THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM (3 credits)

Approved by Daniel E Leitch, paper advisor
Date: January 7, 2011
THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM

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A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

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In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Science

in

Education

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by

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2010
Abstract

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM

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This paper contains research about bilingualism and the positive effects it has on children, the American school system, and America in general. The number of bilingual and specifically non-English speakers in this country has increased and is continuing to increase rapidly. Based on research, there is a great need for bilingual education programs and social services to be offered to English Language Learners (ELLs).

Along with this increase of ELLs comes an increase in controversy over bilingualism and specifically bilingual education. Many myths and misconceptions suggest bilingualism to be negative for America and its schools. Researchers have gone to great lengths to negate these misconceptions and confirm them to be untrue.

Many of these misconceptions are created because of the existence of several types of bilingualism. Different types of bilingualism produce different outcomes usually based on the needs and/or situation of the learner. Even if a bilingual student struggles at first or is hindered by a temporary language delay, the future benefits will usually outweigh these hindrances. This is just one example of a misconception that has been invalidated.
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Chapter One: Introduction

With a rapidly growing number of English language learners in America’s public school system, bilingualism is becoming an important and controversial topic. According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2010) America’s public schools enroll about five million English language learners (ELLs). That is twice the number from just 15 years ago which is expected to double again by 2015. Even though ELLs are the fastest growing group of students in the United States today, not all educators and researchers believe that bilingualism is a positive component of American society and schools. This paper shows the research supporting bilingualism, the myths that attempt to prove bilingualism to be negative, and the contradictions to those myths.

Statement of the Problem

Many American citizens do not view bilingualism as a positive component of their society and therefore do not advocate and/or support it. Most community members lack research-based knowledge regarding the pros and cons of bilingual education and bilingualism in general. Therefore, they are not able to contribute to an informed and constructive public dialogue.

Definition of Terms

Additive bilingualism: Bilingualism in which a person attains balanced competencies in two languages (Francis, 2005).

Folk bilingualism: Bilingualism that is the result of a situation in which a person must become bilingual in order to survive (Baker & Hornberger, 2001).

Subtractive bilingualism: Bilingualism in which a person has an imbalanced competence of one language more than another (Francis, 2005).
**Delimitations of Research**

There are no delimitations in this research.

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**Method of Approach**

A brief review of bilingualism in America was conducted. A review of literature relating to research, studies, and evidence of different types of bilingualism, as well as research that both supports and disproves the positive effects of bilingualism, was conducted. The findings were summarized and synthesized, and recommendations made.
Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Bilingualism in America

Bilingualism is becoming more and more prevalent in America and especially in the public school system. In the United States alone, over 300 languages are spoken (Strickland, 2001). Furthermore, according to the National Education Association (NEA, 2010), about five million English language learners (ELLs) are enrolled in America’s public schools. That is twice the number from just 15 years ago and is expected to double again by 2015. In fact, the Wisconsin Department of Instruction (DPI, 2010) shows that in Wisconsin alone, over 49,000 ELLs are enrolled in public schools.

These ELLs do not speak the same native languages either. Some districts include students who represent more than 100 different language groups (NEA, 2010). Also, most ELLs are not immigrants or recent arrivals but instead are native born to immigrant parents who speak their native language at home. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction (NCELA, 2010), the number of ELLs has continued to grow in many states, particularly those without a history of ELL students. Table 1 (below) shows the increase of ELLs in the United States over a 10 year span.

Table 1.
Not only is the American school system being impacted by an influx of bilingual speakers, but in American homes, nearly 20 percent of children are being raised to be bilingual (Steiner, 2008). With such an increase of ELLs in America, bilingualism is becoming a highly controversial topic. Some citizens think that ELLs should learn English and completely forget about their native languages. Many myths and misconceptions have surfaced due to this controversy. One of the most common is that immigrants resist learning English and therefore segregate themselves linguistically from mainstream society (Tse, 2001). Many Americans think this will result in the exit of English as a common and unifying language.

Most American citizens, however, are unaware that the United States does not have an official language. Historically, several constitutional amendments have been introduced to establish English as the official language of the United States (Tse, 2001). The first amendment, introduced in 1981, tried to prohibit business and social services from being conducted in any languages other than English. The amendment failed nationally, but since the year 2000, 20 states have formed official English laws. These laws and political statements just led to more controversy regarding bilingualism in America.

**Positive Effects of Bilingualism**

Many scholars have suggested that knowing two languages is an asset from which anyone could benefit. One of the most well-known researchers of bilingualism is Jim Cummins, an Irish immigrant, who has been named one of the world’s greatest experts on minority languages (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Since 1970, Cummins has researched and published the
benefits of bilingualism as well as winning several scholarly awards for his work. He has been an advocate for tolerance, equity, and justice for minorities throughout the world.

