

A Study of Dual Language Instruction in the American School System

Ekaterine PIPIA

Abstract

This article was designed to determine the value of recently implemented dual language instruction for minority children in the United States of America as it is significant for America due to the recent establishment of American dual language education. All available resources have been applied to data collection during my stay in the States. A Qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to collect the data considering practical and analytical issues. The handed out questionnaires provided substantial empirical input into the academic debate about the effectiveness of dual language immersion programs in the States. The research revealed that immersion programs are the most effective forms of bilingual education in the United States of America. Despite power imbalances within the language minority students in a diverse society, the study has revealed immersion programs as viable means of second language acquisition and effective schooling practices for language majority and minority students in the United States of America.

Keywords: *dual instruction; minority and majority languages; parental involvement; cross-cultural attitudes; additive bilingualism*

Ekaterine Pipia is a Coordinator of Intensive English Language Program at School of Languages at International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia, ekush7@yahoo.com

Introduction

Bilingualism is prevalent in modern times in almost every corner of the world. In 1982, Grosjean suggested that 'only Japan and West Germany could be classified as monolingual countries, and even at that time they had significant populations whose first language was not the language of the majority'. The United States of America which is determined as the most significant focus country for my research takes precedence over being a multilingual nation with many indigenous Native American Languages, indigenous Spanish and the diverse languages of its mammoth immigrant groups. This fact contributes to the nation's linguistic wealth, which stemmed the most prominent tendency of dual language immersion programs that are increasing in number at a rate unseen in bilingual education since passage of the Bilingual Education Act in 1968. As with many other complex concepts, dual language education that situates within an additive bilingual education framework does not have a clear-cut *definition*. Much like other models of bilingual education, dual language is also known as *developmental bilingual education, bilingual immersion, double immersion, bilingual enrichment, and two-way immersion* (Baker, 2001). Dual language education is defined as a long-term additive bilingual and bicultural program model that consistently uses two languages in one classroom. The first instructional steps are found in the nineteenth century, when non-English or dual language instruction was offered in more than a dozen states in a variety of languages including German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Polish, Italian, Czech, French and Spanish (Collier, 1992). Formal schooling was locally administered by Native Americans only insofar as the U.S. government allowed. Where locally controlled education was permitted, Native American communities often provided dual language instruction.

The *goal* of the article is shaped through exploring and assessing the many facets of the most recently implemented American dual language education in today's schools; its effectiveness and impact on minority children; parental involvement and general American attitude towards minorities' education. It is widely-accepted idea that, dual language programs have raised the status and importance of languages other than English in many communities across the United States. In some communities they have eased tensions between groups who speak different

languages. The programs have helped build cross-cultural school communities and cross-cultural friendships among students and parents, relationships that probably would not have developed without the programs. Dual language programs raise the status of languages other than English because as native English-speaking children become bilingual, parents and students alike see the value of knowing more than one language. A great concern for parents is how their children are progressing in school. In general, parents who are first-generation immigrants worry a great deal about children's academic achievement in schools and their future success in society. Parents whose ethnic backgrounds are different from the mainstream society often have extreme anxieties. They wonder what kinds of linguistic, social, and psychological conditions will help children to be academically successful, and what kinds of school programs are best for them. The parental involvement in dual language education is highly appreciated by the program facilitators. For my following research the focus group is formed by the bilingual parents whose children are enrolled in dual language school programs. A simple one-page questionnaire was constructed taking into consideration the topics of choice, purpose of dual language programs, and effectiveness of instruction conducted in the programs that specifically addressed language learning.

Method

I have applied to web-based online questionnaires because of its apparent advantages over paper approaches. It gave me an opportunity to reach respondents in the States by sending email invitations to online surveys. Online survey software package www.surveymonkey.com was used for conducting the Internet based surveys. The questionnaire available online through <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BF922DQ>. The respondents could access the survey questionnaire by clicking on the link emailed to them. A short letter of introduction explaining the purpose of the research project was given in the body of the email invitation to online questionnaires. In order to generate the analyzable data, responses were arbitrarily coded. Closed questions made it easy to assign numerical symbols to the given response categories and simplified converting them to the necessary format for SPSS. A separate code for non-response was not included in the coding schemes as most questions required an answer

before submitting the form and could not have been skipped. SPSS Version 17 was used to obtain descriptive statistics. Totally 104 questionnaires were completed and returned.

