

Bilingual Education in Colombia: Challenges and Benefits of Transforming a Monolingual School

Educación Bilingüe en Colombia: Retos y Beneficios de Transformar una Escuela Monolingüe

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the benefits and challenges of transforming a monolingual school into a bilingual one in the Colombian context. The theoretical framework highlights the complexities of bilingualism in Colombia, emphasizing the need for a critical approach to the concept and the challenges faced by monolingual schools. Methodologically, content analysis was employed to analyze the transition process, considering the empirical, exploratory, and predictive nature of this research method. The study drew on various sources, including a literature review, contrasting charts, and index cards, to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic. The findings emphasize the significance of a well-planned bilingualism project, which demands time, resources, qualified teachers, and appropriate teaching materials. Success hinges on a gradual, carefully monitored implementation process. Learners benefit from acquiring a foreign language, particularly English, which equips them to navigate a globalized world. The study advocates a sequential and staggered approach, involving regular evaluation and a variety of activities to strengthen language proficiency. In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of well-executed bilingualism projects in Colombian schools taking into consideration that such initiatives offer learners the skills needed to thrive in a globalized world while enhancing the quality of education and the school as an institution.

KEYWORDS:

bilingualism,
Monolingual
school,
Colombian
context,
Transition
process

RESUMEN

Este estudio profundiza en los beneficios y desafíos de transformar una escuela monolingüe en bilingüe en el contexto colombiano. El marco teórico resalta las complejidades del bilingüismo en Colombia, enfatizando la necesidad de una aproximación crítica al concepto y a los retos que enfrentan los colegios monolingües. Metodológicamente, se empleó el análisis de contenido para analizar el proceso de transición, considerando la naturaleza empírica, exploratoria y predictiva de este método de investigación. El estudio se basó en diversas fuentes, como la revisión bibliográfica, los gráficos de contraste y las fichas, para ofrecer una visión global del tema. Los resultados subrayan la importancia de un proyecto de bilingüismo bien planificado, que exige tiempo, recursos, profesores cualificados y materiales didácticos adecuados. El éxito depende de un proceso de implantación gradual y cuidadosamente supervisado. Los alumnos se benefician de la adquisición de una lengua extranjera, en particular el inglés, que les capacita para desenvolverse en un mundo globalizado. El estudio aboga por un enfoque secuencial y

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Contexto
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escalonado, que implique una evaluación periódica y una variedad de actividades para reforzar el dominio del idioma. En conclusión, esta investigación subraya la importancia de los proyectos de bilingüismo bien ejecutados en las escuelas colombianas, teniendo en cuenta que tales iniciativas ofrecen a los alumnos las habilidades necesarias para prosperar en un mundo globalizado, al tiempo que mejoran la calidad de la educación y de la escuela como institución.

The project of bilingualism in a monolingual school is a challenging and unique process that requires significant efforts on the part of the institution.

INTRODUCTION

The educational system is constantly evolving to meet the demands of contemporary society. The need to adapt to globalization has made the learning of a second language increasingly important, especially English, which serves as a vehicle for communication between cultures and nations. This study aims to explore the benefits of bilingualism and the process of transforming a monolingual school into a bilingual one, with a focus on the Colombian context.

The project of bilingualism in a monolingual school is a challenging and unique process that requires significant efforts on the part of the institution. However, when a bilingual identity is adopted, it can lead to improvements in academic practices and the use of language, as well as to opportunities for cultural and commercial exchange. This study aims to analyze the transformation process of a Spanish monolingual school to an English-Spanish/Spanish-English bilingual school in Colombia, in order to identify the challenges and benefits of this change.

Through a study of related literature, this article compiles specific information about bilingualism processes in Colombia and contrasts the benefits of an English bilingual

program in a monolingual school through comparative charts. Additionally, information from other studies on bilingualism and its implementation are cited through content analysis.

