**Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Secondary Education in England**

1. **Research on bilingualism and multilingualism**

The terms ‘bilingualism’ and ‘multilingualism’ in England have many implications and are susceptible to many interpretations. Following Baker and Wright (2017), bilingualism, or the ability to speak two languages, is a specific case of multilingualism where there is no ceiling on the number of languages a speaker dominates. Different migration trends have produced a considerable growth in the number of speakers of different languages in the last decade increasing the country’s linguistic diversity. In secondary education, approximately 450,000 pupils (1 in 8), come from a non-English linguistic background, with over one million pupils in Key Stage 3 (11 – 14 years old) and 4 (15 – 16 years old) learning and using English as an additional language (EAL) (Leung, 2016).

1. **Curriculum**

Although bilingualism and multilingualism have been widespread in Britain for many years, their relationship to education in England have been largely ignored or masked by other preoccupations, such as the performance of non-native English-speaking pupils in national examinations (Bialystok, 2016). This may be because of traditional assumptions made about the primacy in the curriculum of the English language, and the relative unimportance of all others, for popularity, social, economic and cultural reasons; assumptions reinforced by the fact that the rest of the world appears increasingly anxious to learn English because of its lingua franca status (Burns, 2018).

Many of the minorities in England come from countries where bilingualism or multilingualism is widespread in education. These speakers are no strangers to the idea of education through a second language, often English (Kouritzin & Nakagawa, 2018). With so many linguistic minorities with different mother tongues, the language environment in the country is very complex; however, there appears to be a unifying perspective that children must learn English, sometimes at the expense of their own native languages, for social mobility (Cooke & Simpson, 2015).

Additionally, many thousands of bilingual/multilingual students’ mother tongues remain largely ignored educationally for two main reasons: firstly, the current educational system follows a prescriptive national curriculum delivered exclusively in English -with the exception of Modern Foreign Languages, and secondly, because of the absence of a national policy for languages which would recognize the fact that many thousands of pupils use more than one albeit with different degrees of fluency (Costley, 2014).

Over time school practices in England have shifted between two positions resulting from changes in educational policies and based on isolated practices at school level. These have moved from the consideration that non-native speaker pupils bring the ‘wrong’ language to the school thus following a deficit model to one where multilingual skills are recognized and nurtured. In England, pupils coming from a linguistic background, joining secondary school in Key Stage 3 and 4 have already been exposed, to a greater or lesser extent, to a variety of literacy repertoires in their languages at home and within their own local communities; however, this is not always acknowledged as an asset with a potential to add value to the existing linguistic capital of such students (Kasstan, Auer & Salmons, 2018).

The choice of languages available to study for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is largely determined by the popularity of Spanish, French and German. A minority of schools teach Mandarin Chinese and Japanese and Hebrew and Arabic in some religious schools. Pupils can also take other less popular languages that they are fluent in, such as Polish, Panjabi and Urdu, to name a few, but this is mostly on an individual basis (Thebritishacademy.ac.uk, 2018). Additionally, this choice is also determined by the type of school, whether state-run or private, where the number of languages available for study varies significantly. Nonetheless, the number of pupils taking up modern languages to GCSE has declined considerably following the government’s decision to make the subject optional in Key Stage 4 in 2006 (Coleman *et al*., 2008). Amongst the European Union (EU) and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) countries, the United Kingdom (UK) is kept from the bottom position by Greece with only 5% of students learning two or more languages (Ec.europa.eu, 2018)

1. **Teachers and other personnel**

Languages within mainstream secondary schools are taught by graduates or native speakers who have completed a period of up to 36-week intensive school-based training to become qualified teachers, although routes into teaching have diversified over the years. This initial teaching training is followed by a probationary period, which normally spans over one school year, at the end of which the qualified teachers obtain a definitive license to teach or Newly Qualified Teacher Status (NQTS). During the training period trainees are rigorously monitored and assessed formatively and summatively against the Teachers’ Standards (Assets.publishing.service.gov.uk, 2018).

