An Understanding of the Concept and Conditions of Bilingualism: A Study in an EFL Setting

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This paper presents a study carried out at a private school that implemented a bilingual program more than a decade ago. The main aim of the project was to find out how the school community understands the concept of bilingualism and the conditions required to fulfill the goals of a bilingual curriculum at the school. Data were collected through surveys and focus groups made up of different members of the school community. The results showed that bilingualism is associated with a high intensification of English classes and the necessity of having English-speaking employees. Results also depict some theoretical issues about bilingualism and important conditions for implementing a bilingual program.

Key words: bilingualism, additive, content, based, instruction, power, prestige, focus, groups

Este artículo presenta una investigación que se realizó en un colegio privado que ha desarrollado un programa de bilingüismo por más de una década. El propósito principal fue identificar cómo concibe la comunidad educativa el concepto de bilingüismo y cuáles son las condiciones necesarias para lograr los objetivos de un currículo bilingüe en la institución. Se recolectó información a través de una encuesta y entrevistas de grupos focales conformados por diferentes miembros de la comunidad educativa. Los resultados mostraron que el concepto de bilingüismo se asocia principalmente con la intensificación de clases de inglés y la necesidad de contar con empleados bilingües. Los resultados también muestran algunos elementos teóricos sobre bilingüismo y condiciones importantes para llevar a la práctica un programa de esta naturaleza.

Palabras claves: bilingüismo, bilingüismo aditivo, enfoque basado en contenidos, poder y prestigio, grupos focales

Introduction

This research was carried out at one of the most important private schools in Ibagué (San Bonifacio de Las Lanzas School or SBL), an intermediate size city of Colombia located in the center of the country, just three hours from Bogotá, the

capital. Ibagué has been facing significant changes in the educational area. Schools have been looking for strategies to offer a competitive education that responds to the current social demands. There is a growing necessity of learning a foreign language, especially English, which is considered a language of prestige because it is considered as one of the most spoken languages in the world and has a strong influence on technology, information, and education. As a result, there has been a growing demand of English programs in the city and many language centers have emerged.

Nowadays people have a wide variety of methodologies, styles, programs and benefits which make the market more competitive. Most of these institutions have designed special programs for private schools which have found a way to fulfill the necessity of teaching English. On the other hand, universities have opened their own language institutions because students have to attend a certain amount of English classes as a requirement for graduation.

The School adopted an English program about 18 years ago with the purpose of becoming bilingual in the near future. In order to achieve this goal, the school hired native English speakers, purchased North American designed materials and other resources and added a significant amount of English hours. High expectations arose: students were expected to be proficient and able to communicate in any setting and to obtain good results on international language proficiency tests, apart from having a significant impact on the academic life of the school. Unfortunately, those expectations were not fulfilled and a general concern about results was manifested. In addition, questions about bilingualism increased day after day such as Do we really understand the implications of being a bilingual school? Do we really know what bilingualism is?

As a consequence of the situation described above, it was necessary to understand the concept of bilingualism and all its implications for the school. The whole community needed to construct an understanding of this concept taking into account the immediate context: the school community and the city. This research emerges as an answer to this need and attempts to set in motion the beginning of a project that will orient the school to a true bilingualism. The results of this study attempt to provide   answers and some alternatives for our community and for other schools that want to initiate a process in this area.

Research Questions

- How does the EFL community at SBL School understand the concept of bilingualism?
- What are the conditions needed to fulfill the goals of a bilingual curriculum at SBL School?

Theoretical Framework

Defining bilingualism. When coming up with a definition of bilingualism several concepts and considerations emerge. There are as many definitions as points of view, which do not have any relationship in most of the cases. Consequently, the best way to define bilingualism is to go back to its roots and analyze its etymology. Bilingualism means two languages, and a bilingual person is one who is able to use them.

