

HOW DO PLURILINGUAL TRAINEE TEACHERS VIEW THE CLIL CHALLENGE? A CASE STUDY

¿CÓMO PERCIBEN LOS PROFESORES PLURILINGÜES EN FORMACIÓN EL RETO AICLE? UN ESTUDIO DE CASO

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Abstract

The Valencian region is a Spanish autonomous community with a long-standing tradition in bilingual education. However, as opposed to some other Spanish regions, attention towards the linguistic education system from the point of view of research has been scarce. On this basis, the present investigation seeks to analyze the plurilingual education system of the Valencian region currently in force from the perspective of trainee teachers.

To this end, a study has been conducted with three focus groups. The narrative produced by the participants has been analyzed taking into consideration four major dimensions, namely plurilingual programs, teacher training, methodology, and resources and materials. In this analysis, the main idea underlying each dimension has been identified and then the information has been synthesized in flow charts that broadly represent the information conveyed by the groups.

The results obtained evince a lack of initial and continuous teacher training in plurilingual issues, a reality which translates into a low level of linguistic competence and methodological lacunae, as well as a lack of tailored-made teaching materials. There is thus an urgent need to revisit major aspects of the plurilingual programs and bring about certain changes that could contribute to their improvement and consolidation.

Keywords: plurilingual education, CLIL, trainee teachers, evaluation, quality.

Resumen

La Comunitat Valenciana es una comunidad autónoma española con una amplia tradición en educación bilingüe. A pesar de ello, y a diferencia de la mayoría de las otras comunidades, la atención prestada al modelo educativo lingüístico desde la investigación ha sido escaso. Por ello, la presente investigación pretende analizar el sistema educativo plurilingüe valenciano vigente desde la perspectiva de los maestros en formación.

Con este fin, se ha llevado a cabo un estudio con tres grupos focales. Se ha realizado un análisis de la narrativa de los participantes teniendo en cuenta cuatro dimensiones principales, a saber, los programas plurilingües, la formación de los maestros, la metodología y los recursos y materiales. En el análisis se ha identificado la idea principal que subyace a cada dimensión y luego se ha sintetizado la información en diagramas de flujo que, en líneas generales, representan la información transmitida por los grupos.

Los resultados obtenidos evidencian una falta de formación inicial y continua del maestro en cuestiones relativas a la educación plurilingüe, realidad que se traduce en una baja competencia lingüística y lagunas metodológicas, así como en una falta de materiales didácticos apropiados. Por lo tanto, es necesario visitar aspectos importantes de los programas plurilingües y realizar ciertos cambios que puedan contribuir a la mejora y consolidación de estos.

Palabras clave: enseñanza plurilingüe, AICLE, maestros en formación, evaluación, calidad.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing an unprecedented change in education. The breaking down of barriers between societies, globalization and the free movement of citizens around Europe, among others, are some of the driving forces behind this change. This educational context is additionally characterized by the introduction of foreign languages as languages of instruction in the curriculum, mainly English, and by the use of active methodologies that invite the learner to adopt a participatory role in the learning process. Thus, in this new educational scenario, bilingual education has become one of the main teaching approaches and, therefore, the teaching model followed by an increasing number of schools, both nationally and internationally. This aspect responds to a strong commitment on the part of governments not only to increase the level of foreign languages among citizens, but also to contribute to a united, but at the same time multicultural Europe, and promote the European economy across the board.

The proliferation of this teaching model has aroused great interest in the scientific community, with Spain being one of the nations with the highest scientific production in Europe (Aleixandre Agulló and Cerezo Herrero 2019). A large part of the research carried out in Spain has focused on the evaluation of current bilingual and plurilingual programs, according to the model applicable in each autonomous region. Studies such as Travé González (2013) or Lancaster (2016) in Andalusia; Pérez Cañado (2017) in Andalusia, Extremadura and the Canary Islands; Arocena Egaña et al. (2015) in the Basque Country, a study conducted in collaboration with the Dutch province of Friesland; Pladevall-Ballester (2015) in Catalonia; Lozano-Martínez (2017) in Cantabria; Durán-Martínez and Beltrán-Llavador (2016) in Castilla and León; Fernández et al. (2005), Laorden Gutiérrez and Peñafiel Pedrosa (2010), Fernández and Halbach (2011) in Madrid; Bolarín Martínez et al. (2012), Lova Mellado et al. (2013), Alcaraz-Mármol (2018) in Murcia; or the research project coordinated by Cerezo Herrero (2019) in the Valencian region, among others, are some representative examples of studies at a national level that evaluate programs from the perspective of different stakeholders, mainly teachers, students and parents.

However, there are hardly any studies that analyze the programs from the point of view of trainee teachers, who happen to be an essential element in ensuring the continuity and good results of these programs in the future. Only the study conducted by Amat et al. (2017), which addresses the learning of science in English in pre-primary and primary education, provides a complete sample of pre-service teachers. On the other hand, beliefs are paramount when it comes to determining behavioral patterns. As Hüttner et al. (2013: 270) point out, “beliefs are viewed as inherently dynamic constructions of the learning and teaching endeavours”. Thus, the degree of acceptance of a pedagogical practice will be largely determined by the teachers’ beliefs (Arocena Egaña et al. 2015). In the case of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) programs, the perception of trainee teachers will allow us to know how the bilingual (or plurilingual) programs are playing out and what further steps need to be taken in order to tackle any detected deficiencies.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this article is to describe the perceptions that pre-service teachers in pre-primary and primary education have of the plurilingual programs implemented in the Valencian region. Despite there being three curricular languages (English, Spanish and Valencian), in this paper we will only focus on English as a language of instruction. The results are expected to help understand the linguistic educational reality in this particular region and to offer solutions to possible issues that trainee teachers may have encountered in view of their imminent incorporation into the teaching profession.

