



# Bilingual Education Programs in Primary Education: What Do Parents Think?

Recibido: 24/04/2023  
Evaluado: 02/04/2024  
Publicado: 01/04/2025

Martina Soledad Ramírez-Orduña\*  

Daniel Rodríguez-Rodríguez†  

Francisco Javier Batista-Espinosa‡  

Laura Barboyon Combey§  

## Abstract

Bilingual education programs are increasingly being implemented during mandatory schooling to meet the educational and labor demands of a globalized world. For these programs to be successful, they must be implemented effectively and supported by all stakeholders. Therefore, the objective of this research is to determine parental opinions on bilingual (English-Spanish) programs used in schools in the monolingual Autonomous Community of Extremadura (Spain). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 136 parents of students in the final stage of Elementary Education to gather their perceptions of bilingual education programs. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted on the collected data, providing a comprehensive interpretation of family opinions. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory was used to facilitate the interpretation of thematic categories from the qualitative data. The results show some positive opinions in thematic categories related to knowledge acquisition and the usefulness of the language. However, the majority of parents expressed concerns about teaching techniques, teacher training, students' emotions and excessive workload, and their own perceived difficulty in participating in their children's education. Additionally, positive opinions were mostly associated with the macrosystem of the social environment, while negative opinions were linked to the mesosystem of the teaching staff. The results suggest that parental opinions should be considered for the successful implementation of bilingual education projects.

## Keywords

Bilingual education; English; family; integrated curriculum; school

\* Doctora en Psicología. Universidad Europea de Canarias. [martina.ramirez@universidadeuropea.es](mailto:martina.ramirez@universidadeuropea.es)

† Doctor en Educación. Universidad Europea de Canarias. [daniel.rodriguez@universidadeuropea.es](mailto:daniel.rodriguez@universidadeuropea.es)

‡ Doctor en Psicología. Universidad de La Laguna. [fbatista@ull.edu.es](mailto:fbatista@ull.edu.es)

§ Doctora en Educación. Universidad Europea de Canarias. [laura.barboyon@universidadeuropea.es](mailto:laura.barboyon@universidadeuropea.es)

## Programas de educação bilingue no Ensino Primário: o que pensam os pais?

### Resumo

Os programas de educação bilingue estão sendo cada vez mais implementados durante a escolaridade obrigatória para atender às demandas educacionais e laborais de um mundo globalizado. Para que esses programas sejam bem-sucedidos, eles devem ser implementados de forma eficaz e contar com o apoio de todas as partes interessadas. Assim, o objetivo desta pesquisa é determinar as opiniões dos pais sobre os programas bilíngues (inglês-espanhol) utilizados em escolas da Comunidade Autônoma monolíngue de Extremadura (Espanha). Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com 136 pais de alunos na etapa final do Ensino Fundamental para coletar suas percepções sobre os programas de educação bilíngue. Foram realizadas análises quantitativas e qualitativas dos dados coletados, proporcionando uma interpretação abrangente das opiniões familiares. A Teoria Ecológica de Bronfenbrenner foi utilizada para facilitar a interpretação das categorias temáticas a partir dos dados qualitativos. Os resultados mostram algumas opiniões positivas em categorias temáticas relacionadas à aquisição de conhecimentos e à utilidade do idioma. No entanto, a maioria dos pais expressou preocupações sobre técnicas de ensino, formação de professores, emoções dos alunos, carga de trabalho excessiva e sua própria dificuldade percebida em participar da educação de seus filhos. Além disso, as opiniões positivas foram mais associadas ao macrosistema do ambiente social, enquanto as opiniões negativas estavam relacionadas ao mesossistema do corpo docente. Os resultados sugerem que as opiniões dos pais devem ser consideradas para a implementação bem-sucedida de projetos de educação bilíngue.

### Palavras-chave

educação bilíngue; inglês; família; currículo integrado; escola

## Programas de educación bilingüe en educación primaria: ¿qué piensan los padres?

### Resumen

Los programas de educación bilingüe se implementan cada vez más durante la escolarización obligatoria para satisfacer las demandas educativas y laborales de un mundo globalizado. Para que estos programas sean exitosos, deben implementarse de manera efectiva y contar con el apoyo de todos los actores involucrados. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de esta investigación es determinar las opiniones de los padres sobre los programas bilingües (inglés-español) utilizados en las escuelas de la Comunidad Autónoma monolingüe de Extremadura (España). Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a 136 padres de estudiantes en la etapa final de la Educación Primaria para recopilar sus percepciones sobre los programas de educación bilingüe. Se llevaron a cabo análisis cuantitativos y cualitativos de los datos recopilados, proporcionando una interpretación integral de las opiniones familiares. La Teoría Ecológica de Bronfenbrenner se utilizó para facilitar la interpretación de las categorías temáticas a partir de los datos cualitativos. Los resultados muestran algunas opiniones positivas en categorías temáticas relacionadas con la adquisición de conocimientos y la utilidad del idioma. Sin embargo, la mayoría de los padres expresaron preocupaciones sobre las técnicas de enseñanza, la formación docente, las emociones de los estudiantes, la carga excesiva de trabajo y su propia dificultad percibida para participar en la educación de sus hijos. Además, las opiniones positivas se asociaron principalmente con el macrosistema del entorno social, mientras que las opiniones negativas se vincularon al mesosistema del personal docente. Los resultados sugieren que las opiniones de los padres deben considerarse para la implementación exitosa de proyectos de educación bilingüe.

