

The pros and cons of bilingual education education essay



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The present study will look at the pros and cons of bilingual education and its implications in the English education system of Mongolia along with the various types of bilingual education systems and the definition of each. Then it will go on to look at the English education system of Mongolia and why it needs to make use of the bilingual education system. Globalization, professional success, and educational success are the reasons why Mongolia needs to learn English through the bilingual education system. By training teacher more professionally and providing students with enough books, Mongolia will be able to succeed in making English its second language.

1. 1 Aim of Study

As the number of English learners grows around the world, so does the number of various schools and institutions that offer English education. Many of these institutions are aimed at teaching English to non-native English speakers and thus, are taught by other non-native English speakers using both their native language and English as a method of instruction. As a future English teacher coming from a non-English speaking country myself, I felt that it was necessary to find out how this form of bilingual education can be used effectively to teach English to foreigners. Moreover, not only for my own benefit, this study can also help other future English teachers especially since the number of foreigners wanting to learn English is growing rapidly. The various advantages and disadvantages of bilingual education will be studied throughout this paper, as well as my own rationale behind why bilingual education is not only important, but also necessary in the educational system of Mongolia. By looking at bilingual education and its pros and cons, this information can be used to further facilitate the already

growing popularity of English education in Mongolia. Because of the large demand of English learners, it is imminent that a better educational system be provided to fit the need of prospective students.

1. 2 Definition of Bilingual Education

Before going on to the pros and cons of bilingual education, there should be a clear definition of what bilingual education is and what its implications are.

The term bilingual education is used when both the student's native and target language are used for instruction. When it was first introduced in the United States, bilingual education was used for students of limited English proficiency to help them transition into the only-English speaking community by teaching them the basic school subjects in their native language so as to ensure that the students know the material fully and are able to catch up to their classmates in the mainstream English classrooms (Nieto, 2009).

Students may also be pulled out of the classes to be given extra instruction in their own language to aid in their understanding while they learn English. By using the students' native language to teach English, the students are receiving dual language instruction which can have either positive or negative effects on their language acquisition.

1. 3 History of Bilingual Education

The United States has always been a multi-language country even before it officially became a nation. The Native Americans had their own languages and the various people around the world coming to colonize America also brought their own languages and cultures. However, these immigrants coming to America were encouraged to speak English only, having to

abandon their own language and culture. These immigrant students began <https://assignbuster.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-bilingual-education-education-essay/>

to feel ashamed of their own communities and started to conform to the mainstream English-speaking people, losing their identity as minorities. Then in 1906, the Nationality Act in Texas designated English as the official language of instruction and required that all immigrants speak English to be eligible for education (Nieto, 2009). However, with the greater increase of immigrants coming in to America after the World War II, bilingual education became more and more popular. In 1967, the U. S. passed a bill, the Bilingual Educational Act, which stated that many children were not able to understand their teachers' instructions in English and therefore started the funding for bilingual education programs throughout the country. This Bilingual Educational Act characterizes bilingual education as one that allows students to advance through their educational careers more successfully with the help of instruction in their native language, whereas ESL programs were considered insufficient (Stewner-Manzanares, n. d., cited in Pena, 2002, p. 6). Although the government never explicitly required there to be a bilingual educational program, the Civil Rights Act for people of all race and nation and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act prompted the educational system of the United States to provide limited English proficiency (LEP) students with comprehensible instruction (Nieto, 2009). Of course, there has been and still are many anti-bilingualism groups since that time and this study goes on to study what the reasoning is behind these groups and also what the supporters of bilingual education are saying.

CHAPTER 2: TYPES OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The term bilingual education can be used to classify several different types of programs such as: the total immersion program, English as a Second

Language (ESL)/sheltered immersion programs, transitional bilingual education, maintenance bilingual education, and dual language programs. Knowing the differences between each of these programs will aid in understanding the idea of bilingual education better.