2. Literature Review

Bilingual education has made a huge impact on Spanish education in terms of foreign language teaching. The low results obtained in the Eurobarometer 2012 (European Commission) regarding the citizens' proficiency in foreign languages or the need to comply with the European mandate 1+2 (White Paper 1995) have prompted the updating of language policies at a national level. In this sense, following the European trend in bilingual education, CLIL has been adopted as the main teaching approach to overcoming this linguistic deficit.

The acronym CLIL was coined in 1994. As the name suggests, CLIL integrates the acquisition of new curricular content with foreign language learning. In linguistic terms, it seeks to provide learners with more real exposure to the foreign language, encouraging thus a more natural and communicative type of learning. This runs counter to some previous traditional language teaching models in which the language itself was the object of study (Fernández et al. 2005; Mehisto et al. 2008; Lova Mellado et al. 2013; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas 2016). We therefore move away from a pure "teaching English" scenario to a new one in which the language is not an end in itself, but a means to teach academic content and promote real communication (Laorden Gutiérrez and Peñafiel Pedrosa 2010). In this regard, this teaching approach aims to achieve a type of additive bilingualism (Baker and Wright 2017), that is, to incorporate an additional language to the linguistic repertoire of the student. Language is therefore conceived as a communication tool and as a means to access academic content.

Ideally, CLIL contexts use methodological principles based on cooperation among peers and also make greater use of visual and manipulative material, body language, gestures, and a variety of resources that can make up for the deficit in foreign language knowledge and allow access to curricular content (Baker and Wright 2017). To this end, the key to success lies in providing students with the correct scaffolding to ensure the acquisition of academic content (Bolarín Martínez et al. 2012). This requires specific and differentiated teacher training since this teaching approach demands specific competences that can help integrate the language with the new curricular content, thus ensuring that both are acquired successfully. As such, it can be argued that bilingual or plurilingual education is a challenge for teachers since it brings about methodological, curricular and organizational changes (Lova Mellado et al. 2013; Pérez Cañado 2016).

Notwithstanding this, the fact that no single blueprint can be attached to CLIL (Pérez Cañado 2012) and that it has been categorized as an umbrella term

(Mehisto et al. 2008), so that it can draw on different methodologies, makes it a hazy concept (Halbach 2008), as it does not offer a teaching *recipe*. In the words of Cenoz et al. (2014: 247), “the scope of CLIL is not clear-cut and, as a consequence, its core features cannot be clearly identified”. It is, therefore, essential to analyze the current teaching programs and see how teachers understand its methodology and how it is being transferred into the classrooms in practice.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that, in the case of Spain, legislative decentralization in educational matters has led each autonomous region to propose its own linguistic model. In regard to the Valencian region, the autonomous government has decided to implement a plurilingual teaching model that integrates the foreign language with the official and co-official languages, Spanish and Valencian, respectively. To this end, in 1998, by means of the Order of 30 June, the basic requirements, criteria and procedures for the implementation of bilingual programs in schools were established and English became compulsory from the first year of primary education to the end of secondary education. Subsequently, in the Order of 30 July 2008, a plurilingual education program was set up in some schools, allowing for the introduction of the English language in the second cycle of pre-primary education. One year later, the Order of 19 May 2009 established the regulations for the implementation of an experimental program whereby 80% of the pre-primary education curriculum was to be taught in English by means of a CLIL pedagogy, 10% in Valencian and the remaining 10% in Spanish.

Decree 127/2012 of 3 August 2012, which regulates plurilingualism in non-university education in the Valencian region, established for the first time two plurilingual programs: PPEV (Plurilingual Education Program in Valencian) and PPEC (Plurilingual Education Program in Spanish). Both of them make it compulsory for one subject to be taught in a foreign language (English). Afterwards, through Decree 9/2017, which was later ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, a linguistic model was established whereby the presence of the foreign language (English) was diminished, whereas Valencian was enhanced. At present, Law 4/2018 of 21 February, which regulates and promotes plurilingualism in the Valencian education system, is the one that regulates and promotes the Valencian plurilingual educational system. It stipulates a minimum time of 25% for the teaching in each one of the official languages throughout compulsory schooling, including the foreign language course and, at least, one curricular area, subject or non-linguistic subject taught in each of the languages. In the case of the foreign language, the percentage ranges between 15% and 25%.

3. Design of the Study

A qualitative study has been carried out using focus groups. It purports to find out the perceptions of trainee teachers in pre-primary and primary education regarding the structure and functioning of the plurilingual educational system in force in the Valencian region. In particular, we intend to delve into issues such as the learning of the foreign language and the acquisition of academic content, the role of families, teachers' training needs, methodological aspects that characterize CLIL programs, the functionality of textbooks, etc. The research questions that we will try to answer are as follows:

- How do pre-primary and primary trainee teachers perceive the current linguistic reality of the Valencian region?
- What training needs do the participants identify?
- How do the participants perceive the training needs of pre-primary and primary teachers?
- What is the perception of the participants regarding the use of teaching resources and materials in the CLIL context of the Valencian region?