### Palabras clave

educación bilingüe; inglés; familia; currículo integrado; escuela

### Para citar este artículo:

Ramírez-Orduña, M. S., Rodríguez-Rodríguez, D., Batista-Espinosa, F. J. y Barboyon Combey, L. (2025). Bilingual Education Programs in Primary Education: What Do Parents Think?. *Revista Colombiana de Educación*, (95), e19093, <https://doi.org/10.17227/rce.num95-19093>

## Introduction

The increasing interest in learning second languages is one of the major consequences of globalization, in which English has become the universal language due to its role as a lingua franca (Corbella & Marcos, 2020). While proficiency in various languages is essential for professional success (Anghel et al., 2016), the undeniable importance of English stands out, as it has reached dimensions that other languages have not been able to match (Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020). However, according to the English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2022), Spain currently ranks 25<sup>th</sup> out of 35 European countries, with a level classified as moderate. These data are worrying, considering that in Spain, bilingual education became a priority in the education system almost 30 years ago, when it was proposed as the fourth main objective of the *White Paper on Education and Training*, which stated that European Union citizens should speak three community languages (European Commission, 1995). For this reason, there has been a commitment to the implementation of Spanish-English Bilingual Education Programs (BEPS) that span from early childhood education to secondary education (Durán, 2018) and extend throughout life as part of our lifelong learning path (Quirke, 2021).

## Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is framed within the additive bilingualism programs (Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020) and is defined as a "dual educational approach in which an additional language is used for both content and language learning and teaching" (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1). That is, the simultaneous learning of a Foreign Language (FL) and Non-Linguistic Disciplines (NLDS) occurs, with the FL serving as the vehicle through which the content is learned (Gómez, 2017). Due to this, CLIL is regarded as one of the most effective methods for learning a FL, since it entails a transformation of the classroom dynamics and methodology, promoting autonomous and interactive learning, while being flexible and student-centered (Pérez & Martínez, 2020).

In Spain, despite having a national educational law governing the country, each Autonomous Community has the autonomy to enact legislation that, guided by the state law, aims to satisfy the needs of its citizens. In the monolingual community of Extremadura, it was established in 2011 that all Early Childhood and Elementary Education schools to be established in the community would be bilingual, and that state-funded institutions would implement programs to promote bilingual education (*Ley 4/2011*). Thus, three different types of schools can be found, depending on elements such as teacher training, methodology, and the hours of FL instruction provided.

## *Bilingual Institutions and Bilingual Sections*

Bilingual Institutions (BIS) are defined in the *Orden de 17 de abril de 2015* as schools where certain NLDS are taught entirely in the targeted FL, applying the CLIL methodology, based on the recommendations contained in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Instruction in the FL must cover at least 40% of the weekly teaching schedule in Elementary Education, and 30% of the teaching staff must certify both language accreditation and language qualification in the FL. The former refers to having a B2 level or higher of language proficiency according to the CEFR, while language qualification can be acquired by demonstrating teaching experience in BIS or Bilingual Sections (BSS) (for at least one full school year or nine non-consecutive months), or through methodological training (for 50 hours or more) for teachers without experience in BIS or BSS (*Decreto 39/2014*).

On the other hand, schools with BSS use the FL, alternated with Spanish, as a means of integrated learning of the contents of certain NLDS, guaranteeing that teaching in the FL reaches at least 20% of the weekly schedule in Elementary Education. As for the training of teachers of these BSS, they must meet the same accreditation and linguistic qualification requirements as those of BIS (*Orden de 20 de abril de 2017*).

## MECD-British Council Schools

Schools involved in the bilingual partnership between the *Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte* (MECD) and the British Council are those that were established through the formal collaboration agreement signed in 1996. This BEP was groundbreaking in Spain as it aimed to provide a bilingual and bicultural education through an integrated Spanish-British curriculum that combined content from both the Spanish National Curriculum and the National Curriculum of England and Wales (*Resolución de 15 de junio de 2020*). It was also intended to offer a bilingual education to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic and academic level, unlike other BEPs that were criticized for elitism and academic segregation of students (Pérez-Cañado, 2020). This BEP is carried out from the second stage of Early Childhood Education (3 to 6 years old) to the last year of Compulsory Secondary Education (16 years old). During the elementary education stage (6 to 12 years old), Natural Science, Social Science, Literacy and Art subjects are taught in English, covering between 40% to 50% of the schedule, so that students can develop scientific thinking, literacy skills, and bicultural awareness (British Council, n.d.).

In contrast to BIS and BSS, these schools work not only with civil servant teachers but also with linguistic advisors who are highly knowledgeable of the British education system,

teachers with experience in British or bilingual schools specifically selected for this program, and Spanish-speaking English teachers with a minimum level of C1 according to CEFR (British Council, n.d.). While there are important differences in the training of teachers and staff involved in these schools, a common aspect is the choice of subjects taught in the FL. Among them, Science is one of the preferred subjects to start implementing these BEPS (Martínez, 2017) since acquiring scientific knowledge allows students to learn about the social and physical conditions that influence their lives and community, thus helping them to understand, improve, and connect with the world around them (Agudo et al., 2004).

