finally he or she must be able to achieve the mental functions that are necessary for language acquisition. (Haworth et al, 2006)

Yet simply labeling the mental faculties and predisposition towards learning languages and not considering the conscious efforts in learning it is not possible. It is through this manner that a teacher is able to confer this knowledge to his or her students. The teacher systematically helps a child in learning new methods of vocabulary and sentence learning, and thereby helps him or her in creating the foundations of the new language (Wright, S. C., & Bougie, É., 2007).

Interventions such as those mentioned above can help in creating better bilingual students who are at ease in their social and cultural environments. The teachers play an important role in helping foreign students get over their anxiety of discrimination and difficulty in fitting in to a new society (Wright, S. C., & Bougie, É., 2007). Interventions at an early stage provide better

results than those that are carried out at later stages. Understanding that culture and society are important factors in the acquisition of new language can help in improving the outcomes in students.

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