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éxito lingüístico

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Bilingual education and training courses abroad: Key factors for linguistic success

Educación bilingüe y cursos formativos internacionales: factores clave para el éxito lingüístico

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RESUMEN

La educación bilingüe/multilingüe se ha extendido en España debido a su potencial para el aprendizaje de lenguas. Sin embargo, pocos estudios examinan las percepciones sobre el éxito lingüístico (como combinación de competencia intercultural, empleabilidad y movilidad) de los egresados de estos programas y el efecto de realizar cursos formativos en el extranjero. Este artículo analiza si la participación en cursos de formación en otros países y en enseñanza bilingüe/multilingüe condiciona las percepciones sobre el éxito lingüístico de los graduados de programas bilingües/multilingües. El estudio utiliza una encuesta online mediante Facebook Audience Insights. El 19,2 % de los encuestados afirma haber participado en programas bilingües/multilingües y el 38,6 % declara haber realizado cursos en otro país. Se revela mayor éxito lingüístico autopercibido entre los egresados de programas bilingües/multilingües y de dichos cursos, y animan a seguir investigando sobre el potencial de estos programas y las experiencias formativas en el extranjero.

PALABRAS CLAVE

ENSEÑANZA BILINGÜE, ÉXITO, ESTUDIOS EN EL EXTRANJERO, LENGUAS

ABSTRACT

Bilingual/multilingual education has become widespread in Spain due to its potential for language learning. However, few studies examine bilingual/multilingual education graduates' perceptions of their linguistic success (in terms of intercultural competence, employability, and mobility) and whether participation in training courses abroad contributes to it. This paper analyses whether participation both in Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs and training courses abroad affects bilingual/multilingual education graduates' perceptions of linguistic success. A web-based survey is used for data gathering through Facebook Audience Insights for sample selection. 19.2% of respondents claim having participated in

bilingual/multilingual programs, whereas 38.6% declare having taken part in training courses abroad. Findings reveal that participants in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad consider themselves more linguistically successful than their counterparts. This encourages further research on the potential of both Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs and study abroad experiences.

KEYWORDS

BILINGUAL EDUCATION, SUCCESS, STUDY ABROAD, LANGUAGES

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, the need to acquire and develop communicative and intercultural competences has become essential for 21st-century citizens. As a result of globalization and the subsequent increase in mobility flows from country to country, individuals are being required certain command of languages, others than their mother tongue, so as to be able to communicate with others for social, cultural and professional purposes. In this light, educational bodies have made remarkable efforts to implement bilingual/multilingual education, considering it “the only way to educate” young generations according to the demands of the present and the challenges of the future (García, 2009, p. 16).

In Spain, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been implemented in schools since the beginning of the century to provide students with quality exposure to the language of instruction (often English in Spanish schools; Madrid-Fernández et al., 2019). Generally, there seems to be positive attitudes among Spanish teachers and learners in relation to satisfaction and motivation with the CLIL experience (e.g., Martínez-Agudo & Fielden-Burns, 2021; Pladevall-Ballester, 2019; San Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2020). It is also worth mentioning in this respect the variety of languages that exist in Spain. The country is administratively composed of 17 regions and two autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla), all of them with Spanish as their official language. However, some of these regions also have languages with co-official status (i.e., Basque in the Basque Country and Navarre, Catalan in Catalonia, Galician in Galicia, and Valencia in the Valencian Community) which also have a place at schools. The status of these languages makes the implementation of CLIL different in these regions, where the type of education developed is trilingual (i.e., Spanish, a foreign language and the co-official language are used as languages of instruction; Cenoz & Gorter, 2019; Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020).

