

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

KEBERAGAMAN BUDAYA DALAM PENDIDIKAN BILINGUAL

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Abstract

Bilingual education needs to consider the cultural diversity both on its content and delivery in two languages. The use of mother tongue can facilitate the learners to understand the concept of scientific terms used in other languages. It is noted that bilingual learners are able to develop their metalinguistic skills. They have flexibility in their thinking to process the understanding of words through two different languages. Therefore, this study aims to clarify the concept of language learning integrated to the content. Eurydice presented a concept that there should be a special teaching approach that brought out the learning of non-language subjects taught by and through foreign language.

Keywords: bilingual education, cultural diversity, metalinguistic

Abstrak

Pendidikan bilingual harus mempertimbangkan keberagaman budaya pada materi dan cara penyampaiannya dengan menggunakan dua bahasa. Penggunaan bahasa ibu dapat memfasilitasi pembelajar untuk mengerti konsep-konsep ilmiah yang digunakan dalam bahasa lain. Hal yang perlu diperhatikan bahwa pembelajar bilingual mampu mengembangkan kemampuan metalinguistik mereka. Mereka memiliki fleksibilitas untuk memahami kata dalam dua bahasa yang berbeda. Oleh karena itu, studi ini dilakukan untuk mengklarifikasi konsep dari pembelajaran bahasa yang berintegrasi dengan pembelajaran materi lain (konten). Eurydice mengenalkan konsep bahwa perlu adanya pendekatan pengajaran khusus yang menekankan pada pembelajaran subjek non-bahasa yang diajarkan dengan dan melalui bahasa asing.

Kata Kunci: pendidikan bilingual, keberagaman budaya, metalinguistik

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education which is based on multicultural understanding is known to be a dynamic and life-long process of teaching and learning. It can foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, language proficiency, cooperation, self-esteem, community concern and transformative social action. It is assumed also that multicultural education work can promote social justice, education, equity, and excellence.

There are many studies of multicultural education in the past two decades. One wave of study strongly calls for the restructuring of teacher preparation programs to address the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of public school student populations (Hodgkinson, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). Several other studies point out the disparity between a homogeneous teaching population and increasing heterogeneity of racial, ethnic, cultural, and social class of school student populations (Bennett, 1995; Gomez, 1996). Another group of studies highlight the fact that cultural mismatch between teachers and ethnically diverse students contributes to the differences in school success (Au & Mason, 1981; Erickson, 1987; Ogbu, 1987).

According to Ogbu (1987), the cultural mismatch factor most negatively impacts the academic performance of students who are the largest minority groups in public schools. All these studies invariably call for restructuring of teacher preparation programs so that prospective teachers have skills, attitudes, and knowledge to meet the challenges of culturally diverse school environments. Studies based on the cultural differences concept make the assumption that academic achievement of students from culturally diverse backgrounds will improve if schools and teachers make an attempt to ensure that classroom instruction is conducted in a man-

ner responsive to the student's home culture. Modification of classroom instruction to respond positively to home culture of students is known in research literature as culturally compatible (Jordan, 1987), culturally congruent (Au & Kawakami, 1994), culturally responsive (Erickson, 1987), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1990), and bilingual education (Teitelbaum & Hiller, 1977). The last term will be used throughout of this paper.

Bilingual education provides equal educational opportunity for students who do not speak other languages than his or her own language. Bilingual education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as a medium of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organized program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures (Paulston, 1978). In fact, bilingual education program differs with the study of foreign languages as school subjects. In bilingual education, two languages are used for instruction, and the goal is academic success in and through the two languages, whereas the study of foreign languages focuses on the mastery of the learned languages themselves.

Through the context of culture, bilingual education points out the effectiveness in educating nonnative English speaking students by conserving the native language skills of minority students and developing second language skills in English speaking. Bilingual education programs attempt to integrate language minority and language majority students by providing certain methodology and content area instructions of language development in two languages. Bilingual education programs have made the goals of bilingual proficiency, academic achievement and

positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors. To meet the goals, there are factors that affect such issues as student enrollment, program features and design, and instructional features. Thus, it is important for bilingual education practitioners to have knowledge of a holistic curriculum that supports the language proficiency, appropriate assessment, planning and delivery of instruction, culture, and professionalism.