Weinreich (1953), a pioneer of the scientific study in bilingualism, states that bilingualism is the habit of using two languages alternatively. A bilingual person is one who practices those two languages. Other authors have criticized this theory arguing that bilingualism starts when the speaker produces complete and meaningful messages in another language. Halliday, Mackintosh & Stevens (as cited in Siguan, 2001) talk about equi-bilingualism or perfect bilingualism, which is defined as the ability of the speaker to be competent in using two different languages without any interference and in any situation. This theory was criticized, too, based on the grounds that nobody achieves an equal competence in two languages. There are always going to be differences in terms of linguistic use and confidence. According to this theory, only a few people around the world could be called bilingual.

On the contrary, Siguan (2001) states that bilingualism is not the perfect and identical competence in using two languages, but the capacity of using two or more languages in different contexts and modalities. He called this type of bilingualism 'functional bilingualism' and exemplified it with people of the Middle Ages, who used a vulgar language for their daily activities and Latin for their intellectual activities.

After analyzing all these considerations regarding bilingualism, we might conclude that a bilingual person is one who has two linguistic systems and two languages and is able to use them without any interference. In other words, in order to become truly bilingual you must be able to achieve your communicative and

interactional purposes using two languages. As Hakuta (1998) states, bilingualism is a strong command of two or more languages. It has to do with the competence someone has in two languages and the ability to alternate their use.

Types of bilingualism. When defining the varieties or types of bilingualism it is important to consider some aspects: First of all, the objectives of the institution or the social group; second, the role of the languages in the school program or in the social group; and third, the languages spoken in the immediate social context (Siguan, 2001).

Some of the most common types of bilingualism we find among thousands of varieties are early-late bilingualism, simultaneous-successive bilingualism, and additive-subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1973). Trudell (1993) also mentions other types of bilingualism such us transitional bilingualism, immersion, submersion, maintenance and vernacular. For this paper I will describe only the additive bilingualism because it fits the goals and characteristics of the bilingual program our School has been implementing.

Additive bilingualism. Students add a second language (L2) to their repertoire of skills at no cost to the development of their L1 or first language (Cummins, 1990). L1 is maintained and supported in this type of bilingualism. There is no threat to the status of the native language, and bilingualism is seen as an asset. Students attain a high level of fluency and proficiency in their two languages (Cummins, 1990). This type of bilingualism attains an enrichment of language, culture and ethno-linguistic identity. L1 and L2 do not detract one from the other. L2 learning is seen as an "adding to", an enriching language experience rather than replacing L1.

Key issues in bilingual programs. Many elements need to be considered when talking about bilingualism. These are related to the pedagogical and linguistic areas and entail social implications and other conditions that emerge when implementing and or describing a bilingual program. I will present a brief description of each issue and how it affects the process of language learning.

Pedagogical issues. The teaching of a second language demands more than simply knowing the language, its structure, vocabulary or phonetic system. There are serious implications in the process that determine the success or the failure of the second language learning. Below I present some important considerations when teaching a second language, or when working on bilingual programs.

Students never come as empty vessels to be filled with several language elements. The educational and personal experiences they bring constitute the foundation for their second language learning (Cummins, 1994). The role of the school is to amplify and strengthen these experiences rather than replace them. In terms of learning a language it means that children already possess a repertoire of linguistic, cultural and social experiences in their L1 that can be used as a foundation to explore their L2.

Language provision cannot be conceptualized as a separate program. There must be a relationship between academic content and language. Heller (as cited in De Mejía, 2002) has summarized this idea as follows: "by using the target language as a language of communication in authentic situations, such as subject-matter instruction or any other form of teacher-student or student-student communication outside strictly instructional contexts, students' acquisition of the target language will be improved" (p 79). Content-based instruction integrates two elements that become important factors in the second language process: exposure and language use. Exposure to language should promote production. Students need to be provided with opportunities to produce discourse which is coherent, accurate and appropriate (Swain, 1985). For doing so, the input students receive should be optimal. It should be according to the comprehensive level of students e.g. interesting, sufficient in terms of quantity and should promote the development of language competence.

Social issues. Language can be a highly valuable resource which enables people to gain access to privilege situations of wealth and power as used to happen in Hong Kong some time ago. To have adequate English language skills was the key to power and wealth since English was considered the most prestigious language used in education.