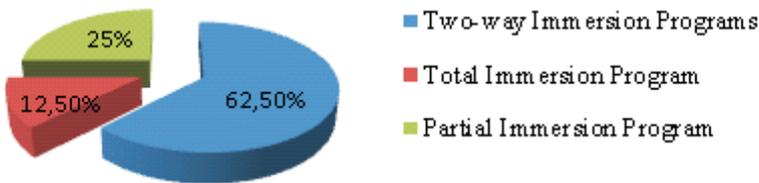
Result

Question 1: Which type of dual language program did you choose for your child?

- A. Two-way Immersion program
- B. Total Immersion
- C. Partial Immersion
- D. Transitional Program
- E. Language Maintenance Program
- F. Transitional Bilingual Education Program
- G. Other

As summing up the collected responses, I have received the following data for analysis, where 62,5% of the parents pointed two-way immersion programs as their best choice for their children, 12,5% of parents showed their great preference to total immersion programs, while 25% of parents marked partial immersion programs from the given options. To my surprise, no response was given to the transitional, language maintenance and transitional bilingual programs.

Figure 1. American parents preference for dual language programs



Question 2: What goals did you have while choosing the program?

- A. to adapt to American society
- B. to get higher education in American Universities
- C. to master English language for everyday communication
- D. to be close to the native language and culture

E. to know several languages

F. Other

Internet sources say that American parents of high school students place especially high importance on a college education, and African American and Hispanic parents give college an even higher priority than do white parents. The collected responses have shown the bilingual parents frame of mind, where the goals are very carefully set. Considerably twenty-six of the respondent parents (25%) showed their goal as the way to get higher education in American Universities. Out of the same parents 29.2% have chosen two-way immersion programs, 23.1% - total immersion programs and 15.4% - partial immersion programs. Interestingly 12.5% was given to the adaption to American society and the same percentile 12.5%- to getting higher education in American Universities. The results are given in the following table.

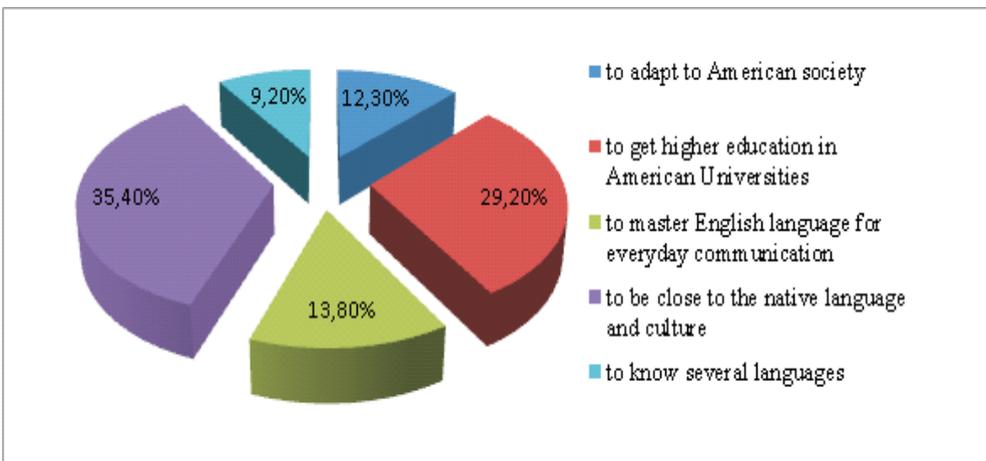
Table 1. Reasons for choosing dual language programs in the United States of America

