



Exploring the Association between Bilingual Education Programs and Oral Proficiency in Second Language: An Investigation of Speaking Skills of Higher Secondary Students from Sialkot''

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ABSTRACT

Bilingual education programs refer to the strategies or ways in which instruction of different subjects is provided to the students in a second language, in addition to their native language. Some of them include dual language immersion and transitional language programs. Economic benefits of the bilingual education system are evident in addition to the psychological benefits. The present study seeks to examine the inclined effects of one of bilingual education programs: Transitional or Dual Language, on the oral competence of higher secondary students from different strata of Sialkot, Pakistan. Mix methods research was used. Data collection was done using questionnaires. An online survey form was presented to forty teachers from different strata, that is, public, private, rural and urban sectors of Sialkot whose students were from multiple backgrounds and results were analyzed. Findings of the research highlights inclined vocabulary retention and pronunciation in ESL speaking skill of students while mitigating the use of Urdu in Bilingual classroom practices. More focus was driven towards lexicons in English in comparison to Urdu. The study advocates for inclined English language speaking skill and declined use of Urdu by students in bilingual classroom, highlighting the positive tendencies of students for English.

Keywords: bilingual education programs, oral proficiency, higher secondary students

1. Introduction

Bilingual Education Programs speak for the strategies through which students are taught in two languages, one being native and the other is target or second language. The goal of these programs is to develop both language skills of students. There are various programs used in different countries like Spain, China, India, USA and Pakistan depending upon the academic, social, psychological, and economic circumstances of students. In Pakistan particularly dual language Immersion is used at the initial academic years and transitional programs at later level, namely secondary, higher secondary or undergraduate. The goal of Bilingual Education is to impart first and second language skills to the students at every given level. There are two paradigms to be analyzed in Bilingual Education Programs: instruction of second language and instruction in second language. We are primarily concerned with the first one in general and specifically to examine what level the students tend to achieve in second language speaking skills.

Pakistan is a country having multicultural and multilingual population using approximately 77 different languages in different regions (Eberhard et al., 2020). In academia, every region tends to use its distinct version of language with English being the second language. First language in most of the cases is Urdu, also designated as the national language and Lingua Franca. For the students of higher secondary and undergraduate levels belonging to middle and lower middle strata of society at public sector colleges of Sialkot, both dual language immersion and transitional programs are used to impart second language competence, as students are

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already enough competent in their native language by the time they reach this stage. However, the phenomenon to be studied is how they are given instructions in second language especially, during the teaching of various subjects, in addition to English. Transitional programs can be early exit or late exit depending on when the students stop receiving input in their native language and tend to show enough proficiency in the target or second language. In what ways do second language instruction and instruction in second language incline their L2 speaking proficiency is the focus of this study.

1.1 Research Objective

The objective of the study is as follows:

- i. To examine the inclined effects of Immersion and Dual Language Program on second language speaking skills of students

1.2 Research Question

- i. How do bilingual education programs like Immersion and Dual Language Program tend to incline second language speaking skills of students?

2. Review of the Literature

The literature review is sectioned below to elucidate various perspectives of bilingual education programs with respect to speaking skills and trace the research gap:

2.1 Background of Bilingual Education

According to Geneese and Christian(2001, p.1)"Bilingual Education involves two languages as a media of instruction". This means that whatever the instructional content may be, bilingual education allows teachers to deliver it in both the student's native language and the second Language. Research in bilingual education in general reveals that gaining competence in second language through bilingual education is much harder and more complex than learning or gaining education in first language. First language has already become a major part of the linguistic repertoire by the time the students start receiving classroom instruction in second language.

2.2 Interrelationship of first and second language

There are two major paradigms when we try to inculcate first language in the second or vice versa. The first one is of the view that first language aids in learning second language. Cummins (2007) has proposed The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, which says that first language facilitates second language development in students. It goes for the positive paradigm. He proposes that most of the structures in L2 can be made easily comprehensible due to the aid of L1 (Jessner & Cenoz, 2000). Ellis has also extended this idea by proposing that learners build some interim rules of L1 that are strictly rigid, and while learning a second language, these rules persuade them to first think in their native language and then translate those thoughts into the second language.

2.3 First and second languages as Separate Entities

In contrast with what Ellis, Cummins and Jessner, and Cenoz has concluded, there are researchers like Stephen Krashen (1981) and Swain (1985) who in their Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, and Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, respectively, came to the terms that first and second language systems are highly different and while learning a second language in a natural or formal environment, first language of the learners prove to be a hurdle throughout the process. They are of the view that for learning and teaching in second language, the sole source should be the second language itself. This controversy has made its appearance in several domains of second language teaching and acquisition and has been continuously affecting teaching polices, methods and approaches in second language classrooms throughout the globe, and Pakistan is no exception.

