

Integrated Bilingual Special Education

Jen-Yi LI, EdD

Li-Yi WANG

Office of Education Research

National Institute of Education

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Abstract

This paper was written as a response to an experimental design of bilingual special education as detailed in the journal article 'Maldonado, Jorge A. (1994). Bilingual Special Education: Specific Learning Disabilities in Language and Reading. The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students, 14, 127-144'. The authors of this article provided a summary of the article first, defined the term 'Bilingual Special Education', explored the historical development of bilingual education in the USA and, investigated the underlying assumption of the study and issues arising when applying the proposed model to individuals with evidencing disabilities. One case study was used to demonstrate the translation of integrated bilingual special education as educational practice.

Keywords: bilingualism, inter-language, reading, special education, specific learning disabilities

Summary of the Journal Article

In this quantitative study, the researcher examined the effect of the use of a student's native language as the mode of instruction to bilingual students with specific learning disabilities in language and reading. The native language instruction (L1) and second language instruction (L2) were combined together in the assigned integrated bilingual special education classroom. The researcher randomly selected twenty Hispanic-Spanish speaking students with learning disabilities in an inner city elementary school and assigned them randomly into two groups of 10, and each group became a class. One of the two classes was chosen to receive the integrated bilingual special education as a treatment (experimental group), and the other class received the traditional special education (control group). The pretest/posttest design was applied by using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills as an instrument to validate the effectual difference between these two groups. Statistically, the results of the t-test in this study showed a significant difference. The researcher also conducted a follow-up study during the year following the completion of the experimental study. The researcher found that students in the integrated bilingual special education classes were successfully mainstreamed into the general education classrooms. The research findings in this study suggested the need to provide bilingual special education.

Responses to the Journal Articles

Integrated Bilingual Special Education

“Integrated bilingual special education” is one of the bilingual special education instructional delivery models. The researcher examined the effect of this model using an experimental design in this study. The researcher provided the explanation and definition for this model as follows: “This model is used when a district has teachers who are trained in both bilingual education and special education. These dually certified teachers provide special education instruction in the native language, provide ESL-English as a second language training, and assist in the transition into English language instruction as the child develops adequate proficiency” (pp. 135-136).

Historical Development of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is not a product of the 1960s, although bilingual education has its origin in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. In 1839, Ohio was the first state to adopt a bilingual education law, which authorized German-English instruction at parents’ request. By the end of the 19th century, about a dozen states had passed similar laws. At the turn of the 20th century, the enrollment surveys reported that at least 600,000 primary school students were receiving part or all of their instruction in the German language—about 4% of all American children in the elementary grades (Rethinking School, 1998).

But the political tide shifted in the opposite direction during the World War I era. American people had fears about the loyalty of non-English speakers in general, and especially, of the German-Americans. So, the majority of states enacted English-only instruction laws designed to “Americanize” these groups in the early 1920s.

Still, by the mid-1920s, bilingual schooling was largely dismantled throughout the country. English-only instruction continued as the norm for limited English proficiency (LEP) students until its failure could not be ignored any more. The LEP students in English-only classrooms were falling behind in their academic studies and dropping out of school at startling rates.

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was passed during an era of growing immigration and a vivid civil rights movement. The federal government provided funding in order to encourage local school districts to try this approach of teaching, which incorporated the student’s native language instruction. Most states followed the lead of the federal government, and enacted their own bilingual educational laws or at least decriminalized the use of other languages in the classroom.

In 1974, the court’s decision of *Lau v. Nichols* stood out as a landmark in the development of bilingual education, as this case required the school district of San Francisco to take affirmative steps to overcome the language barriers that were impeding a student’s access to the curriculum. Congress immediately endorsed this principle in the Equal Education Opportunity Act of 1974 (Duignan, 2000; Rethinking School, 1998).

