

SECCIONES EUROPEAS – PROMOTING BILINGUAL PROGRAMMES IN CASTILLA-LA MANCHA, SPAIN

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Abstract

Our paper is the result of a first stage analysis into the perception of introducing bilingual programmes in Primary schools in the region of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. Since 1996 a small selection of schools have successfully integrated bilingual teaching through a project instigated between the British Council and the Spanish Ministry of Education, and since 2005 the regional educational authority, the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, has been promoting its continuance through a project called Secciones Europeas. This project aims to meet the requirements of the European Action Plan 2004-2006 to achieve bilingualism for all citizens by introducing a foreign language from the early ages of infant and primary education. Our study has focussed initially on schools in the area of Cuenca, the province with the lowest number of primary education centres who are currently involved in the project – only 3 out of a possible 67 - to try to determine the reasons why so few schools have adopted the programme. Our survey was designed to discover whether the low rate of involvement was due to lack of information, or to lack of expertise and linguistic knowledge, with a view to providing the necessary means to redress the situation. The results of our analysis so far indicate a strong need to improve primary teachers' foreign language skills in English and to create the provision for training and resources for CLIL classroom practice. Another notable aspect which our survey revealed was a general opinion among generalist teachers that only foreign language specialists are responsible for and capable of conducting Content and Language Integrated Learning. In the light of these results our plans are to further negotiate with the regional authority and generate the provision of information and training sessions to help improve the number of schools participating in the future.

Key words: bilingual education, Secciones Europeas, Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), primary teacher, CLIL

1. A brief background to Bilingual Education in Spain

Since the mid 1990s in Spain, the implementation of CLIL has been established in two bilingual communities, Catalonia and The Basque Country; the language medium being their respective regional languages together with Castilian, as indicated in Navés, T. et al. (1999) [1]. During this period education was managed by Central Government. In 1996 the Spanish Ministry of Education (MEC) signed an Agreement with both the British Council and the French Government to establish "bilingual" education programmes in state schools, Spanish-English and Spanish-French, respectively, and the regional community of Castilla-La Mancha opted into this programme.



Later, in 2005, responsibility for education, and thus responsibility for the bilingual agreement also, was transferred by the central government to the autonomous governments all over the country. The *Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha (JCCM)* government extended the original MEC/British Council Agreement to continue to function until 2010, and simultaneously, for the academic year 2005-2006, introduced another new project, *Secciones Europeas* (DOCM, of 7-02-2005) [2], which gave access to other schools to take part in a bilingual programme.

With Castilian as the only official language of the Castilla-La Mancha region, we use the term bilingual in this report to refer to the teaching of a foreign language across the curriculum, and not to instruction through a second language of the region (Marsh, D. 1997) [3]. According to the existing Education system in Spain, access to the teaching profession is provided for Initial Teacher Education graduates through a competitive state exam called *Concurso oposición al cuerpo de maestros de educación infantil y primaria*, as indicated by Fernández-Cézar et. al. (2009) [4]. This exam is organised and announced biannually by the Department of Education (*Consejería de Educación y Ciencia*) of the autonomous government through their official regional bulletin [2]. Aspiring foreign language specialists must demonstrate their language skills; otherwise there are no prerequisites in foreign languages for applicants in general. To date there has been no special category arrangements for bilingual school teachers, nor any specific selection process for placements in schools with bilingual programmes. These teachers who feel qualified to teach CLIL must first enter the body of *maestros*, or at least pass the first exam. If they are a foreign language specialist, they use a code number, 099, which indicates that they are also available to be called upon for supply work in bilingual schools.

2. The current situation in Castilla-La Mancha

During the initial period of the MEC/British Council Agreement from 1996 to 2005, only 7 primary schools of the region took part. From 2005 to the current academic year 2009-2010, this number has risen to 61 with the introduction of the bilingual programme *Secciones Europeas*, [5]. 48 of these schools are teaching contents through English, and 13 through French.

