Dual Language Instruction Achievement In A Second Grade Classroom

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to determine whether students in a dual language program only excel in their native language. This paper will also discuss the history of dual language instruction based on educational research within the past 100 years in the United States. An overview of dual language instruction, followed by a description of different programs will be explored. The origins of dual language instruction in the United States and current practice will also be explored. Then benefits and criticism of the approach will be then discussed. Finally the analysis and correlation between reading assessments in a second grade dual language classroom will be presented.
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One of the main topics of discussion in education today is what method or program is best for children acquiring a second language. This is a vast problem that plagues our schools due to the growing population of non-native English speakers, along with the high demand for 21st Century skills. This is a question that all educators are trying to answer. Many school districts have integrated dual language instruction as the best method to provide students more opportunities to effectively acquire a second language with the focus on becoming biliterate. Many suggest students excel in their native language, although standardized scores do not validate this statement. Instead research conducted demonstrated that is a stud excels or struggle in their native language then they will excel or struggle in their second language in a dual language classroom.

Review of Literature

Before we begin to explore student achievement in dual language classroom, we must first understand what dual language instruction is. The term “dual language” refers to any program that provides literacy and content instruction all students through two languages and promotes bilingualism and biliteracy, grade-level academic achievement, and multicultural competence for all students (Christian, Howard, Lindholm-Leary, Rogers, Sugarman, 2007 p. 1). This concept is then applied into instruction and two languages are used. Biliteracy serves as the basis for dual language instruction. It is defined by Gerena (2010), “as the acquisition and learning of the decoding and encoding of and around print using two linguistic and cultural systems in order to convey messages in a variety of contexts” (p. 1). Rather than focusing on the literacy aspect, it also includes the cultural aspect to gain meaning about the target language, which is one of the advantages of dual language instruction. The cultural aspect focuses on the
target language’s culture rather than basic literacy principles. Students learn about the culture through instruction and through their peers. This includes learning about traditions, holidays, and practicing the target language in context.

Dual language instruction requires about half the students classified as native English speakers and about half as native speakers of the non-English language targeted in the program (García, 2005). Rather than using the target language as the core curriculum like most modern language classes, language is taught through content (García, 2005). Instead of focusing on the structure of language, students learn the language from the concept being taught. This could be from a math lesson or any other subject. Also dual language instruction requires the use of multiple measures in both languages to assess student’s progress (Christian et al., 2007). These include regular standardized tests and assessments in both the target language and English.

In dual language instruction, there are two main models of language division that are usually used: which are a 50:50 model and a 90:10 model. In the 50:50 model, instruction is given half the day in English and half the day in the target language throughout all grades (García, 2005). In the 90:10 model, children are taught 90% of their kindergarten school days in the target language, with the percentage slowly dropping to 50% by fourth or fifth grade (García, 2005 p.47). Most school districts decide which model will work best, based upon research of the community and student population. This is determined by conducting surveys and involving the community.

When selecting the best language division instruction model to implement, schools must understand first the goals of the dual language instruction. Each program varies in establishing its own goals, but they usually base the goals upon the primary goal of dual language. According to Garcia (2005), “the main goal of a dual language instruction is to provide high-
quality instruction for language minority students and to provide instruction in a second language for English-speaking students” (p. 47). There are many other goals that dual language instruction uses as a basis. According to educator Eugene Garcia there are three major goals for Dual language program:

1. To help language minority children learn English and succeed in U.S. schools,
2. To help language majority children learn a foreign language without sacrificing their own success in school, and
3. To promote linguistic and ethnic equity among the children, to bridge the gaps between cultures and languages which divide our society” (p. 47).

Garcia’s three goals summarize the goals in any dual language program in the United States.

Now that we understand what dual language instruction entails, we will explore its history specifically focusing on dual language instruction in the United States.