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3.1. Participants and Metaconcerns

A total of 25 pre-service teachers aged between 22 and 31 participated in the study. They were divided into three focus groups. Focus groups 1 and 2 were made up of pre-service teachers who had no previous teaching experience. Focus group 3 comprised pre-service teachers who had been working in a plurilingual context in the Valencian region between four months and one year. All participants had completed a two-month work placement in public, charter and private pre-primary and primary plurilingual schools. As far as gender is concerned, focus group 1 comprised three men and seven women; focus group 2 consisted of one man and six women; and focus group 3 was made up of two men and six women.

The sample was selected taking into account that the participants needed to be bilingual trainee teachers, so they were selected on the basis of their profile. All of them had done their work placement in different pre-primary and primary schools in the Valencian region. Likewise, at the time when this study was conducted, all of them were studying an official MA in Bilingual Education. The specific data of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

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	BA in Pre-primary Education	BA in Primary Education	Another BA	Training in bilingual education	CCEI ¹	CCEV ²	Work experience in plurilingual education
Focus Group 1	3	5	2	7	3	9	0
Focus Group 2	1	6	1	5	0	0	0
Focus Group 3	4	5	1	3	1	1	8
Total	8	16	4	15	4	10	8

Table 1. Focus groups specific data

As for the metaconcerns of the study, we have focused on four main dimensions which are in turn divided into different sub-categories according to the main areas of interest that have been addressed in the interviews (see Table 2).

DIMENSIONS			
Plurilingual programs	Teachers' training	Methodology	Resources and materials
Benefits	Motivation	Coordination and organization	Functionality
Results	Difficulties	Use of the L1/L2	Use of textbooks
Teachers' outlook	Linguistic needs	Students with special needs	
Students' satisfaction	Methodological needs		
Influence of social context	Teachers' competence		
Role of the families			
Plurilingualism decree			

Table 2. Dimensions of the study

Within the teaching programs dimension, we have focused on internal and external elements of the programs that are contributing to the shaping of the plurilingual education system. In the training dimension, an attempt has been

made to go more deeply into the preparation of pre-primary and primary teachers who use the foreign language as a medium of instruction and the training needs that arise both at the beginning and on a continuous basis. The methodology dimension is of utmost importance, since the success of the program largely depends on it. Methodology is not only incumbent upon the teacher within the classroom, but also upon the school, which oftentimes is responsible for making decisions regarding the methodology to be followed, and the teaching staff, who are responsible for coordinating their actions and shaping their teaching efforts jointly. Therefore, it has been deemed important to ask about coordination and organization in the schools, the use made of the L1 and L2 and how students with specific educational needs are dealt with. Finally, with the dimension of resources and materials, we seek to know the functionality of the resources used in the classroom, as well as the participants' perception concerning the use of textbooks in CLIL pre-primary and primary programs.

3.2. Techniques, Procedure and Analysis

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As far as the study techniques are concerned, an interview was conducted with each focus group. A focus group is a technique through which a group of people are interviewed in depth on very specific aspects. It is a semi-structured interview whose objective is to encourage interaction through conversation about the object of study at a given time and to capture the way of thinking, acting and feeling of the people who participate in the group (Sandoval Casilimas 2002; Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson 2009).

Data were collected through audiovisual and written means. For this purpose, there was a moderator who asked the questions and redirected the conversation if necessary; a secretary who collected the information in writing and made a summary at the end seeking the participants' agreement with the information gathered and, when needed, adding further information; and a supervisor who was responsible for checking the proper functioning of the electronic devices used to collect the data (recorder and video camera).

The procedure followed was that reported by Carmona Rodríguez et al. (2014), in which the following stages are identified:

- Selection of research objectives.
- Selection of the most suitable participants based on the following criteria: pre-service teachers with a BA in Education and currently studying a MA in Bilingual Education, either without teaching experience or between four months and one year of teaching experience.

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- Preparation of questions and documents (informed consent).
- Data analysis through triangulation and a systematic consensus model.
- Experts' meeting for analysis of results.
- Conclusions.

The analysis of the content followed a systematic approach seeking the greatest possible objectivity. For this purpose, a process comprising the following stages (Álvarez-Gayou Jurgenson 2009) was carried out:

1. Data gathering through focus groups.
2. Recording and note-taking of the main points approached in focus groups.
3. Data transcription.
4. Data coding. Different dimensions were established based on the objectives of the study. Markers were used to highlight codable elements.
5. Data organization. Axial coding was employed to organize the data and establish different categories.
6. Data verification. Through investigator triangulation, the data compiled were reviewed and the results of the coding process were discussed. Additionally, when concluding each focus group session, a summary of the main points covered was made, so that the participants could verify the information.
7. Final report. After a consensus was reached by all researchers, a final axial coding was performed and a final report was written.

The researchers who participated in the content analysis belong to different academic disciplines, namely Philology, Psychology and Education, although they all have experience in the area of education. Through this procedure, we have been able to filter and approach the reality of the object of study (Vallejo and Finol de Franco 2009).

The data stemming from each dimension (units of analysis) were analyzed and an inter-rater reliability consensus was reached at a later stage. This consensus was transformed into a key idea of each dimension and flow charts that synthesize the information were drawn. The information shown in the flow charts was agreed upon by the researchers on the basis of the axial coding, taking into account three main parameters: (1) the internal consistency of the discourse; (2) the frequency with which comments or key ideas are registered; and (3) the extent to which the key ideas presented are shared by the participants. In this case, flow charts representing the data obtained from the three focus groups have been used in a way that interrelationships among the groups can be established in order to interpret the results gathered in each dimension more accurately (Huber 2003).