2.4 Bilingual Education and Overall Academic performance

Rashid and Ahmed (2018) opine that the primary focus, expertise, and intelligence of an individual are enhanced and exhibited through language, be it mother tongue or second language afterwards. Therefore, our students must be competent in the learning of second language before learning that as a subject. This study also explains the difference between bilingualism and language transfer. However, it does not explain the relationship between L1 and L2 and effects of L1 on L2 either.

The students who speak native language more fluently in formal and informal settings tend to be more socially and emotionally resilient and efficient in their interactional skills. They tend to engage in group talks and discussions. Retention of English vocabulary and over all language occurs when someone analyzes native language speakers of Punjabi in ESL classroom. They tend to maintain social identity (Bukhari & Dilshad, 2022). The study highlights significance of L1 and L2 but it does not necessarily provide much detail into the second language learning process.

Mispronunciation and misinterpretation in English language is a major problem studied in the students of ESL learners of Punjabi. The main reason found behind this scenario is the insecurity, which Punjabi native speakers face due to the lack of formal education and least knowledge of learning a language. Language learning institutions do not take steps to improve these fatal conditions of ESL students in ESL classrooms (Sharma, 2015). This negatively affects bilingual education programs in ESL classrooms in Pakistan (specifically related to Sialkot as the native language of students is Punjabi and they are given instructions and education in Punjabi, Urdu, and English simultaneously). However, this particular study does not talk about the overall effects of Punjabi on English speaking skill of students.

2.5 Bilingual Education Program: Transitional

Collier and Thomas (1998) in their research report that for language minority students, the efficient way to get long-term academic achievement was Two-way Bilingual Education Program. Again, Collier and Thomas (1996) propose that when language minority students are given academic instruction in their mother tongue for the early six years, they tend to perform better as compared to those students who are taught in a second language initially. Although he explains Transitional Bilingual Program as a positive source in academic achievement, the study does not give detailed insights into how a Bilingual Education Program instruction accounts for the inauguration of successful second language speaking skill of students.

Hakuta (1986) conducts a study and concludes that the students who use their first language in classrooms continue to have better cognitive skills unlike the students whose only language in classrooms is English. The study explains cognitive skills while giving a major research gap in the area of second language speaking skill. In addition, Cummins (2000b) also points out that when both languages are given equal esteem in classroom, students are developed better linguistically and academically. Similarly, Crawford (1992) also stresses that LEP develop their English speaking fluency when their mother tongue is also refined along with their second language. The study does not account for the in-depth phenomenon of how the instructions in both languages develop English Speaking skills of students and what would be the appropriate time to exit between the two languages.

Global Education Monitoring Report in 2016 issued a language policy, which said that during early six years of education, children should be taught in mother tongue as it is the language of dream and meditation before anything else. However, educational policies in Pakistan have not addressed the issue straight away creating linguistic and cultural conflict among the minority language groups. Adding to the fact that there are 6 major mother tongues used in Pakistan: Punjabi, Seraiki, Pushto, Sindhi, and Balochi in addition to Urdu, early bilinguals receive input in two languages from their birth while late bilinguals are given second language input during the later years either in natural settings or through formal language instruction. This phenomenon consequently has widened the gap between two languages and is a keen topic of interest for language researchers in Pakistan, particularly in bilingual education programs.

Transitional Bilingual Education programs can be further broken down into early transit or late transit. UNESCO Education polices advocate for the early transit programs while in Pakistan, the practical approaches in classroom go for late transit. The phenomenon further depends on different entities to be taken account of, the primary being background of the students, prior knowledge and usage of L1 and L2 in formal and informal settings and the degree to which they are taught in a second language in their early school years. Keeping in view the gap of all the prior literature, the present research seeks to analyze the opinions and experience of the bilingual teachers of different subjects who choose both L1(Urdu) and L2(English) in teaching of different subjects in the classroom and in what ways early and late exit program tend to incline second language speaking skills of students, that is, English.

In this way, the present research seeks to explore if and in what ways dual language programs for teaching various subjects in the classroom tend to incline second language speaking skills of students and what are the key comparison and contrast, which occur in the process in the case of early or late transit bilingual education programs at higher secondary level students belonging to various strata and academic backgrounds and what are the optimal experiences of the teachers regarding English language speaking skill of students, teaching in these scenarios.

3. Methodology

To conduct this study, mix methods research approach was used to present numerical and descriptive analysis. Close-ended questions are used for the analysis and interpretation of data.

