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**EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN SPAIN. THE CURRENT  
LINGUISTIC PANORAMA OF THE VALENCIAN COMMUNITY**

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**Abstract**

This theoretical approach of this study is to compare four bilingual educational systems from Spain: Galicia, Catalonia, Basque Country and Valencian Community. To carry out our objective, we explore to what extent different educational systems promote bilingualism in some communities of Spain where local languages have received special attention over the last years. For this purpose, we used comparative methodology of deductive character, in order to contrast some variables of each structure educational system such bilingual programs, types of schools, curriculum, school access, bilingual teachers, native and immigrant students. In the case of Valencia we present the main characteristics of educational system of Valencian Community, where Valencian is the official language together with the state language Castilian Spanish. Bilingual educational programs are an extremely useful tool for a Europe which is interested in conserving its present linguistic and cultural diversity. In providing detailed accounts of the socio-cultural dimension of different Autonomous Communities from Spain and the characteristics of each context in which policies are inserted, this paper enriches our understanding of the limits and possibilities of the bilingual education models.

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## 1. Introduction

In the age of globalization and migration, which brings increasing diversity to the multicultural Spain, we find ourselves in a landscape where the political, social, economic and educational context is grounded on a particular understanding of the concept of bi/multilingualism.

Nowadays, using two or even several languages is a natural phenomenon in many regions of the world (Aronin, & Singleton, 2008; Cook, 2007, Graddol, 2006). The advantages of speaking and being



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proficient in two or more languages are valued throughout society strengthening and enriching a person's ability to succeed in life. During the past decades, research in bilingualism has made tremendous progress and provided evidence that speaking more than one language facilitates general cognitive functioning and results in more elaborate cognitive structures. As Commins & Miramontes (2005, p. 118) argue, "to be bilingual is more than knowing two different languages. The presence of the two languages in the speakers' brains provides them with increased cognitive flexibility. Another advantage of being bilingual is the ability to communicate with people from more than one linguistic background and thereby from different cultural backgrounds." Schools are a major site for the formation of knowledge of languages and cultures. In this sense, it is crucial to recognize that the learning and development as such learning is mediated through learners' languages and cultures.

Spanish or Castilian is the official language in Spain along with other three co-official languages: Galician, Catalan, and Basque. The 1978 Spanish Constitution (see Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution below) states that Spanish is the official language of Spain, and recognizes the co-official status of Galician, Catalan and Basque:

3:1. Castilian is the official Spanish language of the State. All Spaniards have a duty to know it and the right to use it.

3:2 The other Spanish languages will also be official in their respective Autonomous Communities, in accordance with their Statutes.

3:3 The wealth of Spain's distinctive linguistic varieties is a cultural patrimony that will be the object of special respect and protection. (Spanish Constitution)

In order to establish a direct communication between citizens of different language contexts of Spain, Castilian is used as a lingua franca. Preserving the inclusion of these minorities' languages, multilingualism in Spain has been a difficult task. To achieve this goal, it is necessary a complex process to preserve cultural and linguistic identity among the various regions and peoples of Spain. Since the death of Franco, the situation of the legal status and promotion of these minorities languages have remarkably advanced. Nevertheless, a clear growth in the spoken use of these languages, and full legal equality with Spanish has not been reached yet.

In this paper we focus on bilingual language policies in Spain, as these policies are the main instruments through which minorities languages are conventionally allocated curriculum space in mainstream schooling. Languages policies construct the role and function of languages in complex ways, and policies and their discourses are an important part of the context in which language education occurs (Liddicoat, 2013). In order to understand how policies allocate space to the minority's languages and how these provide a context for understanding the dynamic of education, it is necessary to examine the ways that policies construct educational possibilities for students in linguistically diverse contexts.

## **2. Bilingual Approaches to Language Learning in Spain**

According to Beswick (2007) and Herrero-Valeiro (2003), Galician is an autonomous language closely related to Portuguese and to other Romance languages like Spanish or French and it is spoken in three main dialectal areas:

1. Eastern Galician, which includes the dialects spoken outside the Galician administrative area, the most important of which is the Galician spoken in Asturias;
2. Central Galician, among which the Mondoñedo and Lugo-Ourense varieties stand out;
3. Western Galician, where the dialects of the Fisterra region in the north and of Tui and Baixa Limia in the south stand out (García-Mateo, & Arza, 2012).

Galicia is an autonomous community where Galician is the co-official language which “everyone has the right to know and use it” according to Statute of Autonomy of Galicia. The 1983 Linguistic Normalisation Act guarantees and regulates citizens’ linguistic rights, regarding the fields of administration, education and the media. Regarding the educational system, Galician language is guaranteed and promoted in the region of Galicia.