II. THEORY

A. Methodology of Bilingual Education: A Framework

The term “bilingual education” continues to evolve. The literature defines it as the use of the students’ home language and culture, along with English, in an individually designed program of instructions (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Carrasquillo, 1990). To provide an appropriate educational context for culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers need a theoretical and methodological foundation in bilingual education. Teachers need to provide theoretical and practical knowledge of bilingual education as instrumental functions. Besides that, teachers have to utilize a variety of assessment procedures. Along with that, teachers should include the concept of culture as a core value for the development of students’ cultural identity and self-concept. In addition, it is important for teachers to have extensive training in the planning and delivery of instruction to promote academic achievement. This is conducted so that teachers who teach bilingual students to be fluent in both English and the native language of the students. Teachers must value commitment to teaching bilingual education learners in order to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students.

Relating to its methodology, Akkari (1998) argued that bilingual education has become a recent concern in public education and learning, especially in contexts with multiple cultural groups. Thus, determining the distinguishing characteristics of bilingual education programs is an effective way to understand their dynamics and to identify the varying rationale among each program. There are six models of managing cultural diversity in formal education: (a) segregated language remediation, (b) transitional bilingual education, (c) language developmental bilingual education, (d) integrated-enrichment bilingual education, (e) two-way bilingual education, and (f) “neo-colonial” bilingual education.

(a) Segregated Language Remediation

This model is considered not a bilingual education program, it is the most commonly used method in addressing language diversity in schools. The goal of segregated language remediation is to rapidly mainstream children into the dominant language. Typically, children identified as having “limited English proficiency” (LEP) are separated from regular classrooms and spend a variable amount of time with specialists who teach the dominant language. This separation ranges from minor, as in the case of English second language pullout programs, to more extensive separation. ESL pullout programs provide supplemental instruction (typically for 30 to 45 minutes each day) for minority language students who have been removed from submersion classrooms. This instruction is usually provided in small groups by teachers who do not speak the native language of minority students.

(b) Transitional Bilingual Education

It is known as early-exit bilingual education, a model whose primary goal is

to “mainstream” students to all dominant-language classrooms. This model uses native-language instruction to help students initially keep up in other subjects, but it eventually shifts to dominant-language instruction. Thus, the native language possesses only transitional or temporary value. In the end, proficiency in the dominant language is that which is the most important.

(c) **Language Developmental Bilingual Education**

It is known as language maintenance bilingual education, strives to achieve fluent bilingualism and biliteracy as well as academic excellence. It typically phases in the dominant language through a more gradual manner than transitional bilingual programs and continues to develop students’ skills in the native language (through language arts or content-area instruction) after they have become fully proficient in the dominant language.

(d) **Two-Way Bilingual Education**

It is known as dual-language education, is a model that combines language-maintenance bilingual education (for language minority students) and foreign-language immersion (for language majority students), with an added benefit of peer tutoring. By bringing children from two different language groups together, this model seeks to enable all groups to learn a vernacular other than their own while achieving high academic standards. Christian (1996) has suggested two major patterns of language allocation in such programs: 90/10 programs, in which 90% of the instruction is carried out in the non-dominant language, and 50/50 programs, in which the percentage of each la-

nguage is roughly equal. The possibility of implementing two-way bilingual education programs depends on several factors, including the size of the linguistically diverse population in a particular school or region, the local availability of financial resources, and the “prestige” of the foreign language.

(e) **“Neo-Colonial” Bilingual Education**

As the matter of fact “Neo-colonial” bilingual education is not very well documented in the pedagogical literature. This model can be found in former European colonies that existed in Africa and Asia. After achieving their independence, many of these countries continued to use English, French, or Portuguese as the language medium of instruction. This maintenance of the colonial legacy can be explained by political, economic, and historical factors. First, these countries were colonies during the time in which public schooling was implemented. They lacked any “local memory” of massive schooling in the native languages. Second, language composition in many countries was made up of multitudinous rather than one dominant language. Thus, the use of the “colonial language” was a pragmatic solution during a period in which building national identity was the priority.

B. The Integration of Cultural Diversity into Content of Language Learning

Rodriguez & Carrasquillo (1997) argued that effective instruction of bilingual education students requires mastering and using appropriate planning and delivery of instruction, as well as teacher’s knowledge and abilities of students’ cultural and linguistic characteristics and instructional needs. To accomplish successful teaching and

learning, teachers are required to (a) provide students with English language development instructional activities, (b) use students' native language for instruction, (c) be knowledgeable about subject contents and its appropriate delivery, and (d) implement appropriate techniques assessment for diagnosis and instructions.