A lot of implications can be considered at this point. For example, language seen under a sociological point of view is considered a form of cultural or symbolic capital which is available for exchange in the "marketplace" of social interaction (De Mejia, 2002). Language receives different values depending on the market. It can be a door to gain valuable social, educational and material resources, or it can be a source of power and prestige (Heller as cited in De Mejia, 2002).

Bilingualism, in this sense, is a provider of access to prestigious international languages that will enable students to interact with speakers of different languages on a daily basis, and gain access to employment opportunities in the global marketplace.

Besides, it prepares students to become world citizens (Bingham as cited in De Mejia, 2002).

Linguistic issues. Recent studies have corroborated once again the advantages of bilingual students over the monolinguals. The development of the linguistic conscience is so interesting in terms of evidence of results. Bilingual students acquire a metalinguistic consciousness faster than monolinguals. The former know that there are different types of languages; they understand that each language forms a system, and each system has its own way of naming things. Bilinguals start noticing the formal character of the syntactic rules and relate words and meanings. Bialystok (as cited in Siguan, 2001) concludes in relation to this issue that bilinguals identify and isolate meaningful words within a sentence. They identify the artificial character of the names and accept that things can be named in different ways. Bilinguals develop an error conscience as well. They are able to identify syntactic, grammatical and semantic errors.

Lambert (1973) initiated a study in Quebec with five to seven-year-old students who were starting their language learning process and belonged to an immersion program. He found that bilingual students develop a greater awareness of the needs of the interlocutor and more tolerance towards communications difficulties than the monolinguals.

Another condition worthy to be considered in this process has to do with interaction. Students' language development is facilitated when they are provided with an atmosphere and a process that focus mainly on the meaning and intention of utterances and messages rather than form; and treat "errors" as a part of becoming better thinkers and communicators (Cummins, 1994).

All the issues mentioned above describe factors and situations that surround the process of bilingualism. Challenges emerge in this process and involve responsibilities for the parties involved. Students, teachers, and parents, are seen as active agents in the bilingual process.

Research Design

Research which attempts to increase our understanding of why things are the way they are in our social world and why people act the way they do is qualitative research. It is concerned with the development of explanations of a social phenomena and answers questions related to social situations. In this sense, this type of research suits

the purpose of this project. Individuals' opinions and experiences will be the key to achieving the purpose of this research. This process involves the use of qualitative data collected by interviews and group discussions.

Qualitative research considers each participant as a social agent. Each participant belongs to a social structure and a sociological context that determines his/her ideology. That is the reason participants were grouped according to their social status, level of education, professions, interests, etc. Each group was divided into smaller groups that shared the same role or status within the school. Therefore, we had groups composed of students, teachers, parents and administrative staff. This flexibility of the qualitative research enriches the group discussions and allows the inclusion of different points of view and positions (Delgado & Gutierrez, 1999).

Qualitative research allows for the use of different methods of data collection. One of the most productive ones in terms of gathering people's views about an issue is focus groups. These are defined as groups of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator who uses the groups and their interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue. It is a good technique when analyzing a social situation in any community because it opens spaces for interaction, discussion and exposition of points of view, experiences and feelings.

Focus groups comprised an appropriate method for this research because they allowed gathering a lot of information about people's feelings, ideas and opinions on particular topics and situations. They also permitted the inclusion of different participants from the community. Focus groups also give greater insight into why certain opinions are held. They help to improve the planning and design of new programs and provide a means of evaluating existing programs and produce insights for developing strategies for outreach as well.

Four focus groups were established for this research. There were a group of parents, a group of students, a group of the administrative staff, and teachers. These focus groups had different sessions to discuss their understanding of the concept of bilingualism and its implications on the School's immediate context. The number of participants in each group varied from five to six. I acted as the moderator in each of the sessions. Following the guidelines of Krueger (1988), I tried as much as possible to create an environment of nurture in which the participants could express their

points of view freely. Also, I encouraged all the participants to contribute so that all voices in the group could be heard and that none dominated the discussion.