### *Stakeholders' perception towards Bilingual Programs*

Currently, all stakeholders involved in BEPS perceive FL learning as valuable for students' training and professional future (Esparza & Belmonte, 2020), especially families with low educational levels who associate English proficiency with upward social mobility (Barrios, 2022; González & Duñabeitia, 2023; Hidalgo-McCabe & Tompkins, 2024). According to Chaieberras (2019), families "are the source of value system orientation, sociocultural principles, and economic aspects that impact their children's lives and behavior" (p. 77). That is why parents have a great effect on the level of students' motivation towards learning, and their opinion and involvement are crucial for the success or failure of the BEPS (Tabatadze, 2015).

Despite the fact that there has been a change in the role of parents, and they are expected to be more involved in their children's education than in the past (Lova et al., 2013), there is generally a great disconnection between family and school when it comes to participating in BEPS (Porter, 2018). Here, the lack of linguistic competence has been identified as the origin of the negative attitudes and high levels of anxiety shown by parents when helping their children with homework in general (Tabatadze, 2015), and especially with the Natural Sciences subject (Ramírez-Orduña et al, 2022). Even so, numerous families still support the teaching of science subjects in English because they consider that it improves linguistic competence and science learning (Aragón-Méndez, 2007; Ruiz, 2023). Sadly, many families perceive that FL training during early elementary education stage does not provide students with sufficient communicative competence (Pladevall-Ballester, 2015), and they identify problems related to teacher training from a CLIL approach (so that scientific and linguistic competence in the FL can be developed in a balanced way) (Pérez & Martínez, 2020). Insufficient and inadequate teacher training in CLIL methodology has been identified even by teachers themselves as the major weakness and the main barrier to achieving the desired academic results (Alcaraz-Mármol, 2018; Cabezuelo-Gutiérrez & Fernández-Fernández, 2014; Durán, 2018; Fernández-Barrera, 2019; Oxbrow, 2020).

According to the scientific literature, while some families strongly support CLIL programs and consider them as the only solution to their children's low English level,

others fear that they may pose a threat to the correct development of their L1, as well as the acquisition of NLDS taught in the L2 (Pladevall-Ballester, 2015; Ruiz, 2019). Therefore, the aim of this study is to gather parents' opinions regarding the effectiveness of BEPs in the acquisition of FL and NLDS content, covering aspects such as the methodology used, children's academic performance, and teacher training, among others.

Since the opinion and involvement of families in the BEPs are crucial for the success or failure of these programs, the central question guiding this study is: What opinion do parents have about BEPs? The objective is to find out the perceptions of parents towards Spanish-English bilingual education programs in the third stage of elementary education, according to the teaching modality (bilingual vs. Spanish mainstream schools).

## Method

This study used the quantitative-qualitative method, or mixed approach, because it provides a more comprehensive view of the research question than if only the quantitative or qualitative method were used (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, a mixed-method of embedded design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) was applied, with a preliminary quantitative analysis of the parents' opinions towards bilingual education, followed by a qualitative analysis describing and examining in depth the interviews conducted.

This mixed design was considered the optimal one as quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently in the interviews, which were later integrated and analyzed to offer a general interpretation of the study phenomenon (Martínez-Arias et al., 2014). Likewise, this study was carried out from a non-experimental, descriptive and cross-sectional approach, since research variables were not manipulated, and the participants were evaluated at a single time point in time (Hernández et al., 2007). This study included individual interviews with parents of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary education students, focusing on the parents' perceptions of bilingual education.

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 136 parents (26 fathers and 110 mothers) whose children were 45 boys (age  $M = 10.58$ ;  $SD = .66$ ) and 91 girls (age  $M = 10.71$ ;  $SD = .74$ ) from 10 different schools in Badajoz, Extremadura Spain. The parents' ages ranged from 29 to 51 years old, with an average age of 40. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used, ensuring that the sample included participants from different areas of the city to cover all socioeconomic levels. Six of the schools were state-funded (67 parents), and four were charter schools (69 parents). In addition, three of these 10 schools followed monolingual Spanish instruction (31 parents), four had BSS (52 parents), two were BIS (36 parents), and one belonged to the MECD-British Council project (17 parents).

## *Procedure*

To conduct the research, the management teams of the educational institutions were contacted, and meetings were arranged with the directors, heads of study, and tutor teachers. The research proposal was presented to them, along with the conditions for its implementation. It is essential to emphasize that this study was conducted following strict ethical research standards. All subjects participated freely, and prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all of them, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the information. At each school, the parents of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary education students were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. Those who decided to participate were administered a semi-structured interview to gather their opinions on BEPS. Each participant was randomly assigned an identification number and participated in the semi-structured interview conducted by the principal researcher at their child's school. All interviews followed the same sequence and were transcribed verbatim for analysis. First, a block of closed-ended questions about their sociodemographic data, their child's data, and the educational institution was asked. Thereafter, all participants were asked the question "What is your opinion about bilingual education programs?" Then, if their child studied in a school with BEPS, they were asked if they were satisfied with them; conversely, if their child did not study in a school with BEPS, they were asked if they would like the school to have one. In both cases, they were encouraged to share as much as they wanted. The average interview time was 15 minutes, with a range of 8 to 21 minutes.

## *Data Analysis*

The first block of closed-ended questions was used for the quantitative data. Later, contingency tables were made using the chi-square test and the adjusted standardized residuals, adopting a confidence interval of .95, so values above 1.96 and below -1.96 would be interpreted as significant.