In addition, in dealing with the integration of cultural diversity into the language learning content, teachers must consider the students' culture and linguistic diversity. It is believed that individuals bring their own culturally and socially driven way of knowing to the learning process (Gardner, 1991; Parla, Karnes & Ludlam, 1996). Students from diverse backgrounds come to school with a wide assortment of experiences and understanding. They have different pictures, each one different from each other, and classroom teachers must connect instructions to those pictures. Teachers' quality seems to be one of important elements in bilingual education. According to Cameron (2003), bilingual education environment requires whose command of the language enables them to be models for their students who will reproduce the accent of their teachers. Therefore, bilingual education teachers need to be aware that when language is a core value for a cultural group, it will also play a crucial role in of the development of students' cultural identity and self concept. Bilingual education teachers must have the following competencies as follows:

- Incorporate activities, materials, and techniques related to language minority students' history, contribution, and life styles.
- Identify approaches in assisting families to become active participants in the educational team.
- Recognize and accept different patterns of child development within and bet-

ween cultures in order to formulate realistic objectives.

- Plan strategies to respond positively to the diversity of behaviors involved in cross cultural settings.
- Provide field experiences in order to assist children to interact successfully in cross cultural settings.
- Demonstrate awareness of the way in which a learner's culture can permeate all areas of the curriculum.
- Describe approaches to develop awareness of the learner's cultural diversity value.
- Know the effects of cultural and socio-economic variables on the student's learning style (cognitive and affective) and general level of development and socialization.
- Recognize cultural similarities and differences between individual to identify potential conflict and opportunities these may create.

In general, current forms of content and language integrated programs regard content learning as the primary learning goal and language learning as a secondary one. Typically, there are no formal language learning objectives and it is up to the individual teacher to select the teaching method and the content-related language to be focused on. It is argued that language learning in bilingual education could be improved by intensified explicit language teaching, such as more explicit focus on form, extended and challenging oral production, more collaborative focus-on-form tasks, and focused use of L1 in class (Järvinen, 2008).

It is found that teachers are able to cover less content when teaching in a foreign language. It is because they have to focus more on the target language in which it gives them a burden. Content teachers are usually not

language specialist (Fruhauf et al. 1996, Eurydice, 2006). It is known that the use of the two languages in bilingual education has been defined quantitatively as the ratio of each language used in teaching. Figure 1

below shows different approaches of content and language integrated education placed along the continuum of content and language.

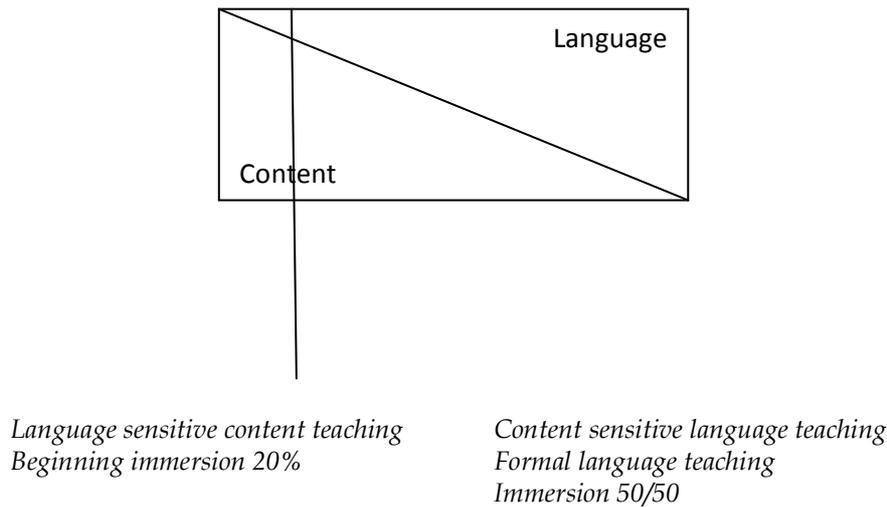


Figure 1. Approaches of content and language integrated education and the ratio of content and language in teaching.

In general, it is believed that learners should pertain to the use of the L2 and avoid the use of the L1 in learning an L2. However, recent research has shown that students use the L1 for purposes that are conducive to the learning of the L2 and not inhibitory to L1 development or wasted opportunities to use the target language (Swain 2000, 2002, Swain & Lapkin, 1998). The role of language is no longer seen from an information-processing angle, as conveying messages, but it is seen as a tool in cognitive activity, i.e. in the learning of the L2. When learners collaborate in speaking, they externalize thought and make it an object to be scrutinized, reflected on, and disagreed on. At the same time, learners make meaning, and when they talk about language they become engaged in meta-talk, which mediates second language learning. In the processes of problem-solving

and meaning-making, students benefit from using the L1. The L1 is used as a tool in learning an L2.