The transformation of a monolingual school into a bilingual one is not a simple process, but an increasingly necessary one in our globalized world. This study aims to shed light on the benefits and challenges of this transformation in the Colombian context, in the hope that more institutions will be encouraged to take on the challenge of becoming bilingual.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon that has been the subject of study for researchers from various fields such as linguistics, psychology, and education. In the Colombian context, bilingualism is a national priority due to the need to promote cultural and economic development. According to the National Bilingualism Program (NBP) (MinEducación, n.d.), the aim is to give all Colombians the opportunity to become bilingual in English and one of the other official languages of the country: Spanish.

However, the path to bilingualism in the Colombian context is not straightforward. Valencia (2005) points out that despite the growing interest in English language teaching, the monolingual tradition still dominates the education system, and there is a lack of trained teachers and adequate resources. Ospina's (2018) research project also highlights the challenges that Spanish monolingual schools face when transitioning to bilingualism, such as resistance from teachers, parents, and students, as well as the need for curricular changes and adequate teacher training.

In addition, Sánchez Solarte and Obando Guerrero (2008) argue that the concept of bilingualism itself needs to be critically examined in the Colombian context. They highlight the importance of understanding the differences between additive bilingualism, which involves acquiring a second language while maintaining the first language, and subtractive bilingualism, which involves losing the first language while acquiring the second. They suggest that the Colombian context requires an approach that promotes additive bilingualism to maintain the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country.

Houwer (2009) also emphasizes the importance of understanding the developmental process of bilingualism, as it involves complex cognitive and linguistic skills. He suggests that bilingualism is not simply the ability to speak two languages but involves a range of cognitive benefits such as enhanced executive function and metalinguistic awareness.

Pearson (2008) supports the idea of promoting bilingualism from an early age and provides practical advice to parents who want to raise bilingual children. She suggests that parents should expose their children to both languages in different contexts, provide them with opportunities to interact with native speakers of each language, and read to them in both languages.

Overall, the theoretical framework highlights the challenges and opportunities involved in the path to bilingualism in the Colombian context. It emphasizes the need for a critical understanding of the concept of bilingualism, the challenges faced by monolingual schools, and the importance of adequate teacher training and resources. In addition, it highlights the cognitive benefits of bilingualism and the importance of promoting bilingualism from an early age. The question then lies in how to go from a Spanish monolingual school to an English-Spanish/Spanish-English bilingual school in the Colombian context?

Contemporary content analysis has evolved its own methodology to facilitate effective planning, execution, reproduction, communication, and critical evaluation of the analysis process.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the scientific and technological research article about the transition from a Spanish monolingual school to an English-Spanish/Spanish-English bilingual school in the Colombian context was primarily based on content analysis, which involves the analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material through a classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effects.

Content analysis is a research method composed of three distinct characteristics. Firstly, it is grounded in empirical evidence, i.e. it relies on observable and measurable data. Secondly, it is exploratory in nature, allowing researchers to delve into the content and uncover new insights. Lastly, content analysis aims to be predictive or inferential, seeking to make predictions or draw inferences from the analyzed content. Contemporary content

analysis has evolved its own methodology to facilitate effective planning, execution, reproduction, communication, and critical evaluation of the analysis process. Researchers have developed this methodology to ensure that their content analysis is rigorous, reliable, and can be replicated by others.

According to Stemler (2001), not only content analysis does focus on making valid inferences from texts; it also emphasizes the quantification of content by using predetermined categories. To summarize, content analysis is characterized by its systematic, valid, and replicable approach to text analysis. It strives to uncover meaningful insights from empirical data, to explore new perspectives, and to make predictions or inferences about the content being analyzed. The research was conducted by using a qualitative approach that involved multiple interpretations taken from diverse authors as meaningful sources, which were based on quotes from the analyzed text and literature review about the topic under consideration.

To develop this monograph, index cards were used to compile the bibliographical information necessary to carry out the research project, which helped referring to and reading the authors involved orderly. The aim of the monograph is to provide the reader a critical overview by using adequate literature review to support the conclusions in regard to the transition from monolingual to bilingual education in the Colombian context.