For this reason, national and international scholars have attempted to analyse the evolution of bilingual/multilingual education (e.g., Madrid-Fernández et al., 2019; Renau-Renau & Mas-Martí, 2019). They have also examined the diverse manifestations existing the country and the differences in implementation of the programs resulting from the freedom of regions to decide over education (e.g., Pena, 2019; Poveda, 2019; Vila et al., 2017). Likewise, so far research has mainly focused on the benefits of bilingual/multilingual education for stakeholders (e.g., Gómez-Parra, 2018; Hughes & Madrid, 2020). However, few studies examine the perception of graduates from bilingual/multilingual education in relation to whether and how these programs have impacted their lives. For this purpose, Gómez-Parra et al. (2021) have reflected on whether bilingual/multilingual education contributes to ‘linguistic success’. The term, which has been traditionally linked to linguistic knowledge in the strict sense, is reconceptualised by the authors as a combination of speakers’

intercultural skills, international mobility, and employability, which recognized as three of the aims of European educational systems (Council of Europe, 2019; European Commission, 2017). In this sense, it seems relevant to study if graduates from these programs believe that this educational option has made them more linguistically successful.

Study abroad experiences have also become widespread due to the internationalization of education and the priority of schools and universities to train global citizens for an interconnected and globalised world (Isabelli-García et al., 2018; Pawlak et al., 2020). Study abroad research emerges in the mid-1990s as a subfield of Applied Linguistics, aiming to examine issues such as program type and structure, and learners' reasons to study in a different country (Howard, 2019). Likewise, much has been written in relation to the linguistic challenges and the multiple benefits for students when studying abroad (e.g., Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018; Gong et al., 2020; Hajar, 2019; McManus et al., 2021; Ruth et al., 2019; Yang, 2017). For instance, Abduh and Rosmaladewi (2018) study teachers' perceptions of how bilingual education promotes intercultural values in the context of Indonesian higher education, showing that the group of lecturers taking part in the study considered that bilingual teaching resulted in open-mindedness and respectful attitudes among their students. Yang (2017) examines the opinions of Taiwanese learners enrolled in bilingual programs and reveals that enhanced international mobility was one evidenced advantage of this educational option. Nevertheless, to the authors' knowledge, the specialised scientific literature has not explored if individuals who have participated in study-abroad experiences have different linguistic success perceptions from those who have not.

This paper analyses whether participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs and training course abroad contribute to bilingual/multilingual education graduates' positive perceptions of linguistic success. Three research questions are established as follows: (1) Does participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad contribute to graduates' positive perceptions of linguistic success?; (2) Do individuals who have taken training courses abroad consider themselves more linguistically successful than their non- bilingual/multilingual counterparts?; and (3) Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education who have taken training courses abroad consider themselves more linguistically successful than their non- bilingual/multilingual counterparts?

METHOD

This study is part of the research project 'Facing Bilinguals: Study of Bilingual Education Programmes' Results through Social Data Analysis (BESOC)' (Ref. no. EDU2017-84800-R), granted by the 2017 call of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The objective of BESOC is to study the impact of bilingual/multilingual education programs on 21st-century citizens across the globe. To that purpose, the research team of the project has designed a specific instrument that allows measuring the perceptions of graduates from bilingual programs regarding their linguistic success. The instrument includes 13 general and demographic questions (no questions related to either nationality or region of belonging, type of schools or educational stage in which bilingual/multilingual education was implemented, or the language of instruction of the program) and 24 specific items divided into three dimensions that

coincide with the components of linguistic success theoretically established (i.e., mobility, employability, and intercultural competence).

The questionnaire was validated using Cronbach’s Alpha test, Bartlett’s sphericity test, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, and confirmatory factor analysis. In all cases, the values resulting from the tests prove the reliability of the instrument and the close relationship between linguistic success and the three established components or dimensions (Gómez-Parra et al., 2021).

The questionnaire was allocated in SurveyMonkey and then distributed via Facebook using advertisements specifically created for that aim. The procedure followed four steps: (i) Facebook Audience Insights was used to target users located in Spain that met pre-established requirements (e.g., age, language, or educational background); (ii) the questionnaire was embedded in advertisements and distributed among the targeted users using the Facebook Business platform; (iii) information was gathered from December 2019 to January 2020; and (iv) data were refined and then analysed statistically with SPSS V22.0. In the analysis, Mann-Whitney *U*-test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test, both non-parametric, were applied to discover statistical discrepancies between participants and non-participants of bilingual programs, between those who have studied in a foreign country and those who have not, and between the combination of both variables.