This is also a qualitative case-study since it is focused on a single unit of analysis: San Bonifacio de Las Lanzas School and its community's perception of what bilingualism is. The purpose is to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Setting

SBL is a private School that was founded 25 years ago. It is located in Ibagué and has about 400 students. It has 2 pre-school grades, transition and kinder 6; 5 grades on the elementary level and 6 grades in high school. Most of the groups have no more than 26 students who belong to the middle and high social strata of the city. Most of them live close to school and belong to the same social group. San Bonifacio has been known as one of the best schools of the city because of the quality of its teaching and learning processes.

This is the only bilingual school in the city. Students have a high amount of English classes every week. Furthermore, English is used as a means of instruction in science and mathematics classes. Apart from this, native English speakers are hired to support the program and students have the possibility to participate in exchange programs.

Participants

There were twenty participants grouped in four focus groups. They met once a week and I as the moderator led the discussions and conducted the interviews.

Following Krueger's guideline (1988), we formed the groups taking into account some variables such as age, education, interests, and social status. Four focus groups were chosen for this research: parents, students, teachers and administrative staff. All the participants were highly involved in the bilingual program of the school.

The Results

The process of identifying and defining the categories responds to a serious and systematic analysis that is closely related to the questions posed for this research.

Once the data were collected and analyzed, they were grouped by common concepts and characteristics that are presented and described below.

The first category responds to the main research question: How does the EFL community understand the concept of bilingualism?

A Basic Understanding of the Concept

Ability to speak. Analyzing and reviewing the information given by the participants through the interviews and the surveys, it was amazing to learn of the wide number of beliefs and preconceptions they had. The preconceptions related mainly to one of the linguistic skills: speaking. According to the participants, there seems to be a strong association between language and oral production. Most of the answers given by the participants addressed the concept of bilingualism right to this association. Let's analyze and see through this category the basis of this appreciation and other elements involved in their concept of bilingualism.

When the five focus groups were asked about their concept of bilingualism, the answers pointed to the same concept: "to speak two languages fluently and naturally". They refer to the ability to communicate in languages, to be competent when communicating, expressing ideas or opinions, as illustrated below:

Parent 1: "I think a bilingual person is someone who speaks two languages correctly as if both of them were their native language... In the British high school they have only three subjects in Spanish and they speak English almost all the time".

Parent 2: "I think bilingualism is to speak two languages, but, because it is learned in the school it might include somehow the cultural part. Any culture not only 'la gringa' or the British one, but also taking into account cultural issues. But in conclusion, being bilingual is to learn another language correctly and use it as if it were the native one".

As we mentioned before, for the participants, being bilingual is a synonym of speaking two languages. There is an idea of bilingualism among them, but it has been reduced to managing skills. The concept has been framed within outputs, things they can hear or see. This concept is elaborated also within some characteristics that are worthy of being analyzed. A bilingual person might speak two languages but with

a certain level of competence. They say bilingual equals speaking a language but speaking it well, correctly, being a native-like speaker. It is not just speaking the language but they are considering a very high level of competence reflected in fluency, accuracy and natural use of the language.

On the other hand, participants think that all the activities and the contents students develop in class must have the purpose of developing and strengthening the speaking skills. For them it might be compulsory to speak, and our role as a school is to force students to do it. This is evidenced as follows:

Parent 1: "I think the school is missing something, to have more conversation in English. Students might be speaking all the time, wherever we go, they should speak English all day long. Even outside the classroom. It's not that we cannot speak Spanish. That means I am dumb. No. It is what you say in the school that all teachers speak only English even when they are not in the classroom… The school should demand more conversation, maybe not only the written test but educate them to speak more".

This conception of bilingualism shares some similarities with the definition given by Siguan (2001) and Weinreich (1953). They agree that bilingualism is the capacity of using two languages. However, we see that the school community places a strong emphasis on oral production: "speaking". A bilingual person, as stated by the participants, is able to speak native-like and to be fluent when communicating. S/He uses the language in a natural way and is able to go back and forth without any problem. The distinction between the community's perception of bilingualism and the theoreticians lies in the fact that being bilingual is not just speaking, but being competent in all the linguistic skills as Siguan (2001) states.