4. Results and Discussion

Following the four dimensions previously described, namely plurilingual programs, teacher training, methodology, and resources and materials, we will now analyze the results of the study. Each dimension will be headed by the key idea stemming from the inter-rater reliability analysis. Based on the participants' narrative, different flow charts will also be presented showcasing the relationship between the content items that have been identified, which correspond to ideas agreed upon and commented on by the vast majority of the participants. Likewise, some supporting verbatim statements taken from the interview corpus will be shown as examples.

4.1. Plurilingual Education Programs

Key idea: Greater mastery of the L2 can be achieved without compromising content acquisition. Teacher training, family support and context-sensitive stimuli are key to learning and content acquisition.

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As can be seen in Figure 1, pre-service pre-primary and primary school teachers believe that plurilingual education programs allow students to broaden their competence in L2 through a more practical and communicative type of teaching, which has been empirically demonstrated in several studies (Admiraal et al. 2006; Dalton-Puffer 2011; Merino and Lasagabaster 2018; Pérez Cañado 2018; Martínez Agudo 2019, among others). However, they recommend that the presence of languages should be balanced in the curriculum and that instruction should begin at an early age because of the cognitive benefits it brings, which is in line with Van de Craen et al. (2007).

Similarly, they consider that the use of active methodologies and teaching innovation tools should be the driving force behind these programs. There is also a perception of insecurity and discomfort on the part of teachers, especially those who are older than 50 years old, which they attribute to a lack of training. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of respondents agree that mathematics should not be taught in the foreign language, perhaps because this subject requires a broader cognitive capacity on the part of the students. On the negative side, there appears to be a lack of coordination among teachers, and students with different language proficiencies are placed in the same class. Some participants also highlight as negative the interference that may occur among the three languages to which pupils are exposed.

As regards the learning of content, which is considered a cornerstone of bilingual education (Coyle 2008), they believe that there is very little time for so much content, especially if we take into account that the teaching is conducted through

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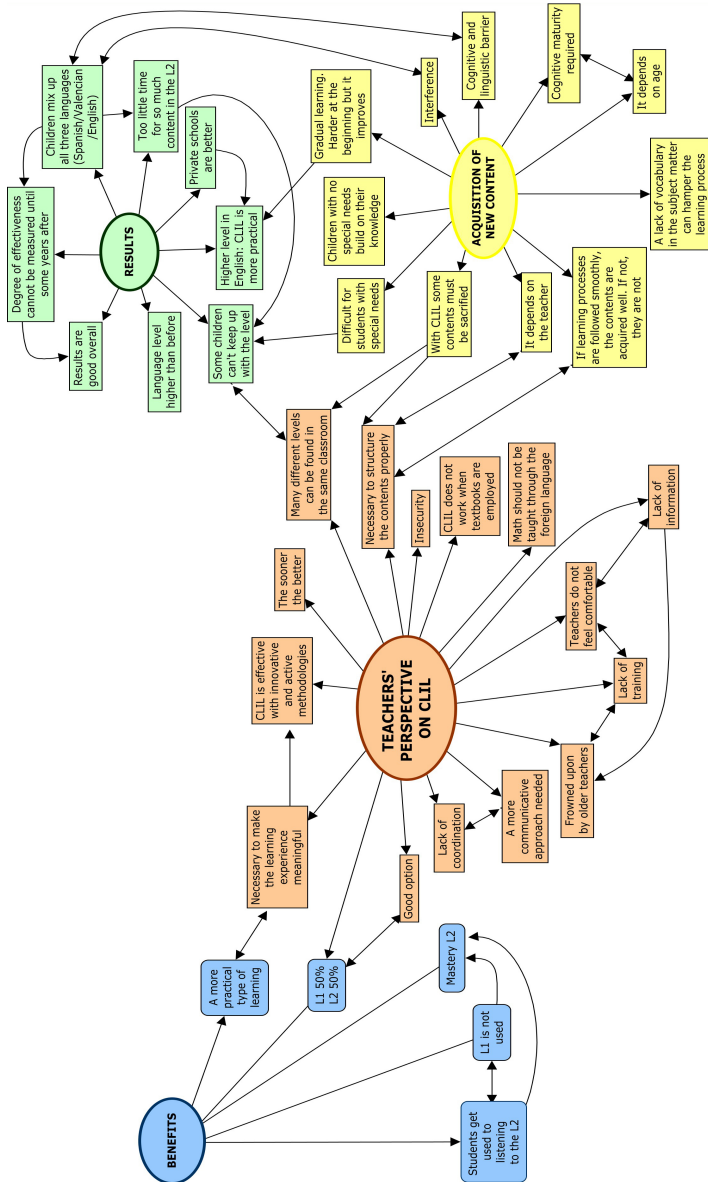


Figure 1. The plurilingual programs (1)

a foreign language, which is an added difficulty. This is why, on many occasions, curricular content is sacrificed. As Alcaraz-Mármol (2018: 51) describes in her study regarding primary school teachers' views on the CLIL approach, learning content in the L2 is not "as deep and detailed for students as the same content in the L1". However, the participants do not consider that students should have greater difficulty in acquiring new content if the appropriate methodology is followed and classes are adapted to the age and cognitive maturity of the students. However, the lack of domain-specific vocabulary can be a major stumbling block.