History

Dual Language can be traced back during the mid-century practiced in public and parochial German-English schools that operated in cities Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and St. Louis (Lindholm-Leary, 2000). An Ohio law of 1939 authorized the instruction in English, German, or both, if requested by parents (Lindholm-Leary, 2000). In 1847 a similar law was adopted in Louisana, except it focused on French rather than German (Lindholm-Leary, 2000). Two years later, after the annexation of New Mexico in 1848, Spanish-English bilingual education became popular (Lindholm-Leary, 2000). There were many settlers who spoke both Spanish and English, so they needed a way to develop both languages. This eventually led to the development of modern day dual language instruction.
Although there were programs in existence historically, the first dual language program that was documented in the public school system was developed in 1962 at Coral Way in Dade County Public schools in Miami, Florida. At Coral Way, the first 50:50 Spanish-English dual language instruction program was created, as an attempt to meet the needs of English language learners due to the influx of Cuban refugees (Schools, 2014). The program at Coral Way used Spanish as the target language.

According to Lindhom-Leary (2008) the program at Coral Way lead to the development of dual language instruction during the 1970’s. Also as result of the court decision of Lau vs Nicholas, public schools were required to take appropriate action to reach all students despite their language (Lindholm-Leary, 2000). This led to the development of two more Spanish – English 50:50 programs in school districts in Washington DC, Chicago, and a 90:10 model in San Diego (Lindholm-Leary, 2000). Eventually this craze lead to the development of other dual language programs. With the legislation of Poposition of 227 and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) the development of dual language programs dwindled. Popositon 227 outlawed the use of bilingual education in California and called for English immersion programs. NCLB established stringent goals that were mandated to be met. If not met, schools were punished. As a result schools shifted their focus to standardized tests to achieve these mandates. Even with these mandates, dual language instruction continued to be used in schools despite their opposition. This eventually led to the development of dual language intruction in schools again. In a recent study by Lindholm-Leary (2000), there are 338 practicing dual language programs. As the paradigm shifts today, dual language instruction is making a come back as a way to develop 21st century skill learners.
Benefits of Dual Language Instruction

Dual language instruction or programs provide students with more opportunities than a monolingual classroom to acquire a new language by always immersing the students in the target language. These language opportunities include a variety of skills that allow our students to become successful in today’s global society. According to Thomas and Collier (2003) “effective dual language instruction provides students the following:

- “A strong basis in bilingualism.
- High-quality language arts instruction in two languages that is integrated into thematic units.
- Separation of the two languages for instruction.
- Use of the non-English language for at least 50 percent of the time and as much as 90 percent in primary grades.
- Active parent-school partnerships.
- Opportunity to excel in their native language
- The transfer of reading skills form their native language to target language
- An additive bilingual environment that has full support of school administrators, teachers, and parents” (p. 2).

Students are taught the language without foregoing the curriculum (Thomas and Collier 2003). It also provides students with an integrated, inclusive, and unifying educational experience, rather than the segregated characteristics of a traditional English-only school (Thomas and Collier 2003 p. 4). Also nonminority students expand their worldviews by learning from their minority peers (Thomas and Collier 2003). They then acquire the knowledge of customs and learn to respect other cultures.
These programs also allow English learners to help English speakers learn through a second language, while native English speakers help English learners acquire English (Thomas and Collier 2003). Thomas and Collier (2003) found that by students helping each other they build long lasting relationships in the classroom. Thomas and Collier (2003) state “students who receive a bilingual education will value their experience, and as high school graduate, will seek opportunities for international travel and employment that uses their second language” (p.4). In a dual language instruction, *language is used as a resource*, which raises the importance of languages other than English in communities (Freeman, Freeman, Mercuri 2005 p. xv). In fact, in some communities, dual language instruction has eased the tensions between groups who speak different languages and brought them together. (Freeman, Freeman, Mercuri 2005) Freeman, Freeman, Mercuri (2005) explain how these programs can help communities separated by race unite as one to become a stronger community.