2. 1 Total Immersion Program

Total immersion programs put LEP students into classrooms in which the language of instruction is only English and all the students are native English speakers (Deveau & Bang, 2004, p. 208). One hundred percent of the classes are carried out in English and the LEP students receive no particular help from a teacher of the same native language. The theory behind this method is that the more exposure to the target language you get, the quicker you will learn that language. Through this method, students are supposed to learn the second language in a natural way just as they learned their native language by being surrounded by people who speak that language.

2. 2 English as a Second Language (ESL)/Sheltered Immersion

Commonly known as ESL, these programs provide separate instruction to students who are having difficulty learning the content material of the class because of their limited English proficiency. They may be pulled out of their mainstream classrooms to be given extra help by a trained ESL teacher with materials that are structured to fit the language levels of the students. Through this form of education, the students are able to develop their language skills without falling behind their classmates in the school curriculum.

2. 3 Transitional Bilingual Education

Transitional bilingual education, or early-exit bilingual education, is a program which provides students with instruction in their native language and allows them to transition into the target language classroom within just two to four years, hence the term early-exit. In this program, the student's native language is used as the medium through which English is learned and is therefore a way to complement their learning, the main goal of classroom instruction being fluency in the L2 (Baker, 1988, p. 46).

2. 4 Maintenance Bilingual Education

Also called late-exit bilingual education, maintenance bilingual education is similar to transitional bilingual education, except that this program goes on for a longer period of time – over six years. Although the students may achieve fluency in English before this period is over, he or she remains in this program. In this method, the teacher teaches the students in their native language, ensuring that the students are academically proficient in their native languages so that they can study successfully in the target language. The late-exit model showed the most academic progress in the students as Crawford (1999) points out that their achievement accelerated over time – almost catching up with that of their English-speaking peers (para. 21).

2. 5 Dual-Language Immersion

In this program, the class consists of two groups of students. One group of students are the English language learners (ELLs) speaking the same native language and the other group is the native English speaking students. The two groups study side by side and the teacher provides instruction in both

languages so that the students are able to learn both languages fluently. This aids the students in becoming both academically and linguistically proficient in both languages. Also, this form of immersion can promote cross-cultural understanding between the two different groups (Serrano & Howard, 2007, p. 152). Through dual-language immersion, students can learn to appreciate each other's differences and help in breaking down barriers that may occur between groups from diverse backgrounds.

CHAPTER 3: DISADVANTAGES OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Those opposed to bilingual education present several reasons to why bilingual education is not efficient in language learning. Those reasons are studied in this section before going on to the supporting grounds for bilingual education along with evidence refuting these reasons.

3. 1 Inefficiency

3. 1. 1 Costs

In the United States, the government is spending over \$12 billion for the funding of education for limited-English students, over half of that amount being spent on bilingual education programs (" The Social Contract," 1994) and those opposed to bilingual education are saying that it is costing too much compared to the outcome of only a handful of LEP students being able to score high enough on tests to be considered fluent English speakers. However, studies have shown that ESL programs where students are pulled out of the classroom for extra instruction cost more (\$1, 198 per year) than bilingual programs (\$175-\$214 per year) (Crawford, 1998). The reason is because " pullout" programs require extra teachers and instructional

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material whereas in-class approaches do not (Chambers & Parrish, 1992, cited in Crawford, 1998, para. 11). Therefore, it is unreasonable to say that bilingual education is costing too much. Rather, there should be some actions to enhance the funding for bilingual education.

3. 1. 2 Uncertified Educators

There are very few teachers in the bilingual classroom who are fully certified and proficient in both the students' native and target language. (Iver, n. d., para. 6) Those in support of bilingual education say that there is not enough funding in terms of providing schools with trained teachers who are able to teach in dual languages and if these needs were met, there would be much improvement in this area and LEP students will receive the proper education that they need in order to study on the same level as their native-English speaking peers. (Iver, n. d., para. 8) This is very important because, as many teachers will agree, it takes much more effort to teach LEP students who also do not understand the teacher's native language than to teach students who speak the same native language as the teacher.