Another important factor to consider here is the difference between a bilingual person and a bilingual institution. According to the participants, the latter is associated with amount of hours students are exposed to English. All the activities and effort the school offers in relation to the second language program might go straight to the point of developing or enhancing students' oral production. That is what really matters when talking about bilingualism. For the participants, if students speak fluently and proficiently, we could say they are bilingual and our school has become a truly bilingual institution. In conclusion, the community has reduced the

concept of bilingualism to oral production because it is the most observable and tangible result of a second language learning process.

Language exposure. Another element that appears with certain frequency in the interviews is exposure. This is considered one of the most important elements when talking about second language learning. Exposure is seen as the amount of time devoted to English. In this category I will analyze the role of exposure in bilingualism according to the participants' point of view.

Two issues are related to exposure. The first one has to do with the amount of English classes provided to students, and the second to "living" the language.

Most of the participants agreed that providing more classes in English would enhance students' production. There is a deeply rooted idea that language learning depends to a great extent on the contact students have with the language. The more students listen to words, expressions and the use of the language in different contexts and situations, the faster the process and the more vocabulary students will acquire. Therefore, a high level of oral production will eventually emerge.

In other words, exposure has to do with the amount of English class hours students are exposed to. Interestingly, most of the participants think that bilingualism will be a result of increasing English classes. A bilingual school should have most of its classes, if not all, in the second language. This, with the idea of providing more language to students, as can be read in the extracts below:

Parent 1: "Yeah, for me it was not to learn English because I grew up speaking it then for me it was normal, but maybe what we see is that what really helps students outside the school and apart from the books is to speak, to be exposed to the television, movies, to have materials they can have access to in order to make English become part of their daily life and not only something they see in the school or in the class… We need to evidence the language in the school, and that has to happen from the top".

Parent 2: "Any activity hold by the school might include something in English as the bingo in the school's day…in other words any activity that involves the whole community should involve something in English and…everywhere we should hear people greeting, speaking in English. It is like generating more English use. We have worked a little bit on that and more teachers are speaking English, but most of the

classes are in Spanish. And I think that the most important factor is to have more exposition to English".

Parent 1: "I think the little ones should have a better use of the text…I don't have any idea of how other schools do that but they might have a greater exposition".

Student 2: "We have swimming in English but for example classes like painting, computers could be a great effort because to have just three classes in English no, no, you can not speak with that".

Teacher 1: "No as xxx said it needs to go one step further to that goal we need to increase subject matters that is dictated. I remember clearly having all the courses in English except for Spanish and geography and history, Colombian geography and Colombian history. But the rest world history or world geography… everything was in English. I remember that it was completely English, English, and English except for three subjects".

The second element related to exposure has to do with the idea of living the language. For the School Community this concept is related to activities and attitudes of all the people that are working or are related to the school. The participants emphasized the importance of having everything in English. English teachers and people from the different school departments have to speak English all the time to students in order to provide more exposure to the language. The idea is to create an "English atmosphere" where students feel bombarded by the language and in that sense they would feel the necessity to use it.

In conclusion, we deduce that having everybody speak English will provide students with a certain amount of language, and will enhance their productive and receptive skills. Let us see some comments from the participants:

Teacher 2: "Everybody should, there should be an English environment and I remember obviously the principal at San Carlos speaks English very well and everything was only in English, the flag risings, everything was in English".

Teacher 1: "It's a responsibility of the entire community, administration, teachers, etc. Something interesting for students... They would say oookkkkeeeyy she's a Spanish teacher but she speaks English. And if they don't know it perfectly, it doesn't matter".

It is true that ample opportunities to hear and use the language foster its acquisition. Exposure plays a relevant role in second language learning. But more than being exposed to the language, it is to be engaged in authentic communicative interactions with an interlocutor who can modify his or her speech. In other words, learners need to be active participants in communicative situations. In order to be able to interact or negotiate learners must understand the input they are exposed to, otherwise they will not be able to use it. Learners need to understand the information they are expose to and, most of all, be able to use it. To do so, students need to be involved in situations where interaction takes place; situations where they become active participants. We cannot forget that second language learners learn first how to participate in a conversation through interaction, rather than building up a set structures and incorporating it into their speech (Hatch, Flashner & Hunt, 1986).