3.1 Research Tool

For collection of data, a 20-item questionnaire related to 4 different factors (5 questions from each factor) was designed by two English language-teaching experts in higher education department. This online questionnaire helps to collect data from a larger population at a given time and results can be interpreted more accurately as compared to qualitative data. This online questionnaire comprised 20 questions all of which were close-ended.

3.2 Research Sample

The online questionnaire was distributed among fifty teachers of higher secondary level of public and private sectors through different platforms, Facebook, Whatsapp and Gmail. Cluster sampling technique was used by researchers as it is more feasible to collect data and analyze it systematically. According to cluster sampling strategy, any location within a group with similar characteristics is chosen for data collection (Barnard, 2002). The teachers were in service in various public and private sectors like Punjab Group of Colleges, Nisa Girls College, Standard College for Girls, GC Women University Sialkot and University of Management and Technology. However, approximately 40 students out of 50 responded. The respondents were subject specialist of various disciplines like Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Information Technology. Bilingual Education Programs, that is, early or late exit tend to incline second language skills of students as well as teachers, particularly English in our context, as it has become the need of every person in this growing and updated world.

4. Data Analysis

The basic purpose of this study is to analyze experiences and observations of teachers of various disciplines like Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Information Technology from various public and private sector colleges and universities regarding the development in English language speaking skills of the students engaged in early and late Transit Bilingual Education Programs throughout their academic history and in what domains they observed inclination in their second language speaking ability. In the following, each question from the questionnaire is analyzed by dint of the collected responses:

Q 1. Is your teaching experience more than 3 years?

The data show teaching experience of various department teachers in their said institutions. The answers represent 28 of the teachers responded *YES* while 8 answered *NO*, depicting maximum experience of instructors at various institutes.

Q 2. Do you teach your subjects in both L1 and L2 of students?

24 teachers answered *YES* that they teach their students in both their native and second language, that is Urdu and English while 8 answered *NO*. This question helps in the detailed analysis of bilingual classroom practices.

Q 3. Do you use 60% L1 and 40% L2 while teaching students?

26 of the 40 teachers answered *YES* while 14 teachers answered *NO*, showing that majority of teachers choose to use both L1 (in 60% ratio) and L2 (in 40% ratio) despite of their students' background.

Q 4. Did your students go for Late Transit Program more than Early Transit during initial school years?

59% of the teachers said *YES* while 41% teachers said *NO*; furthering the notion that majority of students would have done well in L2 proficiency at higher secondary level accordingly.

Q 5. Do you teach students using Early Transit technique during formal session?

The answer to this question was *YES* from 29 of the teachers and *NO* from 11 of them depicting the usage of Early Transit Program by maximum instructors at higher secondary level.

Q 6. Do you believe the decreased L2 classroom input in Late Transit being the main cause of declined speaking proficiency of students?

25 teachers answered *YES* implicating the fact that Late Transit Program and using Urdu more than required is main reason of mitigated English speaking in terms of fluency while 15 teachers responded *NO*.

Q 7. In case of dual language immersion does maximum progress occur in L2 (English) vocabulary retention of students?

27 teachers responded *YES* and 13 teachers responded *NO* to the question. The statistics shows high vocabulary building of students generally, when they are given dual language Immersion.

Q 8. Using CLT in immersion, do they use maximum vocabulary portion of L2 in their daily conversations?

27 of the teachers responded *YES* that in a dual language immersion program using both Urdu and English, students do great in vocabulary building, specifically in English. While 11 responds *NO*, showing that communicative language teaching of English results in good speaking skill of students.

Q 9. Irrespective of their L2 background, do they prefer to answer in English when they are asked questions in the same language?

The results show that 29 teachers answered *YES*, while 11 teachers responded *NO* highlighting that students have an innate tendency and an intrinsic motivation to use second language in their answers.

Q 10. Do they show long-term vocabulary retention of English as compared to first language?

31 of the teachers said *YES* actualizing the concept that they show inclined vocabulary retention to a maximum level and time duration. Much of the students are involved in L2 are successful in long-term memory retention.



Q 11. While communicating with their friends bilingually, do the students of ETP use L2 vocabulary more as compared to L1?

32 teachers responded *YES* while 8 responded *NO*, depicting that Early Transit Program results in motivation of students to use L2 even in informal situations.

Q 12. Do the English speaking skills of the students assist their analytical skills?

30 teachers responded *YES* and were of the view that second language, that is, English enhances their analytical skills when they are assessed formally and informally in the class. 4 teachers responded in negation.

Q 13. In their verbal reasoning assessments, do students prefer to use L2 when asked questions in both L1 and L2?