The research line for this monograph was aligned with the ECEDU research line defined in Article 24 of the Statue of Research of Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD) (2016), specifically the research line "Education and human development." The tools used to develop this monograph included literature review, Contrasting Charts template of monolingual and bilingual

education in Colombia, as well as Index Cards template as part of the organization of the bibliography.

The population for this research included students from elementary to secondary school who participate in bilingualism processes in their schools, as well as teachers, school administrators, and legislators involved in the implementation of bilingual education in Colombia. The research was focused on establishing the influence and benefits of English bilingual education in the school system in contrast with Spanish monolingual education.

One of the critical factors for successful implementation is time. Moving from a monolingual to a bilingual school is a gradual process that requires administrative-academic action and appropriate pedagogical intervention.

REFLECTION

Our research findings support the idea that learning a second language is essential in today's globalized world. In the case of our study, we focused on the transition from a Spanish monolingual school to an English-Spanish/Spanish-English bilingual school in the Colombian context. Our analysis revealed that implementing a bilingualism project requires a well-planned strategy that involves the entire educational community, including teachers, students, and families.

One of the critical factors for successful implementation is time. Moving from a monolingual to a bilingual school is a gradual process that requires administrative-academic action and appropriate pedagogical intervention. It also requires careful

consideration of the quality of the teaching of the language, which is highly dependent on the quality of teachers, resources, and class materials. The opportunities for application of what is learned in class and the administrative-pedagogical management that leads and supports the process are also important factors.

The use of a foreign language within the school context allows learners to express their basic needs such as giving or asking for explanations, spelling, and asking for meanings. However, carrying out complex thought processes when attempting to engage in complex conversations or debates in a language that is not their own requires a considerable amount of time and effort. Therefore, monitoring the process frequently and evaluating it yearly is crucial to meet the expectations of the community of students and families.

The use of a foreign language within the school context offers learners the chance to recognize the world through English as L2, in addition to mastering the semantic and syntactic structures of the language.

DISCUSSION

Our findings highlight the importance of a well-planned and carefully implemented bilingualism project in schools. The implementation process requires a significant investment of time and resources, including qualified teachers, resources, and class materials. The opportunities for application of what is learned in class and the administrative-pedagogical management that leads and supports the process are also key factors for successful implementation.

The use of a foreign language within the school context offers learners the chance to recognize the world through English as L2, in addition to mastering the semantic and syntactic structures of the language. This provides learners with a valuable skill set that can help them navigate an increasingly globalized world.

Our research supports the notion that a sequential and staggered model of the process, which involves frequent evaluation and monitoring, is crucial to a successful bilingualism project. Moreover, filtering academic programs and improving pedagogical practices, as well as introducing new projects, activities, and events that strengthen the practice of the L2, both inside and outside the classroom, are elements that can nourish and provide feedback for the Plan Educativo Institucional (PEI). Ultimately, this can help increase the level and quality of the school as an educational structure.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our research on the transition from a Spanish monolingual school to an English-Spanish/Spanish-English bilingual school in the Colombian context emphasizes the importance of a well-planned and implemented bilingualism project. The project requires significant investment of time, resources, quality teaching, and class materials. Additionally, opportunities for application of what is learned in class and administrative-pedagogical management are crucial for successful implementation.

The use of a foreign language within the school context provides learners with the ability to recognize the world through English as L2, in addition to mastering its semantic and syntactic structures, which is a valuable skill set for navigating an increasingly globalized world.

Our study supports a sequential and staggered model of the process, with frequent evaluation and monitoring to ensure the success of the bilingualism project.

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pedagogical practices, as well as introducing new projects, activities, and events, both inside and outside the classroom, can help nourish and provide feedback for the Plan Educativo Institucional (PEI).

In conclusion, a well-implemented bilingualism project can provide learners with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly globalized world and increase the quality of education and the school as an educational structure.

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