

Plurilingualism, multilingualism and teacher training: a case study

MARÍA TABUENCA CUEVAS Y ANA ANDÚGAR SOTO
Universidad de Alicante

Introduction

During the last century, new needs in education have come to the forefront; for example, a need to incorporate technology in the classroom or the need to make foreign languages part of the core curriculum. In Spain, over the last five decades, there have been eight proposed changes in educational law that regulate how and what is taught at all levels of education. The goal of these changes is school improvement in one way or another (Burner, 2018); but it is important to note that school improvement is closely linked to the professional development of teachers (Postholm, 2012). Therefore, when educational legislation undergoes modifications, teacher training programs should necessarily follow suit however, universities and legislation don't always go hand in hand. Thus, a brief overview of the most important changes in education law regarding multilingualism and plurilingualism and the effect on the teacher training program at the University of Alicante will be presented in order to analyze the peculiar situation of foreign language teacher training and language credentials.

Teaching programs. A brief overview

Teacher training, in the field of foreign languages, has been a challenge throughout the last few decades in Spain as highlighted by Madrid (2001). This would seem to be a contradiction, as

English was made part of the syllabus over seventy years ago– albeit in varying ways starting with the Primary Education Law of 1945. Teacher training also underwent changes to adapt to the new needs of the syllabus; *Plan de Estudios* (1967), a 3-year program, which changed teacher training was however replaced by the *Plan de Estudios* (1971), a 3-year program that provided less training in foreign languages (Madrid, 2001). By the 1980s, there were concerns and criticisms regarding the approach to foreign language learning (especially English) at all levels of education which appeared not only in the research but also in the media. Simultaneously there were, external factors, such as the move to join the European Union in 1986, that entailed an additional new focus on foreign language training in education in Spain.

At this time, there was also a body of research supported by the Council of Europe in the 1990s that would lead to the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) in 2001. This framework provided a clear set of indicators for language level competence that needed to be incorporated into foreign language syllabi across all of Europe as a common standard as well as supporting a communicative competence framework that required, in many cases, methodological approaches to language learning (Figueras, 2012). This, among other issues (Mora & Vidal, 2001) led to changes in teacher training programs which adapted and consolidated specialties, such as English in degree programs. The Bologna Process brought further changes to degree programs in 2008-9, however, these specialties were left much as they were, with no real notable gains neither in number nor range of subjects.

Plurilingualism, multilingualism and teacher training

Although Spanish is recognized as the official language in Spain, Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution recognizes that co-official languages must be respected and protected. Subsequently, in regions where there is a co-official language, and in the absence of a national language policy applied to education, regional education authorities have adapted their plurilingual education programs to include co-official and foreign languages (Eurydice, 2017). In Spain, recent studies have shown that

between 93 %-100 % of Primary schools in Spain offer English as a foreign language as part of the curriculum (Macaro, 2020; Eurostat, 2022). In the Valencian Community, Spanish, Valencian, and English (as the preferred foreign language) are taught side by side. As early as 2006, different regions of Spain introduced English in Pre-Primary Education (Eurydice, 2017), however it wasn't until 2008 with Decree 38/2008, that English became part of the Pre-Primary curriculum. As there are three languages used for teaching, it is necessary to point out that 10 % of the class time in the curriculum is allotted to English in Pre-Primary and anywhere between 15 % and 25 % in Primary Education.

This should entail specific needs in teacher training for plurilingual and multilingual competence as shown by studies such as those of Corcoll (2012, 2013) which comment on the need to develop multilingual competence in teacher education. Others, like della Chiesa, Scott and Hinton (2012), focus on a need for «multilingual competence as the repertoire of resources that students acquire in all languages they know or have learned, and which also relate to the cultures associated with the languages (languages of school, regional languages and minorities and migrations, modern or classical languages)» (p.40). However, the recent TALIS study (Ministerio de Educación, 2018) highlights that only 38 % of teachers are prepared for plurilingual contexts during teacher training. This dichotomy is a burning issue that has yet to be addressed.