It is thus appropriate to remember that during the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) coercive measures were applied, prohibiting the use of Galician, along with Catalan and Basque, in public domains (Freitas, 2008). Galician was recognized as an official language, as well as Spanish in 1981 through the Statute of Galician. Therefore, the students shall have the same writing and oral skills in Galician to the same extent as Spanish. The educational authorities are obliged to provide the “means necessary to promote the progressive use of Galician in education” establishing as the minimum aim the “on finishing the two cycles in which Galician is obligatory” and the children have the right to receive education in Galician, their mother tongue. The main goal for the bilingual education in Galicia is to ensure that students obtain full linguistic competence in both official languages (Galician and Castilian) by the end of obligatory education. Another goal in the educational area is to convert Galician into the vehicle language of the Galician education system. In Galicia’s bilingual programs, students are never segregated into groups according to their L1, and both languages, Spanish and Galician are used to teach content (Fernández Paz, Lorenzo Suárez, & Ramallo, 2008).

With regard to the Catalan community, we can say that Catalonia is an officially bilingual territory situated in the north-east of Spain. Catalan is spoken in four European states. In Spain has been declared official in three autonomous communities (Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Region of Valencia), and also is spoken in some border villages of Aragón and Murcia. It is the only official language of Andorra and it is also spoken in the French department of Pyrénées Orientales), and in the Italian city of Alghero, in Sardinia. Catalan is a Latin language, closer to the most commonly spoken Romance languages, Italian and French from both a lexical and phonetic point of view. In Catalonia the majority of people are bilingual. A 2013 census found that 95% of the population of Catalonia understand Catalan, 55.8% can write it, and 73.2% can speak it, but this latter number increases to 96.4% when restricted to people born in Catalonia.

The language normalization policies were implemented in the early 1980s, after democracy was restored. With the restoration of democracy, the 1979 Statute of Catalonia and the 1983 Statute of the Balearic Islands recognized Catalan as their own and official language, as well as Spanish. As is well known, during Franco’s dictatorship, it was abolished the teaching in any language other than Castilian and thus, Castilian has become generalized. The Catalan language and culture were intensely persecuted and discriminated against and it was a tool aimed to limit its use to private and family spheres being excluded from public communication, prohibited in education, in administration and in any media system.

Regarding the educational context in Catalonia, students are bilingual and illiterate as a consequence of mastering Catalan and Spanish when compulsory education finishes. The model of language immersion allows all students to learn to read and write in Catalan, as children are schooled totally in Catalan, and gradually they continue to learn in Spanish and to master this language. Then, what they know in one language, they can learn to express in the other as they gain fluency.

In the Catalan schools there are large numbers of immigrant children who have migrated to Catalonia from different countries of the world bringing with them their cultures, languages, customs, and ways of life. These students are going through a process of acculturation, trying to establish a foothold in the Catalan system. To address the process of acquiring the minimal skills for communication, the Catalan government has created a temporary support for the new immigrant children aged 8 to 16 from other countries who are new to the Catalan education system and unfamiliar with Catalan, so-called “reception classrooms (RC)” (*aules d’acollida*). “In Catalonia, no student can spend more than 50% of school time in the RC, and it is recommended that they remain there for no more than two years, when they should have reached level A2 (basic oral and written communication) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) linguistic ability index” (Trenchs-Parera & Patiño-Santos, 2013). Such classes of knowledge of Catalan language, help the students to be familiar with Catalan, a necessary requirement for integration in the Catalan educational system. Sanz (2008) defines the school immersion programs in Catalonia as “programs [that are intended to] form bilingual pupils with balanced illiteracy and a greater mastery of the two languages, which they often use as is required by the sociolinguistic context in which they live.” (Sanz, 2008: 224).

We can conclude, that the educational model in Catalonia works and Catalan students know Catalan, the language of instruction, and they also get the same results in Spanish language exams, if not better, than in the rest of Spain.

Another region with an official language is the Basque Autonomous Community where Basque or *euskera* is a minority and isolated language, the only pre-Indo-European language in Western Europe, unrelated to Romance languages. During Franco’s regime, speaking *euskera* in the schools was illegal (Breton, & Ruiz, 2008), thus, the language suffered an irreparable loss. By the end of the Franco’s dictatorship, a network of private schools *ikastola*, was created clandestinely, entirely funded by the parents with the purpose of introducing Basque into the educational system. Some limited financial support was provided by central government to *ikastola* schools after Franco's death.

Basque language started a recovery process from the 80’s, after the creation of the Autonomies. The revitalization of the Basque language has been one of the priorities of the Basque Government. In the educational system this revitalization has been very successful and *education has contributed significantly to the increase in the number of Basque speakers* (Ardeo, 2014).

In the Basque Autonomous Community, Basque was officially introduced in the public education system in 1983 with the law that regulates the use of Basque and Spanish in the Primary and Secondary School. For the Primary and Secondary School three models were created, giving the possibility to each institution to choose the model to offer. In model A, almost all teaching is carried out in Spanish, and Basque is taught only as a subject. Model B is an intermediate model, in which Basque and Spanish are used as means of instruction, some of the subjects are taught in Spanish, and another part in Basque. This model is the way for children from Spanish speaking homes to achieve a good command of Basque. In

model D – the letter C is not normally used in Basque – Basque is the vehicular language and Spanish is only taught as a subject. This model is designed primarily for students from Basque-speaking homes. In fact, the Model A has been losing students progressively, and it is in constant decline, whereas more than half of pre-university students are registered in model D, the model with the greatest number of students. It is clear that in the Basque country, the educational system is bilingual. Regarding the Basque language, it is obvious that it enjoys an important status in the region where Basque is spoken (Singleton, Fishman, Aronin & O Laoire, 2013).

