

Bilingual Education

Unlike the UK, there is a wide variety of education programmes for bilingual pupils in other countries. Bilingual education can be defined as an educational programme in which two languages are used to provide instruction. As with the term [bilingualism](#), bilingual education is a simple label for a complex phenomenon. An important distinction is between those programmes that use and promote two languages and those where bilingual children are present, but bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum. Skuttnab-Kangas (1984) offers three broad categories that encompass the range of education programmes. Other educationalists have further refined and developed these categories (Baker, 1993).

Immersion programmes promote additive bilingualism for majority language speakers. These are highly valued educational programmes and the most well known are the French immersion programmes for English speaking children in Canada. Although teaching is provided in the second language, the teacher knows and may use both languages.

Submersion programmes are programmes where linguistic minorities are taught through the medium of the majority language with minimal or no support to enable learners to understand the language of instruction nor access the curriculum content. Often the minority languages and cultures are not highly valued by the majority group.

Maintenance programmes provide teaching in the first language in order to maintain use of the home language and culture. These programmes are often allied to transitional bilingual education programmes where the learners gradually move towards full use of the majority language. Examples can be found in the United States where, until recently, transitional bilingual education in Spanish and English was widely available. Transitional bilingual education programmes vary in the amount of first language instruction provided and the duration of the programme. Early exit programmes are where pupils move rapidly to English only instruction, for example, within the first one or two years.

Most bilingual education programmes have two goals; the acquisition of the language of the country and academic success; and the continuing development of the heritage language. Many bilingual education programmes can be defined as a way of using the first language to accelerate second language acquisition.

In the United States, [Thomas and Collier](#) (2002) compared the outcomes of different teaching programmes available. They concluded that bilingual education and dual language programmes were the most effective ways to empower EAL pupils to be successful students in the English language mainstream. (see [summary](#))

Debates around bilingualism and bilingual education are proliferating in the context of globalization and the rapid spread of English. For many, bilingual education is important to the maintenance of first language and culture, whilst at the same time promoting the academic achievement and future success of children. For others, bilingual education has become an issue in socio-political debates about nationalism, integration and identity.

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