3. 1. 3 Not Time Efficient

Not only in terms of costs and insufficient staff, opponents of bilingual education are saying that it is not time efficient because it takes too long for LEP students to gain proficiency in English through the bilingual education program because those students tend to want to fall back on their native language, refusing to learn English and assimilate into the mainstream. This causes segregation in the schools and results in social isolation and high drop-out rates. Drop-out rates have reduced in schools with all-English methods of instruction; however, schools that employ bilingual methods <https://assignbuster.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-bilingual-education-education-essay/>

have not seen any reduction in drop-out rates. Most people feel that a drop-out rate of 35% does not justify the high costs involved in bilingual education (Iver, n. d., para. 5). As a result, many opposing groups think that it is best to teach LEP students English in the shortest time possible. The argument against this is that although children seem to master general linguistic skills more quickly, it is estimated that students need between four to six years to become academically proficient in a second language (Nieto, 2009, p. 66). Therefore, it is only natural for students to take a long time before becoming proficient enough in English to be able to enter the mainstream classroom without having difficulty in the other academic subjects. Opponents of bilingual education also believe that bilingual education programs cause students to fall behind their peers in all-English programs in terms of language proficiency. Nevertheless, studies show that not only do these LEP students in bilingual programs catch up, but they also often surpass their peers both academically and linguistically, scoring higher on tests. The longer students spend in bilingual programs, the better they perform in academics and in language (Zelasko, n. d.). Moreover, Cummins (1992) mentions a study that showed that students studying in the immersion program did not necessarily enter the mainstream classroom quicker than those in the early-exit program which also points to the fact that immersion programs are neither cost efficient nor time efficient (p. 97).

3. 2 Better Alternative to Bilingual Education

One of the alternatives to bilingual education that opponents are posing is the total immersion method. Commonly called the “sink or swim” method, supporters of the total immersion method argue for a rapid placement into

the mainstream classroom (Jong, 2006, p. 23). They also believe that students will learn English much more quickly since they are exposed to more English. However, studies show that it is not the quantity of exposure that is important, it is the quality. In order for education to succeed, the language input must be comprehensible to the student (Krashen, 1996, cited in Crawford, 1998, para. 4). Therefore, in order to make the input comprehensible, the language of instruction must be that of the students' native language, English being the language to be learned, not the language to learn with.

3. 3 Loss of a Dominant Language

Another reason that some people oppose bilingual education is because they believe that it causes the English language to no longer be a dominant language of the United States. Promoting bilingualism among the immigrants could put the English at a secondary position and make the immigrants no longer feel the need to learn it. On the contrary, there have been languages other than English being taught in America through bilingual and non-English programs since the 19th century, especially because of the Native Americans. Even with the influx of foreign languages coming in from all over the world, English maintained its position as a dominant language in the U. S., even to the point of becoming a global language. (Crawford, 1998)

CHAPTER 4: ADVANTAGES OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

4. 1 Comprehensible Input

Krashen's theory of comprehensible input is one of the biggest supporting factors for bilingual education. The theory of comprehensible input ($i + 1$) <https://assignbuster.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-bilingual-education-education-essay/>

states that the new information to be learned by a person must be understandable in order to be successfully acquired. “ It is argued by Krashen that humans acquire the rules of language in a predictable order and move from a current level, i , to the next level, $i + 1$, by understanding input $i + 1$.” (Lee, 2004, p. 3) In terms of bilingual education, this theory is divided into two parts, knowledge and literacy. In a study done by Shin (Shin, 1994, Shin & Gribbons, 1996, cited in Krashen, 1997), many respondents agree with the idea that the first language is helpful in providing background knowledge, many agree that literacy transfers across languages, and most support the principles underlying bilingual education.