Student 1: *The problem is not the content, but the methodology employed to teach that content.*

Student 2: *The problem sometimes lies in the fact that domain-specific vocabulary is not pre-taught. This makes it difficult for students to access new content.*

In general terms, the informants have the impression that private schools have more solid programs because of the freedom they have when it comes to managing them and because of their decision-making capacity when hiring teachers in accordance with their teaching needs. Likewise, the respondents point out, as also shown in the studies by Merino and Lasagabaster (2018), Pérez Cañado (2018) or Martínez Agudo (2019), that the linguistic results of plurilingual programs cannot be measured immediately. They need a prior piloting timespan that can help gauge their long-term effects.

As shown in Figure 2, the participants emphasized the lack of motivation and the general negative attitude of most primary school students towards plurilingual programs, which contrasts with the positive results obtained in other studies based on the perception of in-service teachers (Bolarín Martínez et al. 2012; Lova Mellado et al. 2013; Pladevall-Ballester 2015; Durán-Martínez and Beltrán-Llavador 2016), school board members (Laorden Gutiérrez and Peñafiel Pedrosa 2010), students (Pladevall-Ballester 2015; Lancaster 2016), and even in studies on motivation in CLIL contexts (Lasagabaster and López Belouqui 2015). However, they also stress that this perception depends largely on a number of factors, namely, the educational stage, the school, the teacher, the age of students and the parents.

The role of the families is considered extremely important. Rather than as a source of support for content acquisition, they are seen as motivators and facilitators of resources or stimuli that favor learning, including language learning. However, the participants also highlight as negative the impossibility for some parents to help their children, as they lack knowledge of the foreign language. Nonetheless, they also consider that this role should be assumed by the schools themselves. In the same vein, they value the social context as another source of support and the fact

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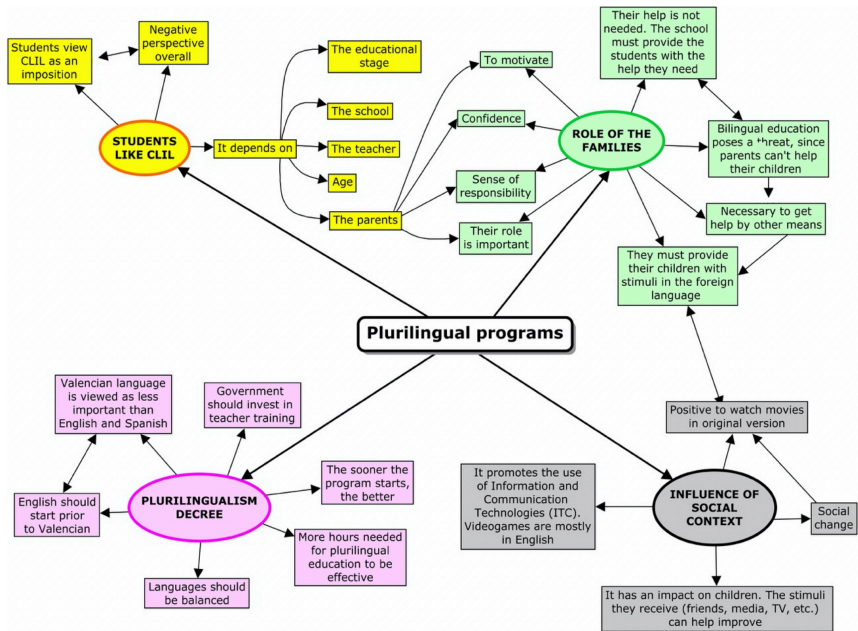


Figure 2. The plurilingual programs (2)

that students can access multiple original resources in different formats, especially multimedia ones, which can turn out to be highly motivating.

Finally, as we have already mentioned, the participants maintain that the plurilingual project of the Valencian region should be implemented at an early age. However, they are not in agreement as to the number of teaching hours that should be attributed to each of the languages. Whilst half the participants think that they should be given equal status, the other half are of the opinion that Spanish and English should be prioritized over Valencian. They concede that the use of the Valencian language is constrained to some Spanish provinces, diminishing thus students' job opportunities at an international level. What is more, some of them even regard teaching Valencian as some kind of punishment. Conversely, they consider that there are insufficient hours devoted to English for effective learning to take place and that this language is more useful for the future, as it opens more doors to globalization and international mobility.

Student 1: *All three languages should have an equal weight in a plurilingual program.*

Student 2: *I think that Spanish and English should be prized over Valencian. What do we need Valencian for? To speak here?*

Student 3: *It is unfair. International schools, for instance, do not have to teach Valencian language.*

4.2. Training

Key idea: *Teacher training and motivation are essential, so more sound training initiatives on an initial and continuous basis are required, both at linguistic and methodological levels.*

In agreement with Coyle et al. (2010) and Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010), teacher training is considered a key factor for the proper implementation of plurilingual programs. The participants maintain that teachers who are older or work with groups having difficult or problematic students lack motivation, which they regard as a key element for lifelong learning. Additionally, students cannot be motivated if teachers lack enthusiasm towards their teaching practice. Without self-motivation, teachers will be unsuccessful when trying to motivate their own students.

The greatest training necessity that they detect is linguistic, especially oral skills, since they consider that the English proficiency that most of the teachers possess is insufficient for the type of teaching that they do. This result is commensurate with the study coordinated by Cerezo Herrero (2019) in the Valencian region with in-service teachers. The participants in our study state that most teachers make mistakes in English because of their low competence in the language, a problem that is attributed to the Degrees in Teaching because of the limited specific training they offer, an aspect that has already been denounced by Fernández et al. (2005) and Madrid (2012). Likewise, they also emphasize that a language competence certificate does not necessarily make a teacher linguistically competent.