QUESTION 2	Total		Two-way Immersion Program		Total Immersion Program		Partial Immersion Program	
			65	62.5	13	12.5	26	25.0
		%		%		%		%
A. To adapt to American society	13	12.5	8	12.3	2	15.4	3	11.5
B. to get higher education in American Universities	26	25.0	19	29.2	3	23.1	4	15.4
C. to master English language for everyday communication	13	12.5	9	13.8	2	15.4	2	7.7
D. to be close to native language and culture	39	37.5	23	35.4	4	30.8	12	46.2
E. to know several languages	13	12.5	6	9.2	2	15.4	5	19.2
TOTAL:	104	100%	65	100%	13	100%	26	100%

It's notable to mention the first and second generation immigrants' experience of socialization in the United States; most of them undergo

challenges when it comes to integrating their home-traditions with that of the mainstream culture. Amid the pressure to succeed in a land where there are many cultural conflicts between homeland practices and American customs, the assimilation process proves to be a problem for most contemporary immigrants. However, solutions to cope with cultural conflicts and the pressures of thriving in the United States have formed to make the assimilation process more manageable for today's generations of immigrants. Eventually, the similar tendency was noticed in my research when the analysis have identified the overwhelming number (37.5%) of parents who have decided to participate in dual language programs due to the closure to the native language and culture, out of which 35.4% were the parents who have chosen two-way immersion program for their children.

Figure 2. Reasons for choosing two-way immersion programs in the United States of America



However, in the United States students are at a much greater risk of developing a negative view of Spanish, even if it is their native language under the influence of society. This attitude inhibits students from meeting the goal of developing proficiency in the minority language while learning English. Therefore, the schools are in need to create a positive environment for Spanish-speaking students in order to create an additive bilingual environment. In this situation, two-way immersion programs have been shown to be effective in promoting positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors, and this may be the reason that they are more desirable in this context.

Only 12.5% of parents stated the knowledge of several languages as their priority. The informative picture is given in the following table.

Question 3: How much was your goal attained?

- A. Very Much (80-100%) B. Rather (60-79%)
- C. More or less (40-59%) D. Not enough (20-39%)
- E. Not at all (0-19%)

Of those parents involving in dual language education, the 38.5% rated the highest degree of their satisfaction. Among these satisfied parents, 40% have chosen two-way immersion programs, 30.8%- total immersion program and 38.5%- partial immersion program. It's essential to present here the 36.5% of parents who answered that their expectations were rather met and 15% of them said that it was more or less fulfilled. Only 10% of respondent parents expressed their slight dissatisfaction due to some difficulties they faced during their children's schooling period. For better understanding refer to the following table.

Table 2. Parental satisfaction of dual language programs

QUESTION 3	Total		Two-way Immersion Program		Total Immersion Program		Partial Immersion Program	
			65	62.5%	13	12.5%	26	25.0%
A. Very Much (80 - 100%)	40	38.5%	26	40.0%	4	30.8%	10	38.5%
B. Rather (60-79%)	38	36.5%	19	29.2%	6	46.2%	13	50.0%
C. More or less (40-59%)	16	15.0%	13	20.0%	1	7.7%	2	7.7%
D. Not enough (20-39%)	10	10.0%	7	10.8%	2	15.4%	1	3.8%
TOTAL:	104	100%	65	100%	13	100%	26	100%

Question 4 and 5: Was it difficult to learn in this program?

- A. Yes B. No C. Not so much

It is widely accepted that the absolute number of bilingual parents are not supposed to back bilingual programs and proceeding to my research 14.3% of parents responded that their children's participation in DL programs was processed by some difficulties and some of them were not hesitated by leaving their comments. The sample group was asked to note their ideas in open-ended questions aiming to provide more information.

However, on the question of difficulties 28.6% of parents expressed the concern that those difficulties were not very much experienced by their children.