4. 1. 1 Knowledge

When a student learns new information in a language that he does not understand, he will not be receiving any comprehensible input. However, if the teacher provides instruction in the student’s native language, it gives the student knowledge. This knowledge helps make the English much more comprehensible. For example, an LEP student who has learned history in his native language will understand history taught in an English classroom because he will have the background knowledge to help him. Further, this knowledge that he has will help the student in learning more history and acquiring more English. (Krashen, 2001, para. 4, 5)

4. 1. 2 Literacy

Developing literacy in the first language will aid in the student’s developing literacy in another language. “ It is easier to learn to read in a language you understand; once you can read in one language, this knowledge transfers rapidly to any other language you learn to read. Once you can read, you can

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read.” (Krashen, 2001, para. 6) With the knowledge obtained from previous learning in L1, the student will be able to connect that context with what he is currently learning in L2. In terms of reading, Koda (1996) states that the words and the global knowledge of a text that a reader encounters are “bi-directional” in that the two factors interact with each other and help the reader understand the text more fully (Cited in Avalos, 2003, p. 174). Therefore, the skills learned in the first language operate as a basic foundation that aids the acquisition of the second language. In addition, studies have reported that a student’s level of literacy in his first language predicts his potential to achieve that level of literacy in a second language (Slavin & Cheung, 2005, cited in Nieto, 2009, p. 66).

4. 2 Higher Academic Achievement

People who are opposed of bilingual education and support the total immersion program use the term “time on task” to mean that LEP students will learn English faster if they do not have to go through the menial learning process and rather, are allowed to learn naturally by being surrounded by the language (Imhoff, 1990, cited in Cummins, 1992, p. 93). Nevertheless, along with Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input stated above, if students are provided with a firm education in their native language, they will be able to gain higher academic achievement in a second language. Therefore, if students’ native language helps in their academics, this will further help them in obtaining higher English proficiency. Since they are able to understand what they are learning in English, this will prompt them to study further, resulting in higher academic achievement. Cummins (1992) points out that studies show the association of cognitive advantages and

educational benefits for bilingual students (p. 94-95). A study comparing the students in immersion programs, early-exit programs, and late-exit programs showed that the students in the late-exit programs, who received instruction in their native language for at least 40 per cent of the time did better academically than their peers in the mainstream classrooms despite that fact that these students received less instruction in English than the students in the other groups and more of their families came from low-income backgrounds. (Cummins, 1992, p. 97)

4. 3 Confidence

Although this may be considered a subjective factor to use as supporting evidence, confidence can be seen as another reason why bilingual education is a positive asset to the educational system. Taking into account all the positive factors of bilingual education stated above, it can be said that this system gives an extra boost of self-confidence to students participating in that program. Bilingual education can have a positive effect on a student's confidence and self-esteem because it stresses the importance of a student's background knowledge and allows the student to use this knowledge by integrating it into their daily learning (Crawford, 1989, 2004, Cummins, 1984, 2000, & Padilla, 1991, cited in Nieto, 2009, p. 68). One of the reasons that some students are unable to attain full fluency in a second language is because they are afraid to make mistakes which might result in embarrassing themselves and being laughed at by their peers. On the other hand, a self-confident, secure person will be able to learn language more successfully (" Second Language Acquisition", 2007, p. 75). As studies have revealed, bilingual education results in a higher English proficiency as well as

higher academic achievement among LEP students than students in an English-only program. This is a strong factor in giving confidence to LEP students as they soon catch up to their English speaking peers both academically and linguistically and therefore do not have to feel that they are inferior to their friends. Learning a second language without falling behind the majority student population on academics, rather, excelling above the norms can only have positive effects on a students' confidence as he goes through that long process.

Moreover, bilingual education promotes bilingualism and biliteracy which can be seen as a very strong asset in this time of globalization. Being able to speak more than one language is looked upon by many with a desire to achieve. Bilingualism gives a person a wider perspective into the usage of language and provides that person with a variety of terms and an ample collection of vocabulary to choose from in his conversation, especially with another bilingual. This advantage can give students confidence and pride in themselves as one student wrote that he is proud to know two languages (Soto, 2002, p. 603).