Castilla-La Mancha is a large, predominantly rural area in central Spain, whose population is spread out in small population nuclei rather than in big cities. This region is made up of five provinces: Albacete, Ciudad Real, Cuenca, Guadalajara and Toledo. In Albacete 8 schools are involved in Bilingual Programmes (3 English, 4 French, plus 1 British Council/ MEC Agreement); Ciudad Real has 20 schools, (16 English, 3 French, plus 1 British Council/ MEC Agreement); Cuenca has only one school involved in the *Secciones Europeas* programme in English, 2 French and 1 British Council/ MEC Agreement; Guadalajara has 9 schools (7 English, 3 French, plus 1 British Council/ MEC Agreement) and Toledo has 20 schools (15 English, 3 French and 2 British Council/ MEC Agreement). Our report focuses specifically on the schools of primary education in a representative part of the province of Cuenca in order to discover the reasons which might explain this notable difference in the number of schools which have adopted the *Secciones Europeas* programme.

3. Research objectives and criteria

In the first stage of our study of the bilingual situation in Castilla-La Mancha, our target teachers are those in full-time permanent employment in primary schools in the province of Cuenca. Only permanent members of staff were invited to take part in the survey, as temporary staff do not have any decision-making powers regarding programmes and curricula.

The questionnaire was delivered to 9 Primary Education schools in the area of Tarancón. This group of schools out of a total of 65 schools in the whole province of Cuenca were chosen because they provide a representative sample of the different population types which characterise the province: *Colegios Rurales Agrupados (C.R.A.)*- schools in rural areas which are grouped together for children from villages of fewer than 1900 inhabitants (4), Primary Schools in villages with a population of between 2000 and 6000 (3), and Primary Schools in towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants (2). The number of inhabitants of the towns or villages determines the status of each primary school and, therefore, its internal organization. The survey returned a total number of 56 responses out of a possible total of 155.

The questionnaire was designed to obtain information according to the following five main criteria: (see Appendix for sample of translated questionnaire).

- Teacher's status: head teachers or member of management team / specialist foreign language teacher / general primary education teacher.

- Teacher's awareness of the *Secciones Europeas* programme.
- Teacher's personal perception of his/her oral and written skills in the foreign language.
- Teacher's ability to conduct a subject class in the foreign language.
- Teacher's opinion on the desirability of bilingual programmes and the school's organizational capacity for implementing them.

4. Results of the survey

The results obtained after analysing the responses received from all the schools contacted in the survey are displayed in Figure 1, which shows the returns in percentages against the question numbers. Although the survey inquired into information regarding two foreign languages, both French and English, 100% of the responses returned an exclusive focus on English. Given the current situation previously outlined (out of a total of 3 schools in other parts of the Cuenca province 2 are already involved in bilingual teaching in French) we were surprised to see that this ratio of preference was not upheld by the teachers surveyed.