Today's foremost challenge in education is to create learning environments that maintain the cultural integrity of every child while enhancing their educational success (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Being closest to learners, classroom teachers are in a critical position to provide learning experiences that will ensure cultural integrity and academic success for all children. At the classroom level, culturally responsive teaching essentially involves using students' cultural experiences and background as a medium for helping them learn important academic skills of reading, writing, and computing. For example, different versions of Cinderella fairy tales found in such cultural traditions as Vietnam, the Philippines, Africa, and the Middle

East can be used in a variety of classroom activities to study the differences and similarities of characters, themes, values, and perspectives. Children can then write their own Cinderella story as a culminating experience. Inclusion of children's literature from different cultural traditions provides learning opportunities for many children to affirm their cultural experiences and help enrich the learning of all children. More importantly, this type of activity can help children reduce and challenge prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes they may bring into classrooms.

Taken from Bax (2010), below is one of classroom instruction examples in bilingual education in Indonesia context.

Junior Secondary Level 7, Science lesson

(On the screen is written the heading "Organization of live" (sic)

The teacher talks about the homework from the previous day, all in English.

She then talks about the classification system with the example of the 'pantera tigris'.

She elicits from students the fact that the first word is the genus, the second the species.

(The second screen shows a list of eight words such as 'life' 'organisation', 'cells', 'tissues', 'organ', 'plant').

The teacher goes through the students asking for the equivalents in Indonesian.

(The next screen shows new words)

The teacher continues drawing on the board of a body and checks knowledge of different systems, all reinforced with the Indonesian equivalent.

She then uses a good metaphor to explain the cells, saying they are like the classroom, with the bricks representing the cells, and she elaborates the metaphor well.

She asks about one cell system and students call out 'protozoa',

then she switches to Indonesian.

She then switches to the five natural 'kingdoms'. She is now presenting rather a lot of information, and the thread of the lesson is less clear than before. (Good use of PowerPoint on screen to illustrate)

content. Good use of whiteboard to put up new vocabulary.

In this context, it is clearly seen that the teacher used English as the tool to teach other subject than English. The teacher delivered the science lesson by using English. This is not so easy task to do, since the teacher had to be able to master English herself before she used it in the teaching and learning process.

III. DISCUSSION

Cummins (1979) argued that proficiency and skills in the first language and second language are interdependent systems. It is expected that the first language acquisition forms the basis of similar proficiency in the second language. Therefore, the general approach to bilingual education posits the necessity of stronger links between the use of language in school and other contexts.

In line with that, Vygotsky (1962) mentioned the existence of two types of knowledge: (1) spontaneous knowledge, which refers to familiar, everyday concepts, and (2) scientific concepts, which encompasses formal, school-learned concepts. These two types of knowledge are strongly and structurally linked. When students are able to speak about their own lives in a given language, they gain mastery in the language. Two specific research findings illustrate this. Wong-Fillmore (1983) has reported that Hispanic students learn more English in classrooms that provide opportunities for reciprocal interaction between teachers and peers. A similar analysis advanced by Boyd-Batstone (1997) reveals how bilingual students become active learners when they are encouraged to use their cultural heritage and

personal experiences as a central ingredient in the classroom.

However, contradict to those perceptions, Freire (1985) cited in Akkari (1998) argued that the society experienced limitation of bilingual education programs within the formal educational system. Schools are not producing significant sociocultural productivity. Most forms of schooling have been conceptually constructed as mechanisms of repression, as a way to screen, discipline, and regulate the instruction of others. Social justice has never been a point of discussion in formal schooling. It is found out that formal schooling has little power on social injustice. Each society fashions the school system to serve the interests of dominant groups.

According to Giroux (1981), schools are institutions that reproduce both the ideological beliefs and the cultural values of the dominant class on a daily basis. The function of mainstream schools is to limit the opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students to see themselves as agents of social change. Students from minority communities most often do not view themselves as potential leaders in their communities' struggle for equality. Regarding to this, there are four areas that support dominant groups interests: (1). Selection of culture deemed as socially legitimate; (2). Categories used to classify certain cultural content and form as superior or inferior; (3). Selection and legitimization of school and classroom relationships; (4). Distribution of and access to different types of culture and knowledge by different social classes.