It is clear that there is a strong association of bilingualism with exposure within the School community. The more language students are exposed to the better. Students will learn more if most people around them speak English with them, if they have a lot of classes in English, etc. Exposure to the language is important, but there are other factors that affect the language learning process. Learners need to receive comprehensible input and be involved in authentic situations where they can participate actively by interacting, giving opinions, expressing feelings, etc.

So far we have analyzed the most recurrent themes in relation to the understanding of the concept of bilingualism. Now we will address the second question which has to do with the necessary conditions to implement a bilingual program.

Fragmentation of Roles

A gap in terms of expectations in the EFL community. When you think of the word "community", the first thing that comes to your mind is a group, union, team work, collaborative work. You expect everybody to be actively involved in the job of implementing a bilingual program. The dictionary defines community as a group of people having common interests, sharing participation and fellowship.

Although the school community is composed of teachers, students, parents, and the administrative staff and each one of these members has an important role to play in the development and consolidation of the program, it is evident that the

responsibility has been laid on teachers and the administration of the school. The real sense of community work is not very clear.

On one side, we have students who are seen as the learners in the process, and learners of experiences. They have the responsibility to speak, speak and speak. It seems that their role is limited to speaking the language, as illustrated in the following testimonies:

Interviewer: "What do you think about students?"

Parent 1: "They shouldn't speak Spanish in English classes. They have to pay attention to the teacher and don't waste time speaking Spanish".

Interviewer: "What other advice would you give to students?"

Parent 2: "To do their best in class and ask when they don't understand. To do their part. To feel free to ask, to lose their shyness, that fear of speaking English. To adopt the habit of speaking English at least, this would be a step in the classes we attend in English. And teachers too, they should explain in English and students have to respond in English and if they don't understand they ask and use Spanish as a last resort otherwise they are missing the importance of asking in English".

According to these comments we see that the students' role goes in two directions: First of all, they have to speak English. Parents, administrators, teachers and the students themselves think their main responsibility in the program is to speak English. It seems that the product is more important than the process. That is the reason that students come to San Bonifacio "to learn English" (so stated a parent in the survey).

There is a common and repeated element in the comments given by the participants in this category as well as the previous one. Bilingualism is a synonym of speaking English. In fact this should be part of the expectations but it is quite surprising that participants did not bring into consideration other elements that should be part of the process such as socio cultural elements, development of their creative potential, etc.

Secondly, students must behave, work in class, and respect the teacher. This is part of the students' natural role but where is the other part of their responsibilities?

Students should be constructors of their process, they should propose, play an active part in the construction of the bilingual process of the school and this is something that goes beyond the classroom or a simple linguistic activity.

On the other hand, parents consider their responsibilities are framed in two major tasks: to provide language to their children and foster their learning process as well.

Once again we have a common point, even when defining the role of teachers. Their role is to speak English to students as well as to encourage students to speak English. Everything turns around the same point: Speaking English. Teachers are seen as providers and the ones who have the responsibility for the students' oral production development. The teacher's role is conceived in terms of language performance and product or production.

Teachers are mainly educators who contribute to the growth and development of a community. We can not reduce the participation of teachers to an instructional task. The word "educator" implies more than giving instructions; it has a social, pedagogical and affective implication.

As I mentioned before, a community is a group of people that works towards the same goal. Everybody knows what to do and what is expected of them. If we analyze the answers given by the participants, we will notice that although there is a vague idea about the role of each member of the community in the bilingual program, there is a gap in terms of expectations and responsibilities. In summary, everybody expects the other to do a specific task and that task is reduced to speaking the language, using the language, providing the language. The roles have been limited to one simple factor: speaking the language.

Another interesting aspect that emerges from the interviews is the separation that exists when talking about responsibilities. There is not a bridge that links all the departments of the school in the language learning process. Every member of the community needs to feel part of the school community, and not to feel discriminated against in the school bilingual program (De Mejia, 2002).

According to the interviewers, another important condition related to bilingualism at San Bonifacio School has to do with attitudes and performance of students in English. This aspect is described as a social issue that has been transferred to their school life.