Political differences also exist in regard to this issue of bilingual education. In 1978, the Ninth Circuit Appellate Court, California, clarified *Lau v. Nichols* through the *Guadalupe v. Tempe*

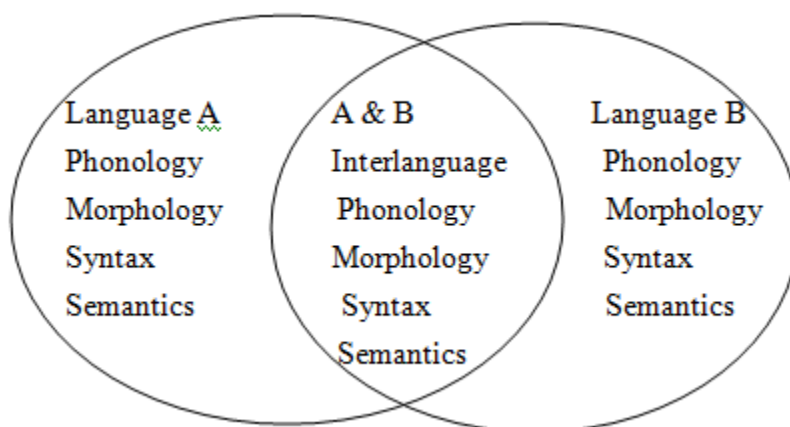
decision, and made the decision that bilingual education was not required by federal law (there is no federal mandate for bilingual education) (Duignan, 2000). Some conservative institutions were against bilingual education, such as the Hoover Institution. By 1983, the American Federation of Teachers voiced opposition to maintaining the native language because it claimed that this would keep the child from becoming proficient in English and from becoming assimilated.

In 1982 and 1983, the Reagan administration renewed the Bilingual Education Act, and English instruction was an integral part of the bilingual education program. Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, reported that government support for bilingual education grew from \$7.5 million in 1969 to \$134 million in 1982 and this money helped between 1.2 million and 3.5 million children. By 1997, 2.6 million students were in bilingual education at a cost of \$12-\$15 billion to the federal and state governments (Duignan, 2000).

Underlying Assumption of This Study

The first underlying assumption in the model of an integrated bilingual special education has to do with the assumption that academically mediated language skills are interdependent. Therefore, when a bilingual child is exposed in an extensive and intensive degree to his/her second language, the level of his/her achievement is partially dependent on the type of competence he/she has developed in the first language. The relationship of two different languages will involve the influence of all the subsystems of one language on the other to different degrees (See figure 1). This reflects the theory of Noam Chomsky which states that all human languages are similar to one another.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Duran (1994)



In the whole process of bilingual development, two major aspects comprise that process: one aspect is the inter-language, and the other aspect is code-switching. The first assumption mentioned previously explained the notion of the inter-language. Code-switching, the use of two languages simultaneously or interchangeably (Duran, 1994), can help in the distinction between Spanish and English. In Maldonado's three-year study, it appeared that a bilingual special education teacher might enhance the code-switching skills of students in the treatment group (integrated bilingual special education) in their second year by using contrastive analysis.

Based on the assumption embraced in this study, two levels of language proficiency were stressed by the researcher. They are Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Prior researchers indicated that bilingual children might be proficient in the BICS in English, but experienced difficulties with the CALP (Cummins, 1984). Bilingual students with learning disabilities were always lost between these two levels of proficiency in their native language (L1) and the second language (L2). The researcher in this study further indicated that language interference results from the inadequate development of L1 and L2. These interferences might hinder the student's ability to competently achieve the fluent usage of the native language or English language as his/her second language.

The second underlying assumption is that language form and use cannot be separated; therefore, it is more global and context-oriented. Wholes are not broken down into parts (at least initially). Instructional procedures would emphasize interactive meaningful experiences rather than controlled patterns on correct form. Errors are tolerated, and corrections are made only if communication breaks down (Bunce, 1997). The researcher brought the educators' attention to the role of bilingual students' cultural background, and suggested that English be taught orally or through a whole language approach. This is consistent with the second assumption that I have proposed here.