Quantitative data were analyzed with the statistics software program SPSS 25. For those of a qualitative nature, an inductive, semantic thematic analysis of the transcripts was carried out using a team-based approach for coding, categorizing, and developing topics. It was agreed that the main researcher, who had conducted the interviews, would not participate in this phase of data analysis. This task was performed by two other authors, both psychologists with previous experience in qualitative research methods, as well as in coding, categorization, and thematic development of this type of study. Both investigators independently conducted all coding, which was later compared and revised. Any disagreements between them were discussed until a consensus was reached, but the rate of agreement on the codes was very high, above 90%. Finally, to improve the reliability of the analytical process, an expert in qualitative methodology was requested to conduct

random reviews of samples of codes and topics assigned by the two researchers, with agreement reached on all of them.

In order to make clearer delineations to categorize the findings, after finalizing the inductive codes and topic structure, Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979; 1994) was used to organize the topics in line with the theorized ecological systems. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are four systems within an individual's ecological context: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The central component of the model is the individual, which comprises a set of physical, psychological, and emotional characteristics. From there, four systems are established in the representation of the context of the person. The microsystem includes activities, roles, and relationships directly experienced by the individual. The mesosystem describes the relationship between two or more microsystems. This may include the relationships that parents have with the school, including interaction with the school, programs, or other families. Outward is the exosystem, which describes environments that may affect the person even though they are not directly involved in them. Finally, the outermost system is the macrosystem, a broader context involving common values or processes, such as cultural influences and broad social structures.

For the present study, the student was established as the individual system, the Science subject the microsystem, teachers the mesosystem, the school the exosystem and the socio-educational context the macrosystem. This framework made it possible to determine whether the parents' support or rejection is found in several dimensions and at multiple levels of the students' lives.

## Results

Initially, the value of the positive and negative parents' opinions towards the teaching of Science was classified by school ownership (see Table 1).

**Table 1.**  
*Parents' opinions according to school ownership*

	State-funded	Charter	Total
Positive opinions	17 (25.4%) residual = 1.1	12 (17.4%) residual = -1.1	29 (21.3%)
Negative opinions	50 (74.6%) residual = 1.1	57 (82.6%) residual = -1.1	107 (78.7%)

Note: Own elaboration.

No significant differences were found ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.29, p = .26$ ) between parents from state and charter schools. Parents' opinions are mostly negative, and they are against teaching Science in English.

With respect to parents' opinions according to the type of teaching (monolingual in Spanish, BSS, BIS and MECD-British-Council project), significant differences were found ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 10.68, p = .01$ ). According to the corrected typified residuals, the percentage of parents with a negative opinion towards bilingual education was higher in the BIS than in the rest, while the percentage of positive opinions was higher among those whose children attended the MECD-British Council school. However, as can be seen in Table 2, parents' opinions were still mostly negative, regardless of the teaching modality.

**Table 2.**  
*Parents' opinions according to teaching modality*

	<b>Monolingual</b>	<b>BSS</b>	<b>BIS</b>	<b>MECD-British Council</b>
Positive opinions	4 (12.9%) residual = -1.3	15 (28.8%) residual = 1.7	3 (8.3%) residual = -2.2	7 (41.2%) residual = 2.1
Negative opinions	27 (87.1%) residual = 1.3	37 (71.2%) residual = -1.7	33 (91.7%) residual = 2.2	10 (58.8%) residual = -2.1

Note: Own elaboration.

Through the analysis of the qualitative data, a total of seven topics were identified concerning parents' opinions towards bilingual education—two of them related to positive opinions (1-2) and five to negative opinions (3-7). While most of the positive opinions were framed within the social environment (macrosystem), the negative ones were mainly related to the teaching staff (mesosystem). Regarding the opinions about the Science subject (microsystem), there was a fairly even balance between positive and negative comments.

The topics associated with positive opinions were: (1) knowledge acquisition and (2) usefulness of languages. The majority of parents in favor of the Science subject in English emphasized the importance of acquiring new knowledge in a FL, as well as the possibility this gave their children to obtain more and better knowledge that contributes to a greater development of reasoning and comprehension skills. For example, one parent described the following:

*I think that teaching English as a subject is not counterproductive, because it is a challenge that children have to face and that will allow them to acquire more content, which will make them stronger, learn and understand reality better. (Participant 12).<sup>5</sup>*

Although it was less reported, positive opinions were also identified related to the improvement of English language knowledge and skills associated with teaching Science in this FL. Thanks to this subject, the children understood the language better, especially

<sup>5</sup> Excerpts have been translated from Spanish.

enhancing their speaking and listening skills, which, in elementary school, are worked on to a lesser extent than reading and writing skills.

Regarding the usefulness of the English language, a significant number of parents stressed the importance of learning languages to have more and better opportunities in the job market, to be able to function in other parts of the world in any situation, and to complete academic training in other countries. A representative comment was:

*It seems to me that having this subject in English is an advantage because nowadays there are many opportunities to study abroad (Erasmus, Master's Degrees, etc.) and they have a head start thanks to this experience. (Participant 132).*

Finally, parents positively valued that Science, and any other subject, should be taught in a FL (and the more, the better), because this would allow their children to be much more fluent in English and they would have no barriers wherever they went.

On the other hand, the topics associated with negative opinions were: (3) didactic teaching methodology, (4) student effort, (5) teacher training, (6) students' emotions, and (7) parent involvement.