A Social Issue

Fear. This topic presents a concern expressed by students, parents, and teachers as an answer to an indisputable fact that is affecting students: "They do not speak". Analyzing the contributions of the participants, I conclude that the main barrier is fear. According to their opinions, one thing that is affecting students' performance in English is fear. Fear of making a fool of themselves or of losing their power, as shown in the following excerpts:

Parent 2: "I see they are doing good in their process but I don't know I see them like, they don't like to speak, they don't like to lose themselves and they should make an effort but they don't like and They should be speaking because we provide a reinforcement at home plus what they are doing here probably they feel embarrassed or they are labeled as 'sapos' [frogs], because they speak English a lot or I don't know why".

Student 4: "We are part of a society that depends on what others say. So many of us feel embarrassed even me, to say something or speaking English even in Spanish we are afraid of being criticized by other people".

Student 1: "Not only criticism but mockery. When you mispronounced a word people go 'ha ha ha' because we don't respect each other, there is not that level of respect to the learning process of each person both in English and Spanish. There are shy people and they do not participate because they think "what if I do it wrong and my classmates laugh at me, so they prefer not to participate… what if I say this in a wrong way and the teacher scolds me. Those are things we have and we feel fear to express ourselves , we are afraid of what others can say and that is the way society is, because we act the same way in meetings, everything is like that. I have made mistakes using some words and everybody laughs at me. But I feel good because I can learn from mistakes and they have made mistakes too so, when I make a mistake I learn and I don't pay attention to them, and although they laugh at me I don't care".

Fear, here, is related to personality. It is characterized by a feeling of insecurity or a lack of self confidence. Students are involved in a series of social parameters and prejudgments that influence their school performance. They are immersed in a strong social dependence that is transferred to their learning process.

According to the participants, students do not use the language in class because of two reasons: one is fear of making mistakes and the other is fear of losing prestige with their peers. Students are very sensitive to what others think or say about them. They are afraid of mockery and prefer to use their native language and keep a good image with their classmates rather than taking the risk of speaking English. Maybe this is due to the fear of becoming ridiculous or to losing their friends. As one of the students states, "when we talk or participate we are called 'sapos'". Classmates are too tough when correcting each other. Tolerance of errors is really low and students are conditioned by all this social pressure.

Students and parents stated that fear was affecting their performance in the second language. In an environment full of stress and fear of failure, fear of embarrassment will stop the student's process and performance. On the contrary, an environment full of positive emotions and attitudes will enhance the learning process and will motivate students to come back for more. Krashen (1985) has proposed that attitudes can act as barriers or bridges to learning a new language as they are the essential environmental ingredients for language learning. He also states that learning will only happen if certain affective conditions (e.g. positive attitudes, self confidence, a low level of anxiety) exist and are used by the learner.

Learners feel that when their cultural group or self identity is being threatened in any way in the language learning environment, it can block their performance and produce a fear of participating and losing a certain "position" among their classmates.

Conclusions and Implications

We conclude that bilingualism is related to the competence someone has in two languages. As Siguan (2001) states, bilingualism has to do with the capacity of possessing two languages and alternating their use. When he talks about capacity he refers to the ability to do something. Bilinguals not only have the capacity to speak two languages but the ability to alternate and use the languages in different situations and with different purposes. Language becomes so natural that learners can go back and forth from one language to the other. Bilingualism has to do with the capacity of using two or more languages in different contexts and modalities.

According to the data there is a limited vision or idea about what bilingualism is. The information reveals that there is a strong relationship between bilingual

education and exposure to the language. That means a significant amount of classes where English is used as a means of instruction, more school activities in which English is used, and all the school staff speaking the language. Exposure plays an important role in second language learning. However, it is important to consider a key aspect related to input of the language students receive or need to be exposed to. Input needs to be optimal, adjusted to the level of the learner, interesting and relevant for them. It needs to be sufficient in terms of quantity and this is determined by the needs and objectives of the school. Finally, input should be challenging (Lindholm as cited in De Mejia, 2002). In other words, input must be comprehensible and equip students to communicate, interact and negotiate. Students need to be provided with opportunities to produce discourse which is coherent, accurate, and socially appropriate and thus to extend the repertoire of the learner (Swain, 1985). Here the responsibility of the school is to understand this principle and in that direction decide on the approach and methodologies it wants to adopt for the bilingual program. Bilingual education is seen as a means of providing students with the possibility of accessing a language and culture different from their native one. It also provides all the tools needed to interact and successfully negotiate in different contexts or situations.