A considerable number of children belonging to ethnic minorities attend supplementary classes mainly devised by their communities where they maintain the use of their mother-tongue outside the mainstream school system. This is startling in the sense that no one seems aware either of the extent or of the increasing demand for such provision. In fact, those concerned with the mainstream system, whilst aware of weekend schools/evening classes for the mother-tongue of such children, have not considered its advantages and disadvantages educationally, and of alternative methods of provision (Babino & Stewart, 2018). Additionally, little is known of the content and the quality of the lessons provided as these schools are not under government scrutiny.

1. **Identity**

To most of the minority groups in England whose children attend maintained schools the advantages of an education which involves acquiring a fully operational command of the world’s most marketable language are clear enough. However, for others the use of any language other than English as the main teaching medium in schools could have severe disadvantages: it could prejudice the effective learning of English limiting curricular choice; it could impose constraints on future employment and it might also suggest discrimination or segregation. If the first objective is to provide equality of opportunity for all, then the means to achieve and exploit equality must be provided (Abello-Contesse *et al.,* 2013).

For newly arrived pupils who speak other languages or for those who have started school with limited proficiency in English, support is provided following an individual assessment comprising reading and listening comprehension as well as speaking and writing skills. Each secondary school has an English as an additional language (EAL) provision programme which is overseen by an EAL coordinator. The purpose of this provision is to enable pupils to access the contents of the national curriculum whilst learning English and, more broadly, to facilitate their inclusion to the school community by removing communication barriers (King *et al.*, 2017).

1. **Challenges**

Initiatives, to resolve possible conflict between the educational claims of the mother tongue and English, by pointing out that one may indeed support the other, tells us little about how to reconcile the complex distribution of a multilingual population with the educational desirability of providing widespread mother-tongue instruction. Moreover, the difference between minimal language maintenance (i.e. by the odd period of mother-tongue teaching, such as for religious instructions) and ‘deepening’ knowledge of use of the mother-tongue could be exploited much further in mainstream schools. The range of possible options is wide; however, the organisational and financial implications are infinitely complicated and variable (Genesee, 2018). Therefore, how can a more ‘positive attitude’, which is so easy to recommend, best be translated into practical measures, that appear to be so complex to implement?

Considering the very different nature of the populations under consideration it is difficult to generalise about the underlying parental concern for mother-tongue maintenance and development. Inevitably there is a complex mixture of explanations (involving personal preferences, particular family and migration situations, and available facilities, amongst others) and these are unlikely to remain constant throughout a life-cycle or stable within one community (García, 2011).

Parents who are not fluent in English wish to ensure total communication with their children, and these and other parents hope that knowledge of the home language and culture will guard against widening the inevitably greater generation and cultural gaps between first- and second-generation migrants. In many cases, children with a non-English mother-tongue are equally competent in both English and their mother-tongue around the ages of seven to twelve. Then English gradually takes over, and often at a time when the adolescent is questioning her allegiances and reacting to the discipline of the home. This discipline may be traditional socialisation or a reaction to the apparent anarchy of the school’s and the society’s morals in general (Hélot, 2015). There is obviously a natural pride and familiarity of the parents with their language and culture of birth and at the same time a dissatisfaction or difficulty in adjusting to certain new ways at an adult age. Parents also have emotional and common-sense reasons for supporting the development of a child’s innate potentialities (Jaffe, 2015). Most parents, particularly those who expect to remain in England, stress the importance of their children attaining a good command of English, but many have come from bi- or multi-lingua countries where a child’s acquisition of more than one language is automatic, natural and appears in no way to be detrimental to the learning process (Gardner, 2015).

If mainstream education in English, and particularly teachers in secondary schools, know very little of their pupils’ mother tongue do not recognise the existence of these languages in any practical way in the school setting, they cannot provide fully for the linguistic and overall educational development of these children.

**Further reading and online resources** [not included in total word count]

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