As mentioned above, the Facebook Audience Insights tool allowed cross-sectional sampling since it helped obtain a larger sample. In this light, the sample was national-representative, and no particular information about the academic or socio-cultural context of the participants was gathered.

A total of 1049 responses were collected, out of which only 759 were complete (i.e., all questions answered). This number was reduced due to incongruous information. The final sample of the study consisted of 741 respondents distributed as follows: as for gender, 263 (35.5%) were men, and 472 (63.7%) were women (0.8% of participants did not provide this information). The mean age was 39.9 years (SD = 14.6), whereas the mean of the time of study in bilingual/multilingual education was 7.92 years (SD = 6.35). Neither nationality nor the educational stage in which respondents were enrolled in a bilingual/multilingual program was considered for the study.

RESULTS

142 (19.2%) of the respondents participated in a bilingual/multilingual program in Spain, whereas 286 (38.6%) had studied a training course abroad, out of whom only 53 (18.5%) had been students of a bilingual/multilingual education program. Table 1 shows generic information regarding respondents’ participation in bilingual/multilingual programs and training courses abroad:

Table 1

Generic and demographic information

		Have you participated in a bilingual/multilingual program?	N	%
Have you ever followed a training course abroad?	Yes	Yes	53	18.53
		No	233	81.47
	No	Yes	89	19.56
		No	366	80.44

Note. Own elaboration.

Table 2 presents the results of Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon tests applied to the three components of linguistic success theoretically established by Gómez-Parra et al. (i.e. mobility, employability and intercultural competence; 2021), revealing statistically significant differences (sig. < 0.05) for two of the three dimensions (i.e., mobility and intercultural competence):

Table 2

Mann-Whitney U-test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test applied to dimensions (grouping variable: participation in bilingual/multilingual programs)

Variable	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> test	Z	Sig.
Mobility	37292.000	216992.000	-2.284	.022
Employability	39944.000	219644.000	-1.127	.260
Intercultural competence	35764.000	215464.000	-2.950	.003

Note. Statistically significant differences (sig < 0.05) shown in bold. Own elaboration.

However, results differ when considering whether respondents have followed a training course in another country. In this case, the results of Mann-Whitney *U* and Wilcoxon *W* reveal significant differences (sig. < 0.05) for the three dimensions as well as for the total scale, i.e., linguistic success as a whole (Table 3):

Table 3

Mann-Whitney U-test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test applied to dimensions (grouping variable: participation in training courses abroad)

Variable	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> test	Z	Sig.
Mobility	34410.500	138150.500	-10.815	.000
Employability	40010.500	143750.500	-8.841	.000
Intercultural competence	40079.000	143819.000	-8.824	.000
Linguistic success	34581.500	138321.500	-10.747	.000

Note. Statistically significant differences (sig < 0.05) shown in bold. Own elaboration.

Table 4 shows the mean ranges for the three dimensions and the total scale:

Table 4

Ranges among dimensions (grouping variable: participation in training courses abroad)

Variable	Have you ever followed a training course abroad?	N	Mean range	Sum
Mobility	Yes	286	478.18	136760.50
	No	455	303.63	138150.50
	Total	741		
Employability	Yes	286	458.60	131160.50
	No	455	315.94	143750.50
	Total	741		

Intercultural competence	Yes	286	458.36	131092.00
	No	455	316.09	143819.00
	Total	741		
Linguistic success	Yes	286	477.59	136589.50
	No	455	304.00	138321.50
	Total	741		

Note. Own elaboration.