On the other hand, participants parallel bilingualism with the ability to speak. There is a strong attention paid to productive skills. A person is bilingual if he/she produces properly and effectively. According to the interviewees being bilingual must be shown through observable and tangible outcomes. If a student does not speak perfectly, s/he can not be called bilingual. There is a tendency to associate bilingualism with speaking and accuracy ignoring the reality that language learning is a process that takes time and goes through different stages. Hakuta (1998) agrees that language learning is a process that takes from four to five years in order to achieve the formal levels of the language. Being bilingual is more than simply having the ability to speak; it includes other competences as well.

This limited view of bilingualism, associated with the need to obtain tangible outcomes, may be the result of the current demands of our society in its globalized tendency: the imperative need to see clear cut products. However, we are disregarding important elements here such as reading and writing, which are crucial if students are to succeed. We are also leaving aside other important aspects such as culture and aesthetics.

In relation to the conditions to implement a bilingual program, the community identified some isolated conditions, but there is not any particular point where those conditions converged. Instead, there is a fragmentation of roles. The community understands very well the other's role but they do not understand their own. Everybody knows what the other person has to do but the question is do they know their own roles?

When implementing a bilingual program it is important to understand the role of each member of the school community. Bilingualism needs to be a construction of the whole community in order to set common goals and walk with the same expectations. The academic and linguistic growth of students is significantly increased when parents see themselves, and are seen by school staff, as co-educators of their children along with the school (Cummins, 1994). The educational process requires collaboration. Carrying out a bilingual program is not the responsibility of teachers only. Students, school staff and parents have a lot to contribute to this process. The school, including all the staff, should establish collaborative relationships with parents and have them participate with the school in promoting students' academic progress. When educators and the school staff define their roles in terms of challenging the discrimination embodied in institutionalized structures, then there are many possibilities for involving parents in their children's education and providing them with a welcoming atmosphere in the school (Cummins 1994).

It is necessary to go deeper when thinking about roles of the members of a school community. Siguan (2001) states that a bilingual society is a collective, a group of people where the roles are related among themselves, all of them know what they are expecting from one another. One important fact in this research is that everybody in the community somehow knows what to do in a bilingual program; however, the missing point is a guiding thread that brings all the departments of the school together in order to define their responsibilities and build a common concept about bilingualism.

There is no doubt that every member of the community has an important job to do, and their duties are not changeable. But the fact here is the point where all those responsibilities and duties meet and work as a whole. In conclusion, I consider that as a school we need to start a process of consciousness-raising in order to see our capacities and potential in assuming our own responsibility in the bilingual program.

All people involved in a bilingual process should know how to contribute and work as a team so that nobody will have false expectations or walk towards different objectives.

Any institution that desires to implement a bilingual program needs to understand this principle of team empowerment and consciousness-raising in order to bring together all the community members for the construction of the program and to take advantage of their potential.

Bilingual education needs to be surrounded by an environment which cares about students' attitudes and affections. Learning a language occurs more effectively when there is a supportive atmosphere, where students take risks without feeling threatened or intimidated by their classmates. One of the aspects that influence success in second language learning is an atmosphere in which anxiety levels are low and there is freedom to express yourself without feeling the fear of being embarrassed when you say something wrong or make a mistake.

My advice and suggestion when implementing a bilingual language program is to think about the true meaning of a community. There must be common expectations and common goals. The principal, teachers, parents and students should be oriented in such a way that they speak the same language and work towards the same goals. Having these conditions will result in organized and solid team work where every participant will be able to contribute and use the potential she or he has.

Lastly, and in view of the results presented beforehand, a lot of questions emerge for further research such as the following:

- How can the views of the members of the school community regarding bilingualism be incorporated into the curriculum?
- How can parents be actively involved in the construction of bilingual understanding and the curriculum?
- What parameters should be taken into account when designing a bilingual program that involves the whole EFL community that implements it?

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