The most common benefits of bilingualism are the academic benefits. Research suggests that bilinguals perform academically as well as or better than students who only know one language. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students who are still learning English have the same grade point average (GPA) as their peers who are fluent in English only (Tse, 2001). Bilinguals also perform higher on college entrance exams like the ACTs or SATs (Steiner, 2008). Bilingual students also have been found to be better readers and have better problem-solving skills (Tse, 2001). This increase in reading ability is because of an increased phonological awareness (Steiner, 2008). All these effects are partly due to the fact that bilingualism stimulates children’s brains.

One of Cummins’ major contributions to the benefits of bilingualism is that bilinguals have superior thinking abilities due to their dual linguistic systems (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). This means that they can perform better on cognitive tasks than a monolingual that has only one linguistic system. One reason for this is the overlap of vocabulary. Some languages that include cognates and/or similar vocabulary would account for greater verbal ability (Steiner, 2008). This ability to analyze unfamiliar words because of knowledge of words in another language helps students perform better on written exams. Furthermore, bilinguals are continuously comparing two languages which also leads to higher cognitive performance (Baker & Hornberger, 2001).

In addition, most bilinguals will perform better on tests of general reasoning or concept formation (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Linguistically, this is because a bilingual would be forced to conceptualize ideas and events in terms of general properties rather than relying on his/her linguistic symbols. Thus, bilingual children can separate sound from meaning better than
monolinguals and also have two words for the same referent (Steiner, 2008). This means they can better connect an idea and its significance of expressions (Arefi & Alizadeh, 2008). They will also be more analytical thinkers due to their ability to break down words into pieces (Steiner, 2008).

Another positive effect is that bilinguals will have an improved memory and an enhanced ability to learn a third or more languages (Steiner, 2008). Knowing more than one language also will lead to greater cognitive flexibility. The habit of switching languages and making use of two different perspectives helps in tasks requiring perceptual and conceptual reorganization (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Learning this shift from one language to another also provides enhanced brain stimulation (Steiner, 2008).

Evidence suggests that learning two languages will increase divergent thinking skills (Tse, 2001). Studies have shown that bilinguals perform at a higher level than monolinguals in verbal flexibility, verbal originality, figural fluency, and figural originality scales when being tested on creative thinking (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Bilinguals are also capable of “language brokering” the interpretation and translation they perform for others such as teachers, parents, and community members. Comparing and translating languages along with making connections between words is a far greater advantage than even learning another set of words (Steiner, 2008). These skills demonstrate sophisticated linguistic, cultural, and cognitive skills (Tse, 2001).

Bilingualism also has benefits other than academic ones. Cummins states that bilingual children will benefit emotionally from knowing two languages (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Also, the ability to communicate in two languages allows students to have access to multiple sources of information, which have been called “social capital” or “funds of knowledge” (Tse,
Furthermore, bilinguals will be exposed to a wider range of experiences due to their participation in two cultures (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). They will also encompass a more complex understanding of other countries and cultures (Steiner, 2008).

Yet another advantage to bilingualism is the economic advantage it provides. Those who know two languages earn higher incomes and have more employment opportunities than monolinguals (Tse, 2001). Not only will being bilingual help in competing for jobs, but it also helps those succeed in jobs especially in a struggling economy (Steiner, 2008). For example, in Florida, those who speak two languages fluently earn at least 20% more if not 50% more than monolinguals (Tse, 2001).

Bilingualism also has societal benefits. A country that employs bilingual citizens has the ability to negotiate with international business clients (Tse, 2001). Without bilinguals a country will encounter shortages when dealing with foreign trade, tourism, and international banking (Steiner, 2008). The United States benefits politically by encompassing a national security corps (Tse, 2001). The President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies pointed out the importance of bilingualism:

The fact remains that the overwhelming majority of the world’s population neither understands nor speaks English, and for most of those who learn English as a foreign language, it remains precisely that. Our vital interests are impaired by the fatuous notion that our competence in other languages is irrelevant. Indeed, it is precisely because of this nation’s responsibilities and opportunities as a major power and as a symbol of ideals to which many of the world’s people aspire that foreign languages, as a key to unlock the mysteries of other customs’ and cultures, can no longer be viewed as an educational or civic luxury (Tse, 2001, p. 50).