Research conducted by Thomas and Collier (2003) “in 23 school districts in 15 states and the analysis of more than 2 million student records showed that dual language instruction can close the achievement gap for English learners” (p.4). It can also provide a superior education for native English speakers (Thomas and Collier, 2003). If schools were to implement dual language instruction, Thomas and Collier (2002) suggest that a school could expect one-fifth to one-sixth of the achievement gap for English learners to close each year. Another study done by Thomas and Collier (2003) “in Houston, Texas found that native English speakers enrolled in a dual language programs for four years or more scored between the 63rd to 70th percentile on the Stanford 9, a normed test, which was higher than their monolingual peers” (p.3). Even though research demonstrates the benefits there are still critics of dual language instruction.
Critics of Dual Language Instruction

Most research conducted supports Dual Language instruction, although many critics have found ways to criticize it. Many believe using dual language instruction segregates students learning two languages from their monolingual peers because they are learning in a different setting and do not mix with their peers (Christian, 1994). Also proponents of dual language programs are designed to serve primarily native English speakers who enroll in them (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005, p.149). Students may also fall behind due to the fact they only receive half the instruction time. One other struggle is being able to find highly qualified teachers (Christian, 1994). Many argue that the only language that should be taught is English (Christian, 1994). Despite all these claims, many of them have been hard to prove without demonstrating the success of dual language instruction.

Student Achievement Research

Introduction

As a bilingual educator in a dual language program for over six years, it has been apparent that students who excel or struggle in their native language also excel or struggle in the target language. This notion has not been revealed in dual language research. Typically research has suggested that students will excel in their native language or transfer these skills to their second language. To further explore this notion, the careful analysis of reading standardized tests in a second grade classroom were utilized to develop a conclusion.

Setting
The second grade dual language classrooms used in this study are located in a small rural resort town. The population is composed of both full time local residents and wealthy second home owners. The socioeconomic status of the town is a mix of both high and low. The population consists of 59% Anglo, 39% Latino, and 2% as other, with census trends demonstrating the Latino population increasing and the Anglo population decreasing. Within this district there is an elementary dual language magnet school that utilizes a 50/50 dual language model with the target language as Spanish.

The School population includes 74% of students classified as English language learners (ELL), with 98% of those students classified as Latino and the other 2% classified as other. The remaining 26% of the population is considered Anglo. The elementary school known as Mountain Town Elementary, consists of 4 classrooms per grade level with the total of twenty-four classrooms. The study group only included two of the four second grade classrooms, totaling forty one students. The second grade classes are classified as 41% Anglo and native English speakers with 17 students, 59% as Latino and native Spanish speakers with 24 students.

Study

This study was conducted analyzing fluency scores from standardized grade level fluency passages administered in both languages. This standardized test used was a reading passage administered in second grade classrooms in both languages. The standardized assessment tools used was Aims web fluency passage in both English and Spanish. Students must read words correctly using grade level passage within a minute. The number of words read correctly determines their score. Most grades in Kindergarten through second tend to be assessed using fluency passages.
Then both English and Spanish scores were compared using assessments administered in the Fall and Spring.
After analyzing the graphs, it is apparent that students do not only succeed in their native language. This data demonstrates that if a student excels in their native language, then they will excel in their second language. This is parallel with students who are struggling. If they struggle in their native language then they struggle in their second language. Thus students in a dual language perform similar in their second language as they do in their native language.
These findings do not correlate with dual language research suggests that students will excel in their native language, although this study may need to be conducted for a longer period of time including grades k-3. This will provide better insight to determine the validity if this study.

**Conclusion**

In summary, dual language instruction has been found to be the most effective practice for students to acquire a second language (Christian, 1994). There are more opportunities offered to students to learn another language, while also diversifying our children. Students are able to become bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural through a rigorous program while also learning the required curriculum. Cristian (1994) found that after studying over a 160 schools in between 1991 and 1994 most had academic achievement as the result of dual language instruction. Students then have the opportunity to excel in their native language, although in this study conducted demonstrate that that students perform similarly in both their native and second language. Although students in a dual language program eventually surpass their monolingual peers academically. As we continue to promote 21st century skills and focus on a global society, it is the best route for our students. They are given the edge to become more successful in the global economy, because they are bilingual. Besides the student advantages, Dual Language instruction can also benefit the community by bringing together two separate races, providing a strong community (Christian, 1994). Even though education is constantly evolving, dual language instruction is still similar to instruction in the past. The same models are being practiced and the same goals serve basis for current practicing programs as those in the past. Dual language instruction has had a long journey in education, and it continues to be an effective form of instruction.
References