Parents also made some comments, for example:

1. *“I worry about how to maintain my own culture and language yet teach and introduce a new language that is main form of communication”*
2. *“We had a hard time with school expectations”*
3. *“Homework was a real obstacle”*

The overwhelming number of parents (57.1%) answered that they have not experienced any difficulties as considering these programs productive and efficient choice for their children. For better understanding please refer to the following table.

Table 3. The dual language difficulties.

QUESTION 4	Total		Two-way Immersion Program		Total Immersion Program		Partial Immersion Program	
			65	62.5%	13	12.5%	26	25.0%
			A. YES	15	14.3%	9	13.8%	2
B. NO	59	57.1%	42	64.6%	6	46.2%	11	42.3%
D. Not So Much	30	28.6%	14	21.5%	5	38.5%	11	42.3%
TOTAL:	104	100%	65	100%	13	100%	26	100%

Conclusion

The quantitative information gathered through this survey provides evidence for the strong support parents have for dual language programs in the United States of America. They understand the purpose of the program, feel that it was their choice to select the program, believe that it's focal to learn a second language and that their child is learning in the dual language program of their choice. Parents view this program to be academically sound, an innovative vehicle for promoting communication and respect among children from different cultures. Contrary to what adversaries of bilingual education would like the public to believe, the results of this survey provide strong evidence that parents of children who attend dual language programs do not want this option eliminated. The motive for choosing any sort of immersion program, which turned out to have the

highest ranking, was 'to be close to the native language and culture' in all three types of immersion programs. As for other motives, parents who chose for their children this or that program do not demonstrate agreement of opinion. This can be explained by the peculiarities of programs as it is designed for minority language students needing to learn English, but wanting to keep their first language. It is the way to maintain pride in a student's cultural heritage to better meet the goals of cross-cultural understanding as well as learning a foreign language, and maintaining high academic standards. It is undeniable that the public education entails adding to and improving the competence of all students in as many areas as possible in order to create functional, responsible and aware citizens. The country has to act in the best interests of the student population, which is ever changing and growing. The public in general tend to believe that having all US students become fluent in more than one language is not only a marketable skill in today's increasingly diverse and global society, but it can also contribute to increased cognitive flexibility and high achievement in math, science and language arts. This important social and academic skill can be infused into all areas of curriculum with students learning in both English and at least one other language if not more throughout their academic careers. The dual-language capacity of teachers and services will also allow for more parent-staff-student interaction and leave room for creative community involvement, both locally and globally. It's noteworthy to stress the fact that the besides educators, parents are the strongest allies of well-implemented bilingual education programs such as the dual language programs the parents in this survey chose for their children. The challenge confronting educators and parents who support these programs is to convince local school boards and legislators that there is a need to increase the number of elementary dual language programs, expand the programs to the middle and secondary levels. The choice and the voice of the parents are cardinal to the implementation of quality educational programs. Indeed, it is the right of the parents, regardless of ethnicity, language or socioeconomic background to make informed educational choices for their children.

References

Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Ekaterine PIPIA

Baker, K.A., & de Kanter, A.A., (1981). *Effectiveness of bilingual education: A review of literature*. Washington DC: Office of planning, Budget and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Education.

Center for Applied Linguistics. (2002). Directory of two-way bilingual immersion programs in the U.S. Retrieved November 19, 2009 from <http://www.cal.org/twi/directory>

Collier, V. P. (1992). A synthesis of studies examining long-term language minority student data on academic achievement. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 16, 187-222

Cummins, J. (2001). Instructional conditions for trilingual development. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 4, 1, 61-75.

Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (1981). *Immigration law and defense* (2nd ed.). New York: Clark Boardman.

Lambert, W. E., & Tavior, P.M. (1987). Language minorities in the United States: Conflicts around assimilation and proposed modes of accommodation. In W. A. Van Horne & T. V. Tonnesen (Eds.), *Ethnicity and language* (pp. 58-89). Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin System Institute on Race and Ethnicity.

Lindholm-Leary, K. (2000). *Biliteracy for a Global Society: An Idea Book on Dual Language Education*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 447714).