Furthermore, McLaren (1989) convinced that in practice, schools should be democratic institutions, critical scholars have begun to unravel the ways in which school, curricula, knowledge and policy depend on the corporate marketplace and the fortunes of the economy. Schooling must always be analyzed as a cultural and historical process, in which

select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender grouping. In short, educators within the critical tradition argue that mainstream schooling supports an inherently unjust bias resulting in the transmission and reproduction of the dominant status quo culture.

Therefore, it is important to have a way of thinking about negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation state (McLaren, 1997).

In fact, accommodating the cultural diversity through content of language learning is not an easy task. There are three case studies related to this problem. First, Oyster-Adams Bilingual Elementary School at Washington D.C. This school uses English and Spanish. It delivers a 50/50 two-way dual immersion bilingual model of education. This means that 50% of teaching and learning is in English and 50% is in Spanish. It is found in this study that native Spanish speaking children learnt to perform better in an environment that respects their native language and provides continued growth in their native language.

In addition, the environment in which all students are afforded the opportunity to obtain the knowledge and skills will enable them to succeed both as individuals and members of society. It is believed that racial and ethnic richness and diversity form the bases through which we enrich and promote the goals of building a culturally pluralistic society (School, 2010). It is important to note down that the language minority and language majority groups at Oyster collaborate in their efforts to define linguistic and cultural differences not as problems to be overcome but as resources to be developed (Freeman,

1996). The collaborative effort is a key feature of Oyster that contributes to its success – policy, curriculum content and classroom activities are always co-created by the English and Spanish groups to maximize cultural balance and draw from the best of both worlds.

Innovations at the Oyster bilingual school include strong parental and community support, maintenance of high academic standards and a program of ongoing professional development, yet conflict remains between staff and between generations over philosophical orientations and how this impacts program design and development (Fern, 1995). This is not uncommon among bilingual immersion schools where socio-historical, cultural and political issues are laid bare and tackled head-on. The literature recommends that Oyster, as well as other schools, need continual professional development, including conflict resolution, collaborative action projects, mentoring and technical assistance to enable an open dialogue about potentially divisive issues.

Second, bilingual education in Hawaii, according to the Hawai'i Department of Education website: "it is an academic program, delivered through the Hawaiian language, based upon Hawaiian knowledge and cultural practices, attentive to community, family and student goals" (Hawai'i Dept of Education, 2010). According to Hawaiian's policy, the program outcomes do not currently exist but are being developed and will be called K-12 Hawaiian Literacy Framework and Performance Standards for Cultural and Language Proficiency.

It is noticed that the Hawaiian language immersion wants to make clear that cultural learning needed to be taught through indigenous language. In addition, the knowledge and learning measurement should not be measured with a Western epistemology because it must remain flexible to adapt to varying contextual circumstances and levels

of education of students. Therefore, Hawaiian Aligned Portfolio Assessment (HAPA) is being created as a standardized test. The test is given in Grade 3 & 4 and tests both reading and math-ematics. Questions and problems are in Hawaiian and answers must also be in Hawaiian.

Third, the total immersion in the Maori language at New Zealand, it is clearly noticed that for Maori educators there is a distinct line between Maori immersion and bilingual education and in fact they are considered opposites (Hornberger, 2009). English is strictly forbidden on Maori education premises at all times. The prohibition is controversial in a nation where English is socially and educationally dominant and highly desirable for academic and social advancement; and all the more controversial considering that the Maori children attending the school arrive as English speakers (Hornberger, 2006).

The example of Maori immersion programs is one of remarkable revitalization of a heritage language under threat. It cannot be discounted that banning English in Maori schools has played a part in this successful revitalization. Not unlike the challenges faced in Hawaii, Maori language programs have struggled to provide enough qualified teachers – qualified in terms of both bilingualism and teaching strategies that are specifically attuned to the needs of students whose native language is usually not Hawaiian or Maori and who have to compete in a job market whose dominant language is English. A renewed focus in New Zealand has emerged around the idea of pre-service and in-service training for teachers.

Related to Indonesian context, the government through the Law of National Education System Number 20 Year 2003 article 33: 3 states that foreign language can be used at school as the medium of instruction to develop learner's competency in the foreign language, especially English, which has the

status as an international language, is considered to be very important in the globalized world. The other article of the Law(50:3) also stresses that the government and/or local government is required to establish at least one level of school to be developed as an international standard school(ISS) in which one of the characteristics of the ISS is the use of English as the medium of instruction(MoI) in the teaching and learning process.