31 teachers said *YES*, while 7 teachers responded *NO*, that their students use second language more in comparison to Urdu in their verbal reasoning assessments despite of whatever their background knowledge may be.

Q 14. Do students try to indulge in group-discussions related to analytical thinking in L2 in a Bilingual classroom?

36 teachers responded *YES* and 4 responded *NO* adding to the fact that when given formal assessments related to analytical skills, they chose English over Urdu because they were all the students indulged in Early Transit Program of Bilingual Education.

Q 15. Does their L1 (Urdu or Punjabi) accent have an impact on L2 pronunciation when presenting in the class?

33 teachers have positive response as to when giving formal presentation in the class, students have distinct accent of English irrespective of Urdu or Punjabi accent all because of their indulgence in Early Transit Program during school years. Conversely, 7 teachers answered *No*.

Q 16. During their conversation with other students in a Bilingual class, do students feel motivated using English?

32 responded *YES* and 8 responded *NO* that the students tend to show inclination towards English and are highly motivated to use it when talking with one another regarding classroom tasks or general conversation.

Q 17. Do the extrinsically motivated students in class tend to excel in L2 speaking in comparison to intrinsically motivated ones?

29 teachers said *YES* being of the view that extrinsic motivation of the students was higher in Early Transit Bilingual Education Program in various subjects in the class. They believe that they have high self-esteem while using English language in and outside the class. On the other hand, 3 teachers responded *NO*.

Q 18. Do students of Late Transit Programs have declined fluency in English speaking generally?

Asking about English speaking proficiency in general (vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation), 35 teachers observed and believed that students show decline in speaking when engaged in late Transit Program. Only 5 teachers responded in negation.

Q 19. Do students of Early Transit Program have inclined fluency in English speaking skill generally?

Asking about English speaking proficiency in general, 30 teachers observed and believed that students show inclined speaking skill when engaged in Early Transit Program, while 4 teachers answered *NO* to the question.

Q 20. Are inaccurate teaching practices in L2 the major reason of failure in their L2 production in a Dual Language Program?

34 teachers said *YES* to the question that it is due to inaccurate teaching practices of L2 in classroom and the same condition throughout their initial and final school years like that of higher secondary level. Conversely, 5 teachers responded *NO* to the question.

5. Research Findings

After analyzing the data quantitatively, the research has come up with the following Findings:

1. Students who are taught through different types of bilingual education Program throughout their academic time tend to perform differently based on their exposure to the second language in the classroom. In Sialkot, most of the people use Urdu or Punjabi as their first language and English is taught as second language. The study is concerned with Urdu because Punjabi is not used in a classroom setting. Teachers mostly use Urdu and English both languages while teaching concepts and subjects to students. When they are exposed to various subjects in both the languages at the start of their academic journey, they are well aware of both languages. The extent to which one language is used in comparison to the other, it tends to change their proficiency in a second language.

2. In case of Early Transit Bilingual Education Program, teachers teach various subjects while use both L1 and L2 at the initial level, while gradually mitigating the use of L1 in the class and ultimately moving to the L2 completely. Thus, they show inclined proficiency in L2 speaking (English in our case) while excelling in various aspects of the speaking (vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and grammar). The school years become so much responsible for the L2 production that they perform ideally for the rest of their academic journey.

3. Conversely, in case of Late Transit Bilingual Education Program, teachers teach various subjects in both L1 and L2 at the initial level and they tend never to change the pattern. They keep teaching students in both the languages and when the students have reached a certain level and their L2 proficiency is not ideally built, the teachers choose to transit to only second language usage in the class. This in terms of Critical Period Hypothesis can be of 5 years of age or generally up to the primary or elementary level education of students. However, as the students have been already exposed to L1 more than L2 throughout their school years and they exit way later to L2 when their reception ability of L2 has declined, they do not perform well in L2 speaking.

6. Conclusion

The use of the first language in teaching and learning the target language has been the major debate in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) over the years (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Machaal, 2012; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). The present study investigates if and in what ways Early and Late Transit Bilingual Education Program affect the speaking skills of students and how teachers of various subjects teach their students while using both L1 and L2. The possible effects of L1 on L2 in general and specifically in the domains of L2 vocabulary retention and pronunciation skills of students.

The study also compares the progress of the students actively involved in Dual Language Immersion at primary or elementary level and at higher secondary level and how these levels operationalize and aid the second language speaking skills of students. In this way, the research proposes recommendations for teachers to enhance and improve L2 skills of students while teaching various subjects through Bilingual Education Program in schools and at Higher Secondary Level. This research concludes that teaching various subjects

through Dual Language Programs is of great significance and Early Transit students performed well in contrast to Late Transit Program students.

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