Likewise, basic descriptive values are as detailed in Table 5:

Table 5
Descriptive information

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum score	Maximum score
Mobility	741	32.7665	13.57674	5.00	50.00
Employability	741	23.0432	11.48634	4.00	40.00
Intercultural competence	741	35.0486	12.99034	5.00	50.00
Linguistic success	741	90.8583	34.25067	14.00	140.00
Have you ever followed a training course abroad?	741	1.6140	.48715	1.00	2.00

Note. Own elaboration.

Tables 4 and 5 show that scores of the mean range are higher in the case of individuals who participated in training courses in a foreign country.

It is necessary now to study the cross-tabulation of the variables ‘participation in bilingual/multilingual education’ and ‘participation in training courses abroad’. Table 6 shows descriptive values for the three dimensions and for the total scale:

Table 6
Descriptive information of cross-tabulation of variables

Type of participation	Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum score	Maximum score
Bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad	Mobility	53	39.7736	10.65840	5.00	50.00
	Employability	53	28.3585	10.31633	4.00	40.00
	Intercultural comp.	53	41.4906	8.02549	25.00	50.00
	Linguistic success	53	109.6226	25.90977	56.00	140.00
	Total	53				
Neither bilingual/multilingual education nor training courses abroad	Mobility	366	28.0656	13.72334	5.00	50.00
	Employability	366	19.2322	11.30417	4.00	40.00
	Intercultural comp.	366	30.7951	13.92166	5.00	50.00
	Linguistic success	366	78.0929	34.68926	14.00	140.00
	Total	366				
Only in bilingual/multilingual education	Mobility	89	30.7753	13.47957	5.00	50.00
	Employability	89	23.6180	10.65204	4.00	40.00
	Intercultural comp.	89	35.6966	11.15531	10.00	50.00
	Linguistic success	89	90.0899	30.65854	32.00	140.00
	Total	89				

Only in training courses abroad	Mobility	233	39.3176	10.32291	5.00	50.00
	Employability	233	27.6009	10.12633	4.00	40.00
	Intercultural comp.	233	40.0172	10.42666	5.00	50.00
	Linguistic success	233	106.9356	27.28158	14.00	140.00
	Total	233				

Note. Own elaboration.

Table 7 presents the mean ranges for the three dimensions and the total scale for the groups ‘participants in bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad’, and ‘participants neither in bilingual/multilingual education nor in training courses abroad’, being higher in the case of the first group.

Table 7

Ranges between participants in both experiences and participants in none

Variable	Participation	N	Mean range	Sum
Mobility	Bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad	53	489.12	25923.50
	Neither bilingual/multilingual education nor training courses abroad	688	361.90	248987.50
	Total	741		
Employability	Bilingual/multilingual and training courses abroad	53	470.86	24955.50
	Neither bilingual/multilingual education nor training courses abroad	688	363.31	249955.50
	Total	741		
Intercultural comp.	Bilingual/multilingual and training courses abroad	53	472.08	25020.00
	Neither bilingual/multilingual education nor training courses abroad	688	363.21	249891.00
	Total	741		
Linguistic success	Bilingual/multilingual and training courses abroad	53	491.67	26058.50
	Neither bilingual/multilingual education nor training courses abroad	688	361.70	248852.50
	Total	741		

Note. Own elaboration.

Likewise, Table 8 shows the results of Mann-Whitney *U* and Wilcoxon *W* tests applied to both groups, with significant differences (sig. < 0.05) in all the cases.

Table 8

Mann-Whitney U-test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test between participants in both experiences and participants in none

Variable	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> test	Z	Sig.
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Mobility	11971.500	248987.500	-4.172	.000
Employability	12939.500	249955.500	-3.528	.000
Intercultural competence	12875.000	249891.000	-3.574	.000
Linguistic success	11836.500	248852.500	-4.260	.000

Note. Statistically significant differences ($\text{sig} < 0.05$) shown in bold. Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The responses of the participants in the study have allowed to determine whether participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad are determinant factors of the perceptions of linguistic success of graduates from bilingual/multilingual programs. As shown in Table 4, individuals who have studied in a bilingual/multilingual program at some point in their lives consider themselves more interculturally competent and more willing to move to another country. These results are in line with previous studies analysing the perceptions of educational stakeholders regarding the benefits of this type of education for intercultural learning and international mobility (e.g., Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018; Yang, 2017).