The bilingual education became an important issue since the government wants to provide brilliant and competitive graduates who hold key competencies. In fact, the establishment and the implementation of bilingual education has raised many dilemmas. The teaching practices at bilingual education is strongly expected to develop through the implementation of variety models of teaching and learning to maximize and optimize the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual potential of the students. In realities, there are some aspects still need to improve starting from the qualification of the school staff itself: the academic qualification of the principal, teachers, and administration staff which are not reaching the standard yet, the competencies of the school staff regarding to the Information and technology (IT) and English competencies (based on the data of the TOEFL/TOEIC score obtained), the ability to conduct the teaching and learning process using various kinds of models/methods/techniques, and so forth. In responding to the requirements set above, it is strongly expected that the school and its staff do not get disheartened but they will make some evaluation and reflection to introspect and retrospect in order to meet the requirements (Hodijah, 2012).

Regarding to studies above, bilingualism should be viewed not as an instrumental skill but rather as a cultural tool that can be used for learning and living together, for writing our own histories, and for sharing

solidarity. As a cultural tool, bilingualism plays a central position in promoting critical literacy among the students. Because of that, in a view of education, Freire (1985) argued that learning is not an individual objective for dispossessed people, but empowering through social change and accomplished with unity and shared power.

It is important to note that bilingual education is not necessarily based on theoretical concepts that require challenging the power relations in a class society. For example, bilingual programs that focus exclusively on culture and language issues may work within the established hegemonic power structure since they do not seek to challenge the institution. A major challenge for teachers in bilingual education is to critically reevaluate the limitations of maintaining traditional pedagogies that appear to benefit only some children. Teachers have the potential to create opportunities for children to be bilingual, become biliterate and succeed academically while at the same time developing social consciousness. In fact, only few teachers have been able to create opportunities for students to engage in transformative educational pedagogy of bilingual education (Arce, 2000).

In addition, the successful to accommodate the cultural diversity in bilingual education relates significantly to the elaboration of good instruction. Good instruction is associated with higher student outcomes regardless of the type of educational model that is used (Levine, 1995; Marzano, 2003; Wenglinsky, 2000). Adapted from Howard, et al. 2007, there are some methods that can be used. It is noticed that in equitable interaction, the promotion of positive interactions between teachers and students should occur. When applied equitably in a classroom with mixed L1 and L2 students this method has enabled both groups of students to perform better academically.

Next, through targeted and varied teaching techniques, there will be utilization of a variety of teaching techniques that respond to different learning styles. This method enables students with varying language proficiency levels to orient their learning more efficiently to the curriculum. Then, in student-centered teaching and learning, the program should have a student-centered approach. Reciprocal interaction is preferable to teacher-centered knowledge transmission and is associated with higher-level cognitive skills. In classrooms with mixed L1 and L2 students, a bilingual program should encourage students to share their linguistic codes and cultural knowledge with other students. In sharing between learners method, cooperative learning strategies should be encouraged. In a classroom with ethnically and linguistically diverse students, academic achievement improves when students collaborate interdependently on common objective tasks and share work experiences.

Additionally, students' expectations and attitudes toward each other become more positive. Then, through common task orientation, language transfer is not always a result of cooperative learning strategies, and attention should be paid to the type of task. Linguistic knowledge transfer will occur when the cooperative learning strategy is focused around a language task that facilitates the students sharing language knowledge.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is noted that bilingual education is instruction in two languages and the use of those languages as mediums of instruction for any part, or all, of the school curriculum (Andersson, Boyer, & Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1970). It immediately excludes programs that include bilingual students but do not involve bilingual instruction, most notably submersion ma-

majority language, irrespective of their language background. It also excludes programs, where a second language is taught as a subject only (Cummins & Hornberger, 2008).

A bilingual program must provide both content and delivery in two languages, although they may vary somewhat in how the languages get distributed across the curriculum. Well-implemented bilingual programs can promote literacy and subject matter knowledge in a primary language without any negative effects on development in the second language (Cummins, 2000). The use of mother tongue to facilitate the understanding of academic concepts would not interfere with the acquisition of English. Many studies reveal that bilingual learners may develop flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. Karmiloff-Smith (1992: 21) refers to metalinguistic skills and to superior abilities of bilinguals with a notion that in the process of acquiring and using different languages they may have the opportunity to reflect consciously upon the ways in which languages differ. If students understand and know how to do something in their primary language they should be able to transfer this knowledge to English using the relevant taught terminology. This could mean producing bi-literate citizens who could be better placed to share knowledge gained to the benefit of their communities.

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