Student 1: *I am under the impression that you pass a C1 English exam because you become familiar with that exam format and, as a result of that, you pass the exam.*

Student 2: *There is much more involved in learning a language than just passing an exam.*

Therefore, they agree that an oral test in the foreign language should be required prior to starting to teach, an aspect which has also been stressed by Halbach and Lázaro (2015). Unfortunately, informants report that most teachers are compelled to resort to their L1 on a regular basis, coinciding with the results of Fernández and Halbach (2011) and Nieto Moreno de Diezmas and Ruiz Cordero (2018).

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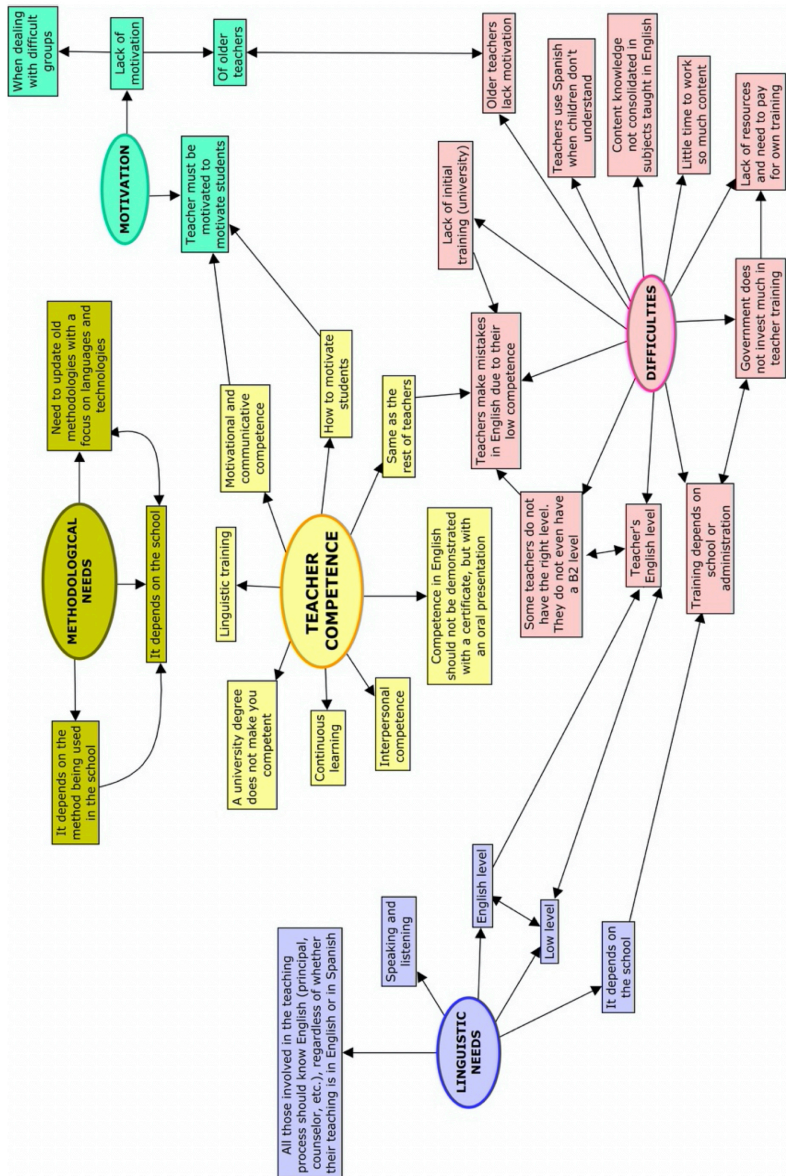


Figure 3. Training

Continuous learning is thus a must if a teacher is to be successful in his or her teaching endeavor. Otherwise, the learning of curricular content could be jeopardized.

As a rule, the participants seem to be more concerned about language training than methodological training, which, as Amat et al. (2017) argue in the case of science, can be attributed to the challenge of having to teach a curricular area in English. However, in line with Alcaraz-Mármol (2018), methodological training is as important as linguistic training. Moreover, this major concern regarding their language proficiency does not respond faithfully to the methodological tenets that govern CLIL, since there is a tendency to avoid master classes in which the teacher is the primary source of linguistic input. Rather, CLIL opts for a type of training in which the students take an active role in building their own knowledge (Pavón Vázquez and Rubio 2010). This is why, matching the results of the study conducted by Durán-Martínez and Beltrán-Llavador (2016), the need for language training seems to be relegated to a second place over time and greater importance is attached to methodological training and the design of teaching materials. Notwithstanding this, the participants do believe that methodological training should be geared towards new methodologies and information technologies. Both the methodological and linguistic training needs should be determined by each school.

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Despite the lack of training offered by the Administration, the interviewees consider that most in-service teachers, with the exception of those who show greater resistance due to age or other reasons, show a willingness to continue training. Likewise, they show awareness of their limitations, even though they regret that their prospects of professional advancement are constrained by the lack of training courses tailored to their needs. This means that they have to pay for their own training, which they consider inappropriate and undesirable. Moreover, it should be added that the training requested in most cases involves stays abroad so as to improve their language skills, something that in most cases is difficult to obtain due to the limited number of places offered.

4.3. Methodology

Key idea: Good organization and coordination of schools, regardless of the type of school (public or private), is necessary to make the methodology used in CLIL settings effective and adaptable to the learners' needs.