CHAPTER 5: BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN OTHER COUNTRIES

There are many countries other than the U. S. that have adopted the system of bilingual education and have had much success. Some of these countries are Canada, Singapore, and Sweden. Studying how these countries have adopted bilingual education can help in incorporating it into the educational system of Mongolia.

5. 1 Canada

Canada has two official languages, English and French. Therefore, Canada has been using the bilingual education model to educate their children to be fluent in both languages. Many Canadian schools use either the late or partial immersion program, allowing students to learn the L2 through a natural process. Studies done in Canadian schools also prove that students in the bilingual program did not fall behind their monolingual peers, scoring higher on academic achievement tests. It is shown that the French language skills of those who received instruction through the immersion programs were superior to those of students who received instruction through the traditional method for a set time period each day (Knell, E., Haiyan, Q., Miao, P., Yanping, C., Siegel, L., Lin, Z., & Wei, Z., 2007, p. 397).

5. 2 Singapore

English being the official language, Singapore has been using English as the primary language of instruction in schools since 1987 (Pakir, 1993, cited in Knell et al., 2007, p. 397). Although Chinese is used in the home, English is used as the main language even between the ethnic groups, as well as in business and technology (Knell et al, 2007, p. 397). The children in Singapore go through the total immersion program since kindergarten. This has been considered a great success in Singapore and it is possible that the English immersion programs contributed greatly to the academic success in other subjects taught in English for students in Singapore (Knell et al., 2007, p. 397).

5. 3 Sweden

Sweden has been giving content-based learning to students through the medium of English. With programs such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), students are taught the basic subjects such as history and art through a foreign language, namely English. Unless it is an international school, Swedish schools teach their subjects less than 50 per cent of the time and subjects cannot be taught solely in English. Code switching is common in these schools and both teachers and students use English and Swedish freely. (Munklinde, 2008)

CHAPTER 6: ENGLISH EDUCATION IN MONGOLIA

Having laid the foundations for the definitions and implications of bilingual education, it is time to look at how this system can be brought into play in the educational systems of Mongolia and why it is necessary for Mongolia to implement bilingual education in order to have a voice in the global market of today's world.

6. 1 History and Current Status of Language Education in Mongolia

6. 1. 1 History

When Genghis Khan and his sons died after having reigned over the vast Mongolian empire, it began to fall apart and was taken over by the Qing in 1911. However, only a decade later in 1921, the Russians took over and Mongolia was under communist rule until 1990 when it gained independence with a peaceful democratic revolution (Cohen, n. d.). Under Russian rule, Russian had been the primary language of use all over the country. The Russian language was held in such high esteem that being able to use and <https://assignbuster.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-bilingual-education-education-essay/>

understand the Russian language was considered as being equivalent with being educated (Namsrai, 2004, cited in Cohen, 2005, p. 204). The Russian language was used in every aspect of the Mongolian life – even the Mongolian traditional script was replaced with the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. More and more students began to study the Russian language, resulting in more and more teachers being trained to teach Russian. The Mongolian's fluency and usage of Russian was so widespread that it sometimes surpassed their proficiency in their own native Mongolian (Cohen, 2005, p. 205-206).

With the collapse of the Russian hold on Mongolia in 1990, Mongolians began to realize that the Russian language was not as useful or powerful as they had thought and that English was the dominant language in the outside world. “ The linguistic map of the world had shifted significantly during the seventy years of Mongolia's isolation, and its people were only now coming to realize that English, not Russian, had become the preeminent international language.” (Cohen, n. d., p. 6-7) The need for English teachers became very urgent; however, English was not studied in Mongolia before 1990 and there were less than a dozen English teachers that were qualified (Ibid, cited in Cohen, n. d.). As a result, the Mongolian government began to retrain the Russian language teachers to be able to teach English.