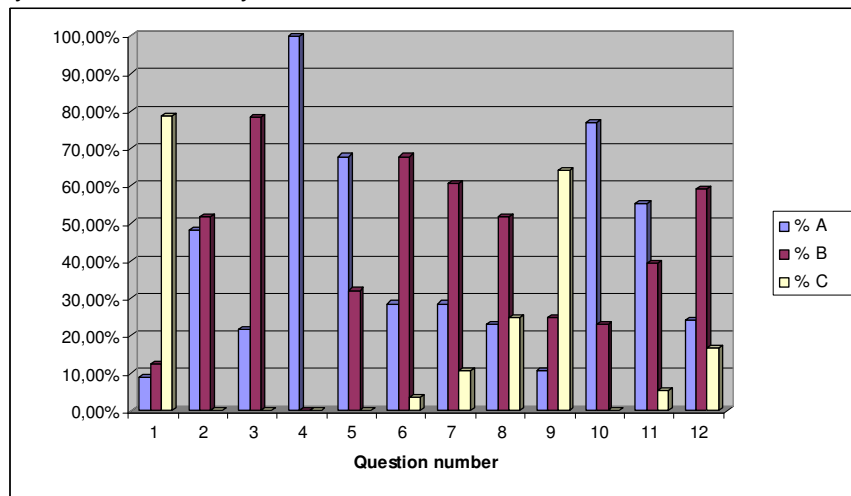


Fig.1. Responses to survey shown in percentages

5. Analysis

Regarding objective 1, there is no notable difference in the answers from teaching staff involved in management teams. The main difference is observed when comparing those who are specialists in a foreign language and those who are general primary education teachers. The conclusions we reach from this are included below.

Concerning our second objective (question 2) we discovered that just over half of the teachers - 51.79% (29) have not heard about the *Secciones Europeas* programme, although 48.21% (27) did know something about this bilingual programme option. This comes as somewhat of a surprise, considering that the regional department of education has this line as one of the prioritized areas for investment in the forthcoming years, with the purpose of fulfilling the European Action plan 2004-2006 [6].

Regarding objectives 3 and 4, which referred to teachers' perception of their ability in foreign languages (questions 6 to 8), over 50% consider that they can at least partially manage oral and written comprehension and production in the target language, as well as manage a simple conversation in English. But this percentage is reduced by half to 25% (14) when they are asked about their capability to partially conduct a content-focussed class in this language, and the number of those who consider this impossible for them rises to 64.29% (36). We can conclude therefore that while about 50% of primary teachers have some knowledge of English, overall they do not feel confident enough to use it in the classroom. Current in-set training provided by the regional government for teachers of schools who have decided to enter the bilingual programme includes an improvement of the English level of teachers by means of an intensive course at the *Escuela de Idiomas*, the official language school in Spain. It is designed to help them conduct classes in the target language, but in

general it would appear that methodology and strategies, or "teaching techniques" are not included as part of the course provided.

Of greater concern is the other 50% of teachers who see themselves as without any ability, neither oral nor written, in the foreign language. For this group of teachers therefore, the weakest point identified is the insufficient level of communication skills in English. This is not surprising, given that other than for specialist foreign language teachers there is currently no general requirement of foreign language qualifications; teachers of non-linguistic disciplines rarely have an acceptable level of foreign language knowledge to be involved in a bilingual programme.

For future teachers, this deficiency is being addressed in the new curriculum under the Bologna Agreement, designed to bring Initial Teacher training in Spain into line with the rest of Europe. From the current academic year 2009-2010 onwards all students will follow a minimum of two years of foreign language preparation for teaching and attain the equivalent of a B1 level of the Common European Framework, regardless of whether they begin training as Infant or as Primary specialists. Those who wish to may opt to continue with two further years of foreign language as a major, to B2 level, and there are plans in some colleges to include specific material on teaching contents through a foreign language (CLIL), as can be found in other parts of Europe [7]. This is, however, quite arbitrary and not all colleges will necessarily include it in their optional modules.

With regard to objective 5, we can say that primary education teachers generally do have a positive perception of the bilingual programme, as responses showed that more than 50% consider it desirable to include CLIL in Primary Education schools; slightly fewer than 40% believe in it with some reservations, and only 5% are reluctant or had negative responses. At the time of the survey, 83.30% (45) consider that their schools are in a position to enter the bilingual programme, which does show an overall positive perception of the current situation. We think that with some reinforcement in training this positive attitude could increase.

Some points of our study have not been determinant for our pursuit analysis. These are concerned with being able to effectively detect whether teachers would be more interested in taking courses at university locations or in the continuing education centres. It is notable, however, that the information gathered does clearly show an interest in attending some kind of course to mitigate their deficiencies regarding foreign language skills and teaching techniques.