Finally, Valencian is an autonomous or indigenous language (*llengua pròpia*) by the Valencian State of Autonomy and the Spanish Constitution, recognized as the official language of the Valencian Community in 1982. As suggested by historical facts mentioned above, during Franco period, Valencian was totally forbidden and used only in the family and in rural areas. The only language employed in the educational system, mass media, etc. was Castilian despite the use of Valencian in informal settings. The majority of the people consider Valencian a distinct language from Catalan; however, some linguists consider it a dialect of Catalan or the same language as that spoken in Catalonia. The Valencian Academy of Language states that laws, norms and acts of the Generalitat Valenciana shall be promulgated and published in the two official languages. At the same time, with regard to the regulation of official use of Valencian, it is accepted Valencian as a language through which people have the right to address the administrative bodies of the Valencian Community in either of its two official languages. On the other hand, the people have the right to know and be taught in Valencian. The Government of Valencia shall adopt measures in order to ensure knowledge of both languages.

As for the educational system, Generalitat Valenciana promotes, supports and guarantees the teaching and use of Valencian to all students. One of the major objectives is to create a balanced presence of Valencian and Castilian at all educative stages through a bilingual education which must guarantee that pupils obtain a good command of Castilian and Valencian by the end of their compulsory educational period. The bilingual educational model incorporated in schools was *Programa d'Incorporació Progressiva* or PIP (Progressive Incorporation Programme), a programme where some subjects would be taught in Valencian and others in Castilian. Later, were developed two other programmes known as PIL *Programa d'Immersion Lingüística* (Linguistic Immersion Programme) and PEV *Programa d'Ensenyament en Valencià* (Valencian Training Programme). In PIL programme, pupils receive instruction in Castilian and only one subject is taught in Valencian. In time, to ensure bilingualism, the hours of subjects taught in Valencian progressively increases, except for Castilian language and literature. The second programme PEV includes the use of instruction in Valencian from the early stages at primary education in 90%, whereas Castilian includes only 10% of instruction. Finally, we can state that depending on the educational context and the sociolinguistic situation of each province, the schools of the Valencian Community include one or two of these bilingual programs in their curricula.

Empirical investigations on the level of competence between context-embedded oral L2 (second language) skills compared to literacy-related skills in L2 have shown that immigrant students can acquire considerable fluency in the dominant language of the society when they are exposed to it in the environment and at school. However, and as demonstrated by many researchers (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981b; Hakuta, Butler & Witt 2000; Klesmer, 1994), despite this rapid growth in conversational fluency,

it generally takes a minimum of five years (and frequently much longer) for immigrant students to catch up with native-speakers when it comes to academic aspects of the language.

Schools are becoming more diverse culturally, with the number of different languages spoken by children increasing. Accordingly to European Commission (2008), it has become clear that the percentage of immigrant students that arrived from their countries of origin has increased three or four times since 2000.

In the Spanish context, some researchers have looked especially at the language acquisition process by immigrant pupils (Díaz-Aguado, Baraja & Royo, 1996; Maruny & Molina 2000; Huguet, Navarro, Chireac, & Sansó, 2012). In this respect, Oller & Vila, 2011 carried out a study with 396 immigrants pupils from primary education in a bilingual context. The results indicated a time period required of six years for immigrant students to develop Catalan and Spanish academic skills at similar competence as native-speakers. The study also points out that the participants were seen to have lower levels of linguistic competence in their L2 compared to those which used the same language in school and in the social environment.

However, as we have noticed, in all the studies presented, length of stay in relation to the age of onset (the age at which a person begins acquiring the target language) is an important factor in explaining the participants' ultimate level of linguistic competence. It may provide stronger indicator of the effects of the L1 on the process of acquisition of the L2 and L3.

### **3. Conclusions**

This paper discussed major implementation challenges of bilingual education in four Autonomous Communities from Spain with co-official languages, main problems faced and solutions offered from the government of each region. As it was mentioned above, the historical evolution of the Galician, Catalan, Valencian and Basque Countries and their current status present differences in political, linguistic and pedagogical terms.

The bilingual educational systems from Galicia, Catalonia, Basque Country and Valencian Community face similar implementation challenges, but they are different in terms of languages involved. The bilingual programs should be a priority with full support from the government, policy makers, teachers and the society, like quality education for students with limited resources, training of bilingual teachers, by maintaining student's native language and improving the academic performance of students.

In short, bilingual educational programs are an extremely useful tool for a Europe which is interested in conserving its present linguistic and cultural diversity. In providing detailed accounts of the socio-cultural dimension of different Autonomous Communities from Spain and the characteristics of each context in which policies are inserted, this paper enriches our understanding of the limits and possibilities of the bilingual education models.

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