6. 1. 2 Current Status

English spread through Mongolia very quickly and it soon became the required language for businessmen and other professionals. Students who are studying English now study primarily to be able to study abroad or find a job. Having been under great economic crisis and near starvation after the <https://assignbuster.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-bilingual-education-education-essay/>

democratic revolution, English became the most important skill in getting employment and an individual's greatest asset in obtaining a job in an English-speaking country (Cohen, 2005, p. 208).

Mongolians study English for various reasons, mostly instrumental, regulative, interpersonal, and imaginative (Cohen, 2005). The instrumental reasons are mainly for learning English for the purpose of studying. The interpersonal reasons for studying English come with notions of “ power relationships” (Cohen, 2005, p. 210) where speaking English with other foreigners can put them on the same level, whereas using a translator can mean that one person is inferior to the other. Also, more Mongolians are speaking English in their workplaces because being able to speak English brings with it the connotation of being more international and modern. (Cohen, 2005, p. 211)

Compared to the growing popularity of English, Mongolia still lacks the sufficient funds and resources to teach English on a more sophisticated level. When Mongolia was under Russian domination, there were many teachers that were given special training in the Russian language for at least 7-10 years and were even sent to Russia to study. (Cohen, n. d., p. 11) However, since its liberation, Mongolia currently is not financially well off enough to be able to provide funds for training English teachers as they had trained the Russian teachers. There is also a lack of textbooks for students learning English. Books for secondary school students were completed only recently in the year 2000 and is currently being revised. Overall, the English education system of Mongolia is still very meager and it will take some time

before it can reach the point of offering students with the same level of sophisticated education as other countries around the world.

6. 2 Need for Bilingual Education in Mongolia

Taking Krashen's theory of comprehensible input ($i + 1$) into account, it can be said that Mongolians have a well-laid foundation of language skills (i). The Mongolian public education system is established fairly well and with the adoption of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, there is a high literacy rate of 99% (Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004, cited in Cohen, n. d.). However, the vast differences between the Mongolian and English language can be a hindrance in the $+ 1$. If Mongolian students are taught by a native English-speaking teacher, their understanding will be very limited and they will not receive the proper input necessary for acquiring a second language. Lee (2004) argues that comprehensible input is crucial because it allows the student to look at the structure because they would have already understood the message (p. 6). Although Krashen's comprehensible input theory may be reasonable in an ESL setting such as America where the native language of the LEP students is mostly Spanish, a language with a very similar structure to that of English, it may not be so efficient in an EFL setting, such as Mongolia. Consequently, bilingual education would be more efficient in teaching Mongolians the English language rather than using a total immersion program which does not consider the students' native language and forces the students to learn.

As the English education system of Mongolia continues to grow, there are a few schools in Mongolia that have opted for the total immersion program, teaching students all the subjects using only English. The philosophy of these schools is the same as any other schools that make use of the total

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immersion program – that the more language input a student receives, the more proficient in that language he will become. However, as stated many times above, this is not entirely true. Quantity of language input does not necessarily guarantee language proficiency. Also, there are some other factors to be considered when looking at the case of schools in Mongolia with the total immersion programs. For example, in the American School of Ulaanbaatar the majority of the students are Mongolians who speak fluent English. Most of these students are either born in or have lived in other English-speaking countries and so it is only natural that they are fluent in English – this is not the case of the students in most other schools in Mongolia. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the immersion program of that certain school provided students with the education to be able to speak fluent English and this specific case is not relevant to the rest of the country. Although a total immersion program can be used, other methods, such as maintenance or transitional bilingual education, or dual-language immersion programs would be a better alternative in the Mongolian context.

Total immersion programs cost a lot of money because they need to bring native English-speaking teachers from foreign countries. In order to accommodate the needs of these foreign teachers, the school will need to pay them a great deal of money. This results in the tuition fee going up to more than \$10, 000 a year. Although the elite class of Mongolia will be able to send their children to