The vast majority of negative comments made by parents mentioned aspects related to poor application of didactic techniques, which they considered caused difficulties to their children. They believed their children did not learn more English or scientific content and lagged behind other students in the monolingual modality who took the subject in Spanish. Parents also pointed out that Science seemed to focus on learning more advanced vocabulary than would be appropriate for their age or taught in the English class. A good example of this is the following response:

*I think they are making a mistake with English education. The way they teach it is not working, the children memorize vocabulary that they don't understand, and they don't learn. English is totally important as a subject, but Science is not well thought out or is not being applied well and in the end they learn neither English nor science. (Participant 121).*

There was also rejection towards the subject because parents perceived it was not taught in a practical and playful way, and it did not start from the student's own experiences, making it feel decontextualized and difficult to understand. They also perceived that the lack of translanguaging (Spanish-English) led to a lack of understanding of most of the subject content. The following comment highlights this point:

*I think Science should be taught in Spanish as prior knowledge and then supplemented connotations in English. English is important for the education of our children, but the basis should be given first in Spanish because many times they come home with many doubts and we have to solve them in both languages, so that sometimes they don't understand things in English and Spanish. (Participant 18).*

Another topic category to emphasize was the extra effort required to learn the contents of the subject. This effort extended beyond the classroom, as more time was needed at home to complete homework and study to understand the contents, often resulting in less time for other school subjects. For example, one parent commented that:

*A lot of time is wasted translating instead of studying, so the effort is double, and the child gets tired and does not get the same results as if it were in Spanish. (Participant 37).*

In addition, parents perceived their children's overexertion in this subject does not usually correspond to good grades or a better understanding of the content, despite the additional time invested.

Participants in the interviews reported that the subject's teachers were not adequately prepared to teach it, which they felt caused the negative consequences such as poor didactics, poor homework regulation, and emotional and family problems related to the subject. One parent reported:

*Teaching natural science in English would only be worthwhile if the teachers had the necessary training that would allow them to have the appropriate level to do it well. (Participant 59).*

Parents also felt that the teaching staff should be native English speakers, as this would ensure better training for teaching Science in the best possible way.

As for the thematic axis of students' emotions, this can be seen as a consequence of the previous three themes. Due to the lack of a good didactic methodology, poor teacher training, and the students' overexertion to understand the contents of the subject, emotional problems arose. A significant number of parents reported that their children experienced anxiety, distress, and other negative feelings, both at school and at home while doing homework. One parent commented:

*There is a mismatch between Science and English level, which produces a lot of anxiety and distress for the children. (Participant 92).*

In fact, some parents believed that their children's rejection of the Science subject was transferring to the English subject itself. It was generating aversion and anxiety, not so much towards the subject's content but towards the language itself, due to the negative experiences the students were having.

Although less frequent than the other topic areas, some parents also made self-oriented comments. They complained about eding to help their children outside of school hours to understand the subject matter. However, they often felt unable to provide adequate assistance due to insufficient language proficiency. Some even stated that the poor teaching of the subject caused tensions in their relationships with their children

because they could not help make the subject more understandable or enjoyable. For example, one parent pointed out:

*There are subjects in which we parents have to help our children because they are lost. The content is difficult for a 9-year-old student, and it is not fair that the student's grade is directly proportional to the parents' involvement in the subject. (Participant 95).*

Some parents expressed a sense of injustice because they perceived that the students who got better grades were those whose families could afford private tutors, English booster classes, or language camps in the summer—opportunities that not all families could afford. The reasons for and against bilingual education are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
*Summary of qualitative themes*

Topic	Examples	System level
Positive opinion		
1. Knowledge acquisition	I am satisfied with the knowledge acquired in Science.	Microsystem
2. Usefulness of languages	English is the most important part as it opens doors to the world.	Macrosystem
Negative opinion		
3. Didactic teaching methodology of the subject	Bilingualism in schools should be coordinated so that students have more time for discussion, practice and play, and where there is real feedback. A language is learned by speaking in a natural way and not by memorizing Science concepts that end up being forgotten, as is being implemented at school.	Exosystem
4. Student effort	The level of English taught in the Science subject does not correspond at all with the level of the grade the children are in. English is too technical for them, which means that they overexert themselves and that many concepts are lost.	Microsystem
5. Teacher training	It is very important for proper bilingual teaching to have native teachers.	Mesosystem
6. Students' emotions	My son already had Science, he was very frustrated and did not like the experience at all.	Individual
7. Parents' involvement	Our children tell us that other parents help their children to study, but we cannot.	Individual

Note: Own elaboration.

## Conclusions

The objective of this study was to analyze parents' opinion of the BEPS (English-Spanish) in the last stage of elementary education, covering aspects such as methodology, children's academic performance, and teacher training, among others.

An initial quantitative analysis of the data showed a generalized and mostly negative opinion of parents towards BEPs. Previous studies have criticized bilingual education for promoting student segregation and for its association with schools of high socioeconomic status, as it is usually the case with private and charter schools (Álvarez-Sotomayor et al., 2023; Pérez-Cañado, 2020). However, in our research, no significant differences were found between parents' perception in state-funded and charter schools, nor were any responses collected in the interviews that referred to this matter.