When considering if respondents had followed a training course in a different country, the results are slightly different. As shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5, study abroad experiences seem to contribute to self-perceived linguistic success (as a whole and in terms of mobility, employability, and intercultural competence). In all the cases, statistically significant differences are revealed (see Table 4). This suggests that individuals who have had study abroad experiences think they are more linguistically successful, more willing to be employed and travel to other countries, and more interculturally competent than their counterparts. The scientific literature specialised in this field has examined neither the link between participation in bilingual/multilingual education and international training courses nor the effects of such courses on learners' perceived linguistic success as defined by Gómez-Parra et al. (2021). However, the results of this study may reveal that participants are well-aware of the benefits of moving to another country for training purposes (such as oral fluency and accuracy – McManus et al., 2021, and academic, career and personal development and global citizenry – Ruth et al., 2019) and that, for this reason, they decided to do so. Nevertheless, further research in this area is still needed as suggested by previous studies (e.g., Tudor, 2008 as cited in Yang, 2017).

At this point, it is necessary to reconsider the research questions of the study. In relation to the first one (*Does participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad contribute to graduates' positive perceptions of linguistic success?*), the findings have shown how participation in Spanish bilingual programs results in higher self-perceived mobility and intercultural competence, while participation in training courses abroad also entails higher self-perceived employability and global linguistic success (see Tables 2 and 3). Therefore, studying in a bilingual/multilingual program and having study abroad experiences appear to be determinant factors in the perceptions of linguistic success. In relation to the second question (*Do individuals who have taken training courses abroad consider themselves more linguistically successful than their non-bilingual/multilingual counterparts?*), results have shown that those who have had a study abroad experience consider themselves more linguistically successful than those who have not (see Table 3). In relation to the third question (*Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education who have taken training courses abroad consider themselves more*

linguistically successful than their non-bilingual/multilingual counterparts?), statistically significant differences have been found among participants, proving that the perceptions of linguistic success are higher in the case of graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education who have also taken training courses in another country (see Table 8).

The results should be interpreted considering five main limitations. First, the study has only considered quantitative information reported by respondents themselves. In this sense, future research should also consider analysing qualitative data as well as using more instruments to gather them in order to obtain more information regarding the linguistic success of Spanish bilingual/multilingual graduates. Second, the number of participants could be extended so that a wider representation of participants in Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs is achieved. Third, no data have been gathered in relation to respondents' nationality or region of belonging, the type of programs (i.e., bilingual or trilingual) and schools in which they were enrolled, the languages of instruction, or the educational stage in which they received bilingual/multilingual education. Considering these aspects could also provide more information about graduates' self-perceived linguistic. Fourth, this study only examined differences between the groups 'participants in bilingual/multilingual education and training courses abroad' and 'participants neither in bilingual/multilingual education nor in training courses abroad' were examined. Subsequent studies should also analyse the different combinations of variables (briefly explored in Table 6), since significant discrepancies may vary in other cases yet unexplored. Fifth, only information regarding Spain has been considered. Therefore, future analyses should consider comparing Spanish bilingual/multilingual education with that of other countries (at the present, the BESOC team is examining the perceptions of graduates from bilingual/multilingual programs from different parts of the world, so that comparative studies are the next step in the research project). Furthermore, future lines of research should focus on collecting data about the results of study abroad experiences for graduates, examining, for instance, the achievement of a language-level certification. Despite the limitations, these results entail new insights in the study of the potential and effects of Spanish bilingual/multilingual education and the benefits of study abroad experiences, whose linguistic, social, cultural, and personal benefits are more than clear.

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