Information Issues from this Study as Applied to Individuals with Evidencing Disabilities

The results of this three-year research finding showed promising and positive effect of the integrated bilingual special education model. Obviously, the pedagogy adopted in this study helped the language minority students achieve a higher academic performance. We all know that students with learning disabilities have many challenges in their academic pursuit. The discouraging situation would worsen when students with learning disabilities also have the background of English as their second language. Because of their learning disabilities, and to some degree, the language impairment, these children do not have well-developed basic language skills, which are necessary in order for a student to benefit from instruction that uses language to succeed academically. There would be a distinction between the development of language and the use of language as a medium for instruction (either a first language or a second language) (McCormick, 1997). The characteristics of students with learning disabilities are: easily distractible, memory deficit; perception difficulties in many areas such as visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic areas, and clumsiness in coordinative motor skills. Specifically, language difficulties of children with learning disabilities are often described in terms of five basic processes: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics (Marks, 1993). Those factors all affect each child's academic achievement. A child with learning disabilities learning English as a second language also brings to the school task a myriad of other cultural differences and the knowledge of his/her language knowledge.

The child's native language and culture dominate and impact his/her learning at school. Teachers need to be aware of possible causes of communication failure in the school environment in order to circumvent misunderstandings and to facilitate academic achievement and acceptance of the bilingual/bicultural child in the school system. Teachers must be aware of their own cultural interaction and how it may affect children who do not share their culture and language. In addition, teachers need to respect these differences as differences and not deficiencies. The research findings conclude that it is better to teach in the child's first language, as this facilitates

learning of the second language. It is better to use the child's strongest language system when introducing new concepts and skills (McCormick, 1997; Kayser, 1995). It takes fewer trials for the children to learn a second language under the bilingual training program than in the English-only condition (Kiernan & Swisher, 1990). Both the child's first language and second language must be used to develop his communication skills and language learning abilities. Using only one language (e.g., English), could limit the child's language development and neglect the child's strength (the first language comprehension). This language strength (the first language comprehension) could be used to develop academic language, and may increase the efficiency of English acquisition (Kayser, 1995).

Limitations of This Study

In the discussion of this study, the researcher concluded that through a student's native language as the primary means of instruction, the students' self-esteem levels were elevated, as well as the expectations of these bilingual students with learning disabilities (p. 143). The researcher came to this conclusion without the provision of any quantitative information. He did an experimental design so he needed to provide more data to support his conclusion. The researcher did a follow-up study which lasted a year and the follow-up study was affirmative of his earlier study. Nevertheless, the researcher did not report information about the study design as well as the data analysis for that follow-up study.

The researcher pointed out how several important variables including the cultural differences, social context, and self-esteem would affect the performance of those language minority students with learning disabilities at school. For those students with learning difficulties, experiencing failure is not uncommon. Their previous failures have caused a sense of anxiety and fear, a lack of motivation, and even a feeling of poor self-image, which as affective filters of language acquisition, make them avoid virtually all types of written expression and reading practices (Richard, 2000, classroom handout). Thus, a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies exists. This cycle must be broken if students with learning disabilities are to become receptive to writing and reading exercises. Even if students do practice writing and reading, it is usually for the purpose of simply completing an assignment, and not because they feel that writing is intrinsically important or valuable. Finally, the sense of low self-esteem prevents students with learning disabilities from feeling that their writing is worthy to be shared with others, thereby creating a tremendous barrier that they must scale to become receptive to any type of writing and reading exercise (Zhang, 2000).

Translating Into Educational Practice

One integrated bilingual special education designed by Ortiz (1984) can still be modified and used in a school setting. Based on this three-year study, the first year would consist solely of a student's native language instruction, the second year would be designated as the transitional year for students to transfer their native language to the second language (this involves numerous amounts of code switching in order to allow for inter-language to happen). The third year would be English-only instruction. The following example is a full day schedule. Bilingual teachers change the ratio of native language and the second language according to students' language development and facilitate their usage of the second language.

A Full Day Schedule (Ortiz, 1984):

- 8:00-8:30 A.M. Opening — students' independent time: journal writing, learning activities for the day, thematic reading.
- 8:30-9:00 A.M. Daily Routine — drill and practice: alphabet phonics review in Spanish and English, analysis of differences, thought for the day.
- 9:00-12:00 PM Theme for the month review — integration of all content areas in relationship to the monthly theme, direct instruction in language, reading, math, science, and social studies as a whole.
- 12:00-1:00 P.M. Lunch and Recess
- 1:00-2:00 P.M. Shared Reading — group reading, small group reading, and discussion of the readings.
- 2:00-3:00 P.M. Learning Centers — independent and group work in the learning centers, programmed activities chosen by the students to reinforce skills learned during the morning.