What has however come to the forefront is the fact that linguistic competence can be certified through language exams from external organizations. In Spain, decrees, such as 61/2013 (based on Organic Law 2/2006, Royal Decree 1629/2006, Decree 155/2007, and Decree 119/2008) created a system of recognition of competence in foreign languages in the Valencian Community and the Commission for the Accreditation of Levels of Competence in Foreign Languages. This established a set of 'official' exams that would enable teachers and students to demonstrate language proficiency through external organizations unrelated to the Spanish Education System. It has also led to a classification of what level student should have at the end of each stage of education across Europe in foreign languages. As early as 1999, the European Council pointed out the need to

have a B2 level in two foreign languages by the end of compulsory education. In the Valencian Community, this has not yet been supported by a decree. In fact, students are generally expected to have reached a B1 level in English, but it is not recognized, nor tested, nor certified by the Education Ministry at any point during their education (Tabuenca-Cuevas, 2016). This would seem to be counterproductive, as a recent study by Cambridge (2015b) revealed that 77 % of those surveyed between the ages of 16-24 thought that in order to find a job, it was more important to speak English than to have a university degree. It should be noted that when it comes to Valencian, the co-official language of the region, students do receive recognition of their language level from the Ministry of Education in the Valencian Community at the end of compulsory education. This has inevitably led to the following situation in which Spain is one of the top countries in the world for Cambridge exam centres (Cambridge, 2015a) as the need for external certification rises.

Current situation of foreign language teacher training

The last few years have seen changes in teacher training in the Valencian Community regarding language competences. As mentioned previously, students can specialize in English as a foreign language during their teaching degree programs. However, it is important to note that there are external situations that affect these specialists. Students, up until October 29, 2021, were expected to have acquired a Training Certificate in Foreign Languages that demonstrated not only a B2 level of English, but also training in specific area such Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). This could be done through university courses, or through courses organized the Ministry of Education. This was meant to ensure that methodology and language competences were covered. This requirement has been eliminated in favor of language exams. As the teaching degrees do not certify language competence, students need to pass an 'official exam' at a minimum level of B2, to be able to teach English and at a minimum level of C1 if they are going to teach other non-linguistic

subjects in English according to Order 3/2020 (based on Decree 61/2013). What becomes evident is that the situation is incongruous; a foreign language teacher only needs a B2 level of English, while an Art teacher or a Physical Education teacher would need a C1 level of English to teach.

This subsequently creates a contradictory situation as teachers need to pass civil servant exams to become active teachers with a permanent position. In the case of Pre-Primary Education, there are no specific positions for English teachers and no specific requirements beyond a B2 level language certificate. This means that students who study this specialty do not have a specific foreign language post although English has been part of the curriculum since 2008. This is paradoxical as they are best prepared for this area, but it is not recognized as a specialty. The situation is different in the case of Primary teachers, but just as inconsistent. There are specific positions for English teachers, but it is not necessary to have a specialty in the degree to opt for one of these positions. In fact, any general education graduate, or a specialist from another area, can opt for a post teaching English just if their language certification is sufficient. This conflicting situation in many ways undermines the purpose of speciality of foreign languages in teaching degrees.

With the publication of Law 4/2018 on Training for the implementation of the Multilingual & Intercultural Education Program in the Valencian Community, steps toward changing these inconsistencies were made. In Article 27, it is stated that, the Council, through the competent department in matters of Education, will promote that university curricula provide teachers with training (initial and continuous) for the fulfillment of the objectives of the multilingual and intercultural Education Program. It also asserts that the competent department in the field of education will do, at least every four years, a global evaluation of the Valencian educational linguistic model that will have, among others, the following purposes: improve the quality of the multilingual and intercultural education it provides and introduce changes to improve the educational linguistic model. Although these articles identify the main issues that need to be addressed in teacher training, pointing out the need for the Education Ministry and universities to collaborate to implement change, little has been done to date on these issues.

Conclusions

The analysis of the current situation highlights the many questions that need to be addressed as it is essential to take a stand and question, where do we go from here? Will the only requirement to teach English in the Valencian Community be a teaching degree with an external B2/C1 language certificate? It is clear that training, in methodological approaches like CLIL, is necessary as more and more non-linguistic subjects are taught in English in the curriculum at both at Pre-Primary and Primary levels. How will this be guaranteed if specialties in English are not given their due value? If the certification of language competence for pre-service teachers is key to obtaining a post, will this be incorporated into degree programs? Will students in general at every level of Education receive language competence recognition? How will teacher training in education systems that support plurilingualism / multilingualism be supported? What structural changes need to be made to degree programs to ensure that teachers are prepared for plurilingual and multilingual education systems? As Beacco *et al.* (2016) state, it is necessary to:

Make intercultural and multilingual education an explicit general objective, treat all language teaching (including languages of instruction) as a single process, encourage teachers to work closely together and give equal importance to openness to languages and cultures, communication and (inter)cultural competences, learning autonomy and transversal competences (p. 10).

This brief analysis of the current situation at one university highlights the many questions that need to be addressed in foreign language teacher training. It is paramount to reassess what is happening to and question, where do we go from here?

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