Figure 4 shows the importance of coordination and organization for the correct implementation of the CLIL approach. It is noteworthy how the type of school has a significant effect on these two principles. Most participants state that public schools are better organized, as they have a greater number of resources at their disposal, while those that are best coordinated are private schools, especially because teachers are often involved in interdisciplinary projects that help establish

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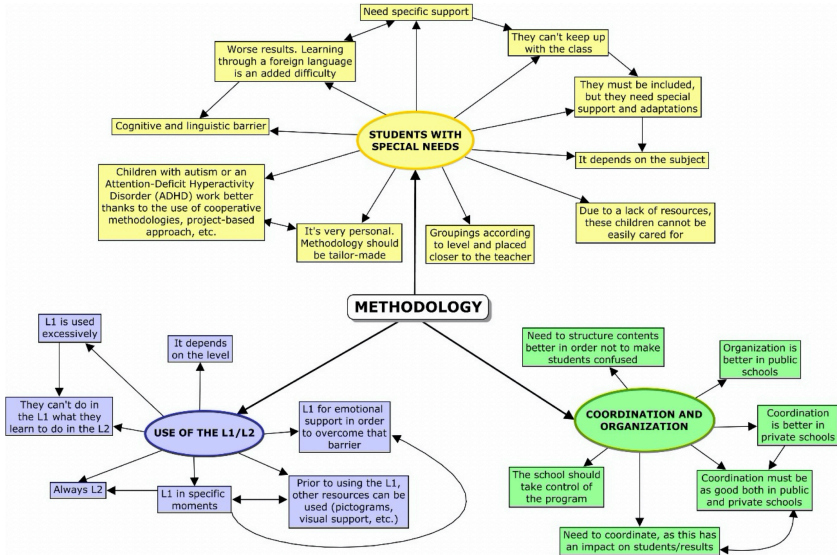


Figure 4. Methodology

links between different curricular areas. Nonetheless, they concede that there should not be major differences between public and private schools in terms of coordination and organization. Otherwise, these could have a negative impact on the students themselves and their learning outcomes.

In this section relating to methodology, the participants once again express their concern about the excessive use of the L1. They consider that there are other teaching strategies that can be put into practice prior to using the L1. However, some informants also admit that students' age is a key factor in this regard and that emotion is difficult to convey through the L2. There are thus certain occasions when the use of the L1 would be justified. There is also the fear that the acquisition of knowledge through the L2 will later make it difficult to be used in the L1 because of a lack of domain-specific vocabulary in the L1.

Lastly, there is general agreement among the participants that students with special educational needs or learning difficulties are at a disadvantage when the foreign language is used as a language of instruction, since it creates a linguistic and cognitive burden. They feel that, in these cases, the foreign language should be introduced in certain subjects and with the corresponding adaptations and

resources. The lack of adapted CLIL materials, however, makes it difficult to cater to the needs of these students. Consequently, methodology must be customized, and these children should be placed closer to the teacher and grouped with other children who have similar academic capabilities.

Student 1: *They do not have the same capacity as other children to learn a new language. It is even difficult for them to learn in their own language...*

Student 2: *There are not enough teachers to cater to the needs of these students. It is virtually impossible to attend to different learning abilities in the same classroom, even if teachers try with all their might.*

On a more positive note, in the case of learners with autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the participants state that these learners benefit more from the methodology employed in the classroom than from the language learning process. Nonetheless, the effective teaching of learners with special educational needs remains one of the greatest challenges to be tackled in CLIL.

4.4. Resources and Materials

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Key idea: *In CLIL settings, the textbook should only be used as a reference or support tool. The teacher and the students should have an active role in which the materials selected support the activities but are not at the core of the methodology.*

Figure 5 shows the resources and materials dimension. As can be observed, despite the large current supply of CLIL materials (Tragant et al. 2016), participants criticize the use of textbooks for their rigidity. Hence, the difficulty in adopting a methodology in keeping with the patterns governing the CLIL approach. Teaching through textbooks leads to a lack of motivation on the part of both teachers and students and kills the teacher's creativity. Textbooks also tend to be rather theoretical and make teachers dwell in their comfort zone, as they do not have to worry about designing activities that cater to the students' needs best. Additionally, the participants do not think that textbooks provide the necessary Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) that characterize the CLIL approach, an aspect that has been empirically demonstrated (Romeu Peyró et al. 2020). Textbooks can actually be replaced by information technologies. Resources and/or materials are only reported to be appropriate if they have been properly adapted. Therefore, the informants are of the opinion that teachers need to prepare their own materials despite the additional workload involved.

Student 1: *You don't need to think or do anything. It's like: "I have everything I need here. This activity looks good to me and I think I cover that objective..."*

Student 2: *A textbook is just words. It is mainly used to read, memorize, and write. That's it. They don't make you think. However, children learn by doing.*

Student 3: *With information technologies, I don't think textbooks are necessary.*

How Do Plurilingual Trainee Teachers View the CLIL Challenge?