All these advantages benefit individuals, the public school system, and America in many ways.
Bilingualism Myths and Facts

Even though there is significant research to prove the benefits of bilingualism, there are still contradictions and studies that show bilingualism causes negative effects on students. Many of these contradictions have been established as untrue and to be nothing more than myths. One of the most common myths is that bilingualism does not stimulate cognitive development in any form. As cited in Baker and Hornberger (2001), the Piagetian view states that language learning focuses on tasks and relevant information. This is assuming that language uses a central part of cognitive activity (Arefi & Alizadeh, 2008).

Also, evidence shows little or no support that language learning contributes to the achievement of cognitive development (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). In fact, Vygotsky perceives the process of language as strictly social and based on his/her biological dispositions (Arefi & Alizadeh, 2008). Other significant researchers such as Leopold, Lambert, and Iacno-Worrall disagree with the Piagetian theory as well (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). They question that if access to language helps the child focus on relevance of task situations, what will be the effect of access to two languages? These researchers support this theory by using the example of a deaf child. Although deafness does not prevent concept formation, it will hinder certain types of cognitive development which are accessible mainly through the linguistic medium (Arefi & Alizadeh, 2008).

Not only does early research show that bilingualism does not stimulate cognitive development, but it also shows bilingualism lowers performance levels on cognitive tasks (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). This argument, however, was ruled out by Cummins’ Threshold Theory. In this theory Cummins states:

There may be a threshold level of linguistic competence which a bilingual child must attain both in order to avoid cognitive deficits and allow the potentially beneficial aspects
of becoming bilingual to influence his cognitive functioning. Therefore, bilinguals are revealed as achieving higher levels of cognitive performance (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 17).

Another argument for the absence of academic achievement in bilinguals is that early IQ testing in the 1920s proved that monolinguals performed better than bilinguals (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). However, many of the early studies failed to take into account variables such as socio-economic status, sex, and the extent of the bilingual’s knowledge of his/her two languages. When a study was done that compared a group of monolinguals and bilinguals of balanced socio-economic status, sex, and age, the bilingual students were found to perform higher than monolinguals in verbal and non-verbal tasks. Also, testing in the past only used quantitative research whereas qualitative research now suggests even more that bilinguals are achieving as well as or better than monolinguals (Cummins, 2009). There is no longer any evidence that shows that bilinguals differ from monolinguals in IQ testing (Baker & Hornberger, 2001).

Studies also show that bilinguals have difficulties expressing their intelligence through language (Arefi & Alizadeh, 2008). For example, a group of students who received mathematical instruction through a second language were found to be eleven months behind in story problem arithmetic (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). However, they were at the same level as their peers when completing arithmetic tests in which the problems were expressed in symbols. This is likely because these bilingual students failed to overcome difficulties in coping with two languages, which is not the norm in most cases. It is cases like these that cause ELLs to be labeled as special education students when they have no cognitive disabilities at all (Markham, Schon, & Shaftel, 2008).
Another argument against bilingualism is that students will lose their first language while trying to acquire another (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Many scholars perceive that students will have two underdeveloped languages rather than one strong language. They argue that in order for a student to succeed linguistically and academically in a second language, they must first be well developed in their first language (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Another reason for this is that bilinguals do not have the ability to cope with two language systems thus lowering their levels of verbal ability (Baker & Hornberger, 2001).

Other research suggests otherwise. Learning a second language will actually increase the proficiency and awareness of a person’s first language (Tse, 2001). Humans do not have a limited capacity for knowing language. Knowing one language will help students to learn a second language better and more quickly (Strickland, 2001). Furthermore, giving up one language does not promote the development of another (Steiner, 2008). For example, if a child stops speaking German or French, he/she will not become a better English speaker because of it. Even worse, a child may be disturbed emotionally if forced to give up one language especially if he/she is dependent upon that language to communicate with certain people in his/her life (Baker & Hornberger, 2001).

Many researchers are under the misconception that only very intelligent students will be able to become bilingual (Steiner, 2008). However, any child without a language disability can learn another language, especially while he/she is at a young age when the language acquisition areas of the brain are developing. According to Noam Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar (UG), all people are born with an innate knowledge that guides language acquisition (Ellis, 2008). Thus, an infant’s brain is prewired to learn all of the different languages in the world (Steiner, 2008). Research suggests that all children have the ability to learn another language.
How easily they learn it depends on many factors such as age, environment, and genetics (Strickland, 2001). Some children are more linguistically gifted than others just as some children are more athletic or musical than their peers (Steiner, 2008).

Another common myth is that bilingualism causes language delays, (Steiner, 2008). To a certain point, this statement is true. When a child is learning two languages he/she sometimes will start talking