In addition to the general schedule, there should be specific instructional strategies for each and every child so as to focus more on his/her individualized learning difficulties and elucidate his language intervention program.

Case Study

Background

John (pseudonym) is a Spanish-speaking boy in the fourth grade and learning English as his second language. Spanish is the dominating language in John's family. His parents are all monolingual speakers. With three years of school, he can use primary English to communicate with friends, siblings (one older brother), and classmates in the school. However, his Spanish comprehension is still better than his English comprehension. John's academic progress is very slow, and after the diagnostic testing (e.g., the Universal Nonverbal Intelligent Test), John is determined to have learning disabilities with language impairment and qualified to receive some resource assistance from the special education and ESL teachers. Because of the cultural differences and learning disabilities, John's development in reading and writing development has been quite delayed.

Although he is in the fourth grade, his reading level is only in the pre-primer level as measured by the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Achievement Tests. Spelling test scores derived from the Kaufman Test of Education Achievement also reflect a significant below average performance. Results from the Test of Phonological Awareness indicate that John has not mastered the ability to detect similarities and differences among phonemes in words (Data are not available for reading levels in Spanish). John's concept of word-to-sound correspondence is not fully established. The language differences make it more difficult for him to have better comprehension in English reading (slow reading process), and learning disabilities make him have difficulties in using the word identification strategies, such as the phonics system. John's visual and auditory processing is all very slow, and his language development milestones are delayed. John needs to compensate and reinforce his ability in using the strategies of word recognition and in the meantime participate in fourth grade reading classes.

IEP Objectives

The IEP objectives of John's are set as follows:

- (1) John will recognize and insulate high frequency words in context from the Fry Word List.
Baseline: 27/100
- (2) John will utilize strategies to decode unknown words using picture cues, initial sounds, word families, word stretching and others.
Baseline: Inconsistent use of strategies to decode.
- (3) When given a grade level passage, John will answer literal comprehensions.
Baseline: Below 50% accuracy
- (4) When given a grade level passage, John will identify the main ideas and supporting details.
Baseline: Below 50% accuracy

Those IEP objectives indicate that John needs to work on word recognition. John's language difficulties can be mainly described in terms of phonology and morphology. The deficiencies of phonology and morphology have hindered John's word recognition, identification, and spelling. John's reading comprehension obviously suffers directly when John misidentifies words. John scores significantly higher on an oral listening comprehension task than the reading-level-matched (grade-level-matched) of younger students. This indicates that John has developed Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills--BICS mentioned in the study, so John will be able to move to the transitional year of inter-language in the integrated bilingual special education model.

Language Interventions

Based on these characteristics of John's language difficulties, John's language intervention instruction has been drawn from the literature reviewed. John's personalised instructional program of language intervention will be designed by focusing on spelling, and with the consideration of his language difference background. Because John has achieved the level of BICS, thus, he will in the second year of the integrated bilingual special education model be able to use Spanish and English interchangeably. As a result of the characteristics of reading and writing disabilities on spelling, John has benefited from the different language-based spelling instruction methods within the integrated bilingual special education model. John's bilingual teacher will help him develop his reading and writing skills in Spanish half the time in a school day, and then distinguish between Spanish and English using contrastive analysis. This approach will enable John to understand the differences in the sound system and decoding skills of both Spanish and English. For example, when John learns vowel and consonant sounds in Spanish, he can transfer these concepts into English language. The teacher can point out that there are five vowels in Spanish, and using contrastive analysis integrated with other teaching strategies, show that the same vowel sounds exist in English. However, the teachers will point out that in English, a distinction exists between lax and tense vowels. The same process can also apply to teaching consonants, consonant blends, and digraphs. In this way, John can transfer of his reading skills from reading in Spanish to reading in English.

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About the Authors

Dr Jenyi Li is a research scientist with the Office of Education Research at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Ms Li-Yi Wang is a research assistant.