Another point of interest which provided a variable in the responses regarding every issue other than organization is the kind of population nucleus the schools belong to. We found that responses were determined rather by the place the teachers live than by their place of work. Teachers of primary schools that fall into the category of C.R.A. (Colegio Rural Agrupado) (Rural Schools Group) warn about the organizational aspects because many of their teachers have to share their teaching load among different schools in the villages nearby and consequently are not consistently present at any one school in particular. Therefore although they may be interested in the programme, they would need considerable extra support from the regional government.

Conclusions

Our overall conclusion is that there is a need to stimulate both awareness and interest in the Secciones Europeas bilingual programmes for its future progress to be successful. One suggestion to remedy the situation revealed in Q2 could be to propose that the regional government inform not only teachers but also other citizens of the region through the use of the web page of the *Junta de Comunidades of Castilla-La Mancha*. In the link related to Education the regional commitment to this issue could be made public through a "Regional Plan for Plurilinguism", as done by the Andalusian regional government in 2004 [8].

The responses given by Qs 6-8, which identify that the weakest point of those teachers with a sufficient knowledge of English is their lack of confidence, need to be addressed by providing resources with which to conduct classes, as this aspect is not successfully achieved with the existing training. Courses dealing with CLIL Resources and Techniques could be provided as part of the continuing education programmes offered by the Teachers' Resource Centres (CPR). This would allow teachers to feel confident enough to adopt the bilingual programme with appropriate tools to use in the classroom and teach the pupils effectively.

For those teachers without foreign language skills who are currently employed in state schools, the proposal of programmes that provide them with an acceptable level of the foreign language as part of their in-set training would be extremely advantageous. Also, the development of adequate courses at university level would help them to gain the required language background, information and expertise.



We have been able to see a high degree of willingness to receive complementary training as expressed by 73.7% (43) of primary teachers, who would like to take part in courses that could prepare them to implement the bilingual programme in their schools. To succeed in the implementation of the *Secciones Europeas* programme, we consider the support of groups of professors of the Schools of Education at university level to be very interesting. These could collaborate with the regional administration through projects dealing with the design of appropriate courses on these topics and methods, with monitoring and evaluation of their implementation (Casal, S, et al, 2009) [9].

These suggestions properly acted upon, in addition to the degree courses that all trainee teachers will follow from now on, should contribute to bringing about a greater number of schools' participation in bilingual programmes as an integral part of Primary Education in the future. Our aim is to carry out further surveys in other areas of the province and actively promote those aspects previously outlined, together with any suggestions revealed by new data, in conjunction with the regional Education Authority.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our thanks to the *Delegación Provincial de Educación* for the information provided regarding the statistics on schools and teachers, and for their support and collaboration in delivering questionnaires to schools; also for their interest in promoting bilingual education.

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Appendix

Survey into the viability of introducing the *Secciones Europeas* Bilingual Programme into schools in the Province of Cuenca.

1. Please indicate your current professional status.

A	B	C
Management Team member	Foreign Language Specialist	General primary teacher/ other specialist

2. Do you know of the existence of the *Secciones Europeas* Programme?

A
Yes

B
No

3. Has your school ever proposed joining this programme?

A
Yes

B
No

4. Which foreign language is taught in your school?

A
English

B
French

5. Which foreign language do you know most?

A
English

B
French

6. Can you read and understand written texts in this language?

A
Fully

B
Partly

C
Not at all

7. Can you produce simple written texts in this language?

A
Fully

B
Partly

C
Not at all

8. Can you hold a basic conversation in this language?

A
Fully

B
Partly

C
Not at all

9. Do you think you could conduct a class from the general Primary curriculum (eg. maths, natural science, art etc) in this foreign language?

A
Fully

B
Partly

C
Not at all

10. Would you attend a course designed to improve your language skills in the classroom?

A
Yes

B
No

11. Do you think it desirable to include the teaching of contents through a foreign language?

A
Fully

B
Partly

C
Not at all

12. Do you think your school is organisationally equipped to introduce the *Secciones Europeas* Programme?

A
Fully

B
Partly

C
Not at all