After the first analysis of the quantitative data, a second analysis was conducted to determine whether there were differences in parents' perceptions according to the type of BEP their children were in. Data showed that rejection was higher in the BIS (more than 90%) than in the MECD-British Council school, where the percentage of rejection (58%) was significantly lower than in the others (monolingual schools, BIS, and BSS). CLIL, which is the teaching method applied in the schools analyzed, has been widely contrasted and corroborated (Oxbrow, 2020), and has been proclaimed as one of the most effective ways to learn a FL (Gómez, 2017; Martínez, 2017). However, for BEPs to have successful educational outcomes, adequate teacher training is required (Durán, 2018; Esparza & Belmonte, 2020), since its application implies the knowledge and use of didactic techniques aimed at promoting interactive and autonomous student-centered learning (Pérez & Martínez, 2020). Thus, the low requirements for teachers of BEPs in Extremadura, who only need to certify a B2 level of the FL and obtain language qualification through a course of more than 50 hours (or teaching experience of at least one academic year in a BC) (*Decreto 39/2014*), may be causing teachers to use inappropriate methodologies, negatively affecting parental opinions (Alcaraz-Mármol, 2018; Cabezuelo-Gutiérrez & Fernández-Fernández, 2014; Ortega-Martín et al., 2017). Only parents whose children were enrolled in the MECD-British Council school, which requires teaching staff to have greater linguistic competence and a rigorous, specific methodological training, showed more balanced negative and positive opinions.

It has been proven in this study that this MECD-British Council bilingual project is better valued by parents, who perceive it as a more integrated program, more demanding in terms of access requirements for teachers, more complete thanks to the participation of language consultants, and with greater coordination between management teams, teachers, and parents, which is a key element for the success of BEPs (Lova, 2013; Porter, 2018; Tabatadze, 2015). This should be extended to any BEP that is to be developed. It is essential that bilingual projects be seen as well-structured programs, and the MECD-British Council project can serve as a guide for this (Barrios & Milla, 2020; González & Duñabeitia, 2023; Oxbrow, 2020).

After the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed a total of seven thematic categories—five indicating rejection and two indicating support for the BEPs. These categories were then classified according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 1994). Although each of the students' surrounding contexts was

identified by the parents in the topics they proposed in their positive and negative opinions, the vast majority belonged to the microsystem, corresponding to the subject of Science.

People are at the heart of Bronfenbrenner's model. Thus, parents' opinions referred to negative effects of BEPS on both their children and themselves. Regarding their children, parents reported that teaching Science in English provoked negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, boredom, or worry, which parents considered would not happen if the subject were taught in Spanish. As for themselves, parents mentioned on several occasions feelings of inadequacy due to their lack of knowledge or skills to help their children with Science because it was in English. These opinions align with previous research (Main author, 2022). Therefore, given the negative valence of the two thematic categories, complementary interventions aimed at both students and families should be considered to mitigate these negative perceptions, which undoubtedly harm the correct development of the BEPS (Tabatadze, 2015). First, for students, interventions should help them manage and channel the negative emotions they may experience when studying and completing tasks in a FL. Second, for parents, guidance should be provided on how to assist their children if they face difficulties understanding content at home (Barrios, 2022; Pérez & Martínez, 2020).

The analysis of the thematic categories related to the systemic levels revealed that parents' positive opinions were centered on motives associated with the microsystem and the macrosystem. This suggests that parents with positive views towards BEPS believed that the Science subject itself could have a positive influence on their children, as it provided them with more knowledge and skills and, ultimately, enabled them to be better students (Aragón-Méndez, 2006; Ruiz, 2023). In addition, many parents also mentioned that Science helped their children develop a better work ethic. This group of parents, who had more positive opinions than the rest, may have had a more satisfactory experience with bilingual education projects (such as parents of students in MECB-British Council schools), which made them more supportive of these programs to help their children develop better language skills (Pladevall-Ballester, 2015; Ruiz, 2019).

On the other hand, at the macrosystem level, parents stressed the benefits of Science for improving their children's future social and professional development (Agudo et al., 2004), not only in their local context but also in other countries or in unexpected situations, which they could successfully face thanks to better English proficiency. Some parents even admitted that these were the main reasons why they enrolled their children in these schools in the first place. Considering the importance of English in today's society as a cohesive language, it is clear that parents would be pleased if their children developed better competencies in this language (Ruiz, 2023). Language proficiency is now one of the most important factors for improving employability, entering the labor market, and progressing in professional careers (Anghel et al., 2016; Corbella & Marcos, 2020). Therefore, it is understandable that the thematic category of language usefulness was

linked to positive opinions, as English is a precursor of upward social mobility (Barrios, 2022).

Regarding the opinions linked to negative thematic categories, these were associated with the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem levels. At the microsystem level, responses were found across all negative thematic categories. However, opinions were primarily focused on the students' overexertion (which is not reflected in their grades), the loss of subject content (which was often perceived as overly theoretical and impractical), and the emphasis on vocabulary acquisition rather than concept assimilation. At the mesosystem level, which involved the subject's teachers, two clear thematic lines emerged: linguistic competence and methodological training. Parents felt that the subject should be taught by native teachers, as they were more qualified to do so. They also believed that many teachers lacked the appropriate didactic techniques, indicating the need for further training. Other studies have highlighted that teachers themselves point to insufficient training in CLIL methodology as a major weakness in the effective didactic application of these programs (Barrios & Milla, 2020; Fernández-Barrera, 2019; Oxbrow, 2020; Ruiz, 2023).