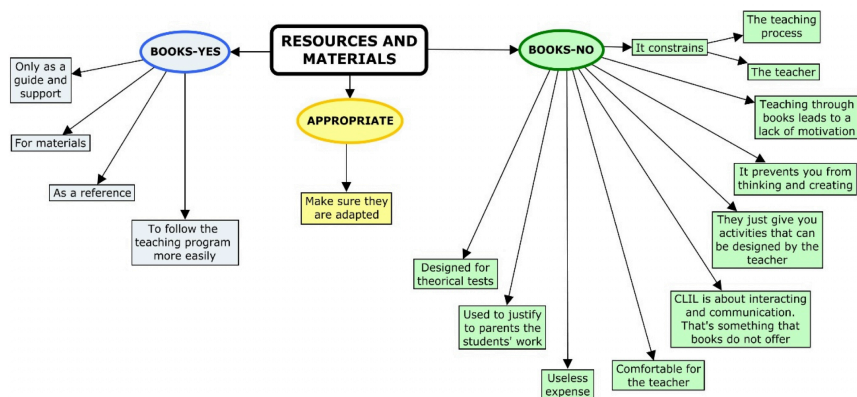


Figure 5. Resources and materials

The participants only regard the textbook as appropriate support or guidance for new teachers, or just to follow a teaching program more easily, but they generally agree that the textbook constrains both the teacher and the teaching process. They concur that CLIL involves interaction and communication, something that a textbook does not provide. They conclude that its main role is just to justify to parents the work done by the learner, but it is an unnecessary expense. However, it is noteworthy that other studies show that the textbook is considered to be an essential element when working with younger students (Lozano-Martínez 2017), as well as when structuring the lessons (Moore and Lorenzo 2015). Nonetheless, trainee teachers partaking in our study praise a type of teaching free of textbooks in order to make the learning experience more meaningful and attractive.

5. Conclusions

The main objective of this study has been to find out the perceptions of pre-primary and primary school trainee teachers about plurilingual programs in the Valencian region. Understanding the nature of these programs from the point of view of would-be teachers is essential for making future decisions and adjusting the available resources and efforts to new emerging realities. Although the plurilingual system in the region is organized around three languages (English, Spanish and Valencian), in this article we have focused on English and how the teaching of curricular content through this language is framed within the current plurilingual model.

In general terms, the first conclusion that can be drawn from the results obtained is that, after a work placement in pre-primary and primary plurilingual schools as part of their Master's training, the participants describe a reality that is very similar to that depicted in other studies carried out with other stakeholders, mostly in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers perceive plurilingual programs as an opportunity to improve the general foreign language proficiency of students and, therefore, to become more internationally competent. Consequently, most of them view positively the teaching of the majority language, i.e. English as opposed to Valencian.

Teacher training is undoubtedly the main element that can ensure continuity and guarantee the quality of plurilingual programs. Although additional training is required on a continuous basis, the participants emphasize that the number of specialized courses offered at university should be greater. As a result, it can be concluded that the curricula of Degrees in Teaching should be updated in order to adapt to this new educational reality. To this end, each didactic area should devote a small proportion of its time to teaching how to integrate the acquisition of specific academic knowledge with the foreign language.³ Each area requires different teaching approaches and strategies, as well as domain-specific vocabulary. For this reason, we consider that each of them should have a unique and non-transferable training aimed at plurilingual teaching.

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This training structure organized according to different curricular areas should subsequently be maintained in continuous training courses and combined with stays in other schools so as to create synergies and contribute to the construction of a collaborative network of bilingual/plurilingual teachers. This would make it possible to create a direct learning experience in the classroom and, in the case of stays in foreign schools, to improve the foreign language. To this effect, it is necessary to sign new agreements with other schools and allow teachers to carry out extended stays to make sure that the experience does enhance the set of competences required of plurilingual teachers.

Based on the data obtained, we would establish three main measures that require urgent attention or investigation. On the one hand, teacher profiles should be established for the recruitment of teachers in public schools. A B2 accreditation in English and being in possession of the training certificate issued by the Department of Education do not guarantee the suitability of the teacher's academic profile. A specific examination should be established for the different curricular areas so that the candidates can demonstrate both their linguistic and methodological knowledge. This would also make it possible to bridge the gap between public and private schools.

On the other hand, it is deemed necessary to change textbook-based CLIL settings. Textbooks are still mostly mere translations of other textbooks originally

written in L1. Moreover, as it transpires from the study by Romeu Peyró et al. (2020), most textbooks seem to focus almost exclusively on the development of LOTS (Lower-Order Thinking Skills) and, to a very limited extent, HOTS (Higher-Order Thinking Skills). It follows that teachers are compelled to spend a great deal of time developing their own teaching materials, thereby forcing them to neglect other fundamental issues such as training.

Finally, students with special needs constitute one of the major challenges of this training. At present, their integration into plurilingual streams (especially when the foreign language is used) seems to be a challenge that most teachers do not know how to handle. This is why immediate research is needed in order to promote an inclusive type of education that guarantees that all students can access plurilingual programs on equal terms.

Among the main limitations of this study, it is worth mentioning that the results obtained are based on the perspective of pre-service teachers and that their opinions correspond to a work placement period as part of their Master's training. Likewise, the study is restricted to the Valencian region, so the results cannot be extrapolated at a national level. However, the present study may inspire similar research studies in other Spanish regions. Scarcity of empirical data in the Valencian region makes it necessary to carry out further scientific studies in order to scrutinize the current plurilingual educational system and help fine-tune future initiatives.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Rosario García-Bellido was responsible for the methodological design of the study and the data analysis process, as well as for drawing the diagrams with the results of this analysis. Dr. Enrique Cerezo Herrero carried out the literature review, conducted the focus groups interviews and interpreted the study data on the basis of the existing literature.

Notes

1. Certificate issued by the Regional Department of Education that includes both linguistic and methodological training in English.

2. Certificate issued by the Regional Department of Education that includes both linguistic and methodological training in Valencian.

3. It must be taken into account that in Degrees in Teaching the students have to demonstrate a certain level of English before they are awarded the diploma, so this proposal is feasible and could contribute to this end.

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