At the exosystem level, opinions about the schools primarily concerned the generally low level of teachers' English proficiency, which parents linked to training problems, as well as the need for better coordination between teachers and management teams to implement correct teaching techniques. Parents also mentioned the importance of not overloading students with Science assignments, which generated additional effort and stress, and criticized the fact that subjects were generally theoretical and not relevant to students' future careers. Finally, at the macrosystem level, which encompasses the broader education system, parents' opinions were consistent with those at the exosystem level but linked the didactic and organizational problems to the entire education system rather than seeing them as isolated to their child's school. These parental contributions are significant, as they suggest that for the BEPs to reach their full potential, solutions should not target isolated agents (whether students, teachers or families) but should involve educational reforms that address the functioning of the entire system and the interrelationship and interdependence of all its components (Quirke, 2021).

In conclusion, a large majority of parents expressed negative attitudes and overall rejection towards the English-Spanish BEPs. Some reasons for this disapproval are linked to the perception of a low linguistic and methodological training of the teaching staff, inappropriate use of didactic techniques, students' overexertion (which causes negative emotions), and parents' difficulties in helping their children with homework. Thus, for the successful implementation of BEPs it is crucial that lawmakers, teachers, and other education professionals take into consideration parents' opinions, which are undoubtedly a determining factor and a reflection of the success or failure of the implementation of bilingualism in schools.

Considering the decentralization of education in Spain, where educational competences are assigned to each autonomous community, the results obtained, though revealing and significant, should be interpreted with caution. These findings should not be generalized because, although the sample was drawn from various schools with different teaching systems, it was selected from a single locality of a specific Spanish autonomous community. Furthermore, there is an overrepresentation of mothers over fathers in the interviews. For further research, it is recommended to compare findings across different autonomous communities and to ensure a more balanced gender representation among participants.

It is therefore necessary to continue researching this subject, given that there is little literature addressing the perspective of families. The opinions of students and teachers are typically considered, but those of the students' primary educational role models—their parents—are often overlooked.

## References

- Agudo, M., González, R., Hill, E., Justo, M., Kelly, R., Locke, M., Medrano, M. & Reilly, T. (2004). *Orientaciones para el desarrollo del currículo integrado hispano-británico en educación primaria*. Secretaría General Técnica.
- Alcaraz-Mármol, G. (2018). Trained and non-trained language teachers on CLIL methodology: Teachers' facts and opinions about the CLIL approach in the primary education context in Spain. *LACLIL*, 11(1), 39-64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5294/laclil.2018.11.1.3>
- Álvarez-Sotomayor, A., Gómez-Espino, J. M. & Barbier, R. (2023). Mapping the opportunities of attending bilingual schools in Spain. *Language and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2023.2240294>
- Anghel, B., Cabrales, A. & Carro, J. (2016). Evaluating a bilingual education program in Spain: The impact beyond foreign language learning. *Economic Inquiry*, 54(2), 1202-1223. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12305>
- Aragón-Méndez, M. (2007). Las ciencias experimentales y la enseñanza bilingüe. *Revista Eureka sobre Enseñanza y Divulgación de las Ciencias*, 4(1), 152-175. [http://dx.doi.org/10.25267/Rev\\_Eureka\\_ensen\\_divulg\\_cienc.2007.v4.i1.10](http://dx.doi.org/10.25267/Rev_Eureka_ensen_divulg_cienc.2007.v4.i1.10)
- Barrios, E. (2022). The effect of parental education level on perceptions about CLIL: A study in Andalusia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(1), 183-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1646702>
- Barrios, E. & Milla, M. (2020). CLIL methodology, materials and resources, and assessment in a monolingual context: an analysis of stakeholders' perceptions in

- Andalusia. *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(1), 60-80.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1544269>
- British Council (n.d.). *Bilingual education in Spain*. Retrieved November 23, 2022, from <https://www.britishcouncil.es/en/partnerships/success-stories/bilingual>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the Development of Children*, 2(1), 37-43.
- Cabezuelo-Gutiérrez, P. & Fernández-Fernández, R. (2014). A case study on teacher training needs in the Madrid bilingual project. *Latin American Journal of Content and Language Integrated Learning*, 7(2), 50-70. <https://doi.org/10.5294/4220>
- Chaieberras, Z. (2019). Parents' perspectives on the bilingual program in the region of Madrid. *Pulso. Revista De Educación*, 42, 73-105. <https://doi.org/10.58265/pulso.4851>
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Corbella, V. & Marcos, A. (2020). El aspecto lingüístico de la internacionalización de la educación en el nivel superior. La importancia del inglés como lengua extranjera. *Gestión de las Personas y Tecnologías*, 13(39), 39-52.
- Coyle, D., Hood, P. & Marsh, D. (2010). *Content and Language Integrated Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. & Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications.
- Decreto 39/2014, de 18 de marzo, por el que se establecen los requisitos específicos de acreditación de la competencia lingüística en lengua extranjera para impartir áreas, materias o módulos en los programas bilingües, y se regula el procedimiento para obtener la correspondiente habilitación lingüística en el ámbito de la Comunidad Autónoma de Extremadura. *Diario Oficial de Extremadura*, 57, de 24 de marzo de 2014.
- Durán, R. (2018). Análisis comparativo de la percepción de los docentes sobre los programas bilingües en la Educación primaria y secundaria. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 29(3), 35-52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/RCED.54066>
- Education First (2022). *English Proficiency Index*. Education First.

- Esparza, C. & Belmonte, M. (2020). Percepción docente sobre el bilingüismo en centros de Educación Infantil y Educación Primaria de la Región de Murcia. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 31(2), 251-260. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rced.63130>
- European Commission (1995). *White paper on education and training. Teaching and learning: Towards the learning society*. European Commission.
- Fernández-Barrera, A. (2019). Doing CLIL in the Science Classroom: a Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography in La Mancha Secondary Schools. *Foro de Educación*, 17(27), 37-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14516/fde.712>
- Gómez, M. (2017). Evaluación de los resultados de la educación bilingüe. In M. Amor, R. Serrano, y E. Pérez (Coords.), *La Educación Bilingüe desde una visión integrada e integradora* (pp. 195-202). Síntesis.
- González, J. & Duñabeitia, J. A. (2023). Family Attitudes towards Multilingualism in Bilingual Education Programs and Their Relationship with Academic Performance. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(1), article 6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14010006>
- Hernández, R., Fernández, C. & Baptista, P. (2007). *Fundamentos de metodología de la investigación*. McGraw Hill.
- Hidalgo-McCabe, E. & Tompkins, L. (2024). Bilingual Education in the Media: Addressing the Controversy in Madrid. *Revista de Educación*, 403, 203-230. <https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2024-403-609>
- Ley 4/2011, de 7 de marzo, de educación de Extremadura. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 70, de 23 de marzo de 2011.
- Lova, M., Bolarín, M. & Porto, M. (2013). Programas bilingües en Educación Primaria: Valoraciones de docentes. *Porta Linguarum*, 20, 253-268. <https://doi.org/10.30827/Digibug.22306>
- Martínez, J. (2017). Análisis de la calidad de los programas de AICLE en Extremadura. In J. L. Ortega-Martín, S. P. Hughes & D. Madrid (Coords.), *Influencia de la política educativa de centro en la enseñanza bilingüe en España*. Secretaría General Técnica. Centro de Publicaciones. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.
- Martínez-Arias, R., Castellanos, M. & Chacón, J. (2014). *Métodos de investigación en psicología*. Giunti EOS Psychometrics.
- Orden de 17 de abril de 2015 por la que se establecen las características de los centros de Educación Infantil y Primaria bilingües de la Comunidad Autónoma de Extremadura. *Diario Oficial de Extremadura*, 89, de 12 de mayo de 2015.
- Orden de 20 de abril de 2017 por la que se regula el programa de Secciones Bilingües en centros docentes sostenidos con fondos públicos de la Comunidad Autónoma

- de Extremadura y se establece el procedimiento para su implantación en las diferentes etapas educativas. *Diario Oficial de Extremadura*, 83, de 3 de mayo de 2017.
- Ortega-Martín, L., Hughes, S. P. & Madrid, D. (2017). *Influencia de la política educativa de centro en la enseñanza bilingüe en España*. Secretaría General Técnica. Centro de Publicaciones. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.
- Oxbrow, G. (2020). Addressing the language challenge in monolingual CLIL contexts: Stakeholder perspectives in the Canary Islands. *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(1), 99-114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1657486>
- Palacios-Hidalgo, F. (2020). Efectos de los programas bilingües en España: la figura de los nuevos bilingües. In M. Gómez & C. Huertas (Eds.), *Educación bilingüe: perspectivas desde el sistema educativo español* (pp. 81-96). Junta de Andalucía.
- Pérez-Cañado, M. (2020). CLIL and elitism: myth or reality? *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(1), 4-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1645872>
- Pérez, S. & Martínez, M. (2020). El proceso de implantación del bilingüismo en Science en un centro concertado de Primaria y Secundaria. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 31(1), 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.61723>
- Pladevall-Ballester, E. (2015). Exploring primary school CLIL perceptions in Catalonia: Students', teachers' and parents' opinions and expectations. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 18(1), 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2013.874972>
- Porter, L. (2018). Journeying Together: Improving Parent Relations within Dual-Language Immersion Programs as a Model for Cross-cultural Understanding and Collaboration. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 6(2), 19-31.
- Quirke, P. (2021). Professional Development Learning Plans. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt1005>
- Ramírez-Orduña, M. S., Sánchez-Herrera, S., Cubero-Juárez, J. & Borrachero-Cortés, A. B. (2022). Bilingual teaching and homework: analysis of families' emotional variables. *Culture and Education*, 34(3), 574-596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2022.2058790>
- Ruiz, M. B. (2019). Assessing English Writing Skills of Students from Bilingual and Non-Bilingual Schools in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain: A Comparative Study. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition*, 5(2), 95-113.
- Ruiz, M. B. (2023). Parents' opinion about the bilingual program in the Autonomous Community of Madrid. *El Guiniguada*, 32, 60-78. <https://doi.org/10.20420/ElGuiniguada.2023.631>

Resolución de 15 de junio de 2020, de la Secretaría General Técnica, por la que se publica el Convenio con la Delegación en España de la Fundación British Council, para la realización de proyectos curriculares integrados y actividades educativas conjuntas. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 174, de 23 de junio de 2020.

Tabatadze, S. (2015). Factors influencing the effectiveness of bilingual educational programs: The prospects of pilot programs in Georgia. *Sino-us English Teaching*, 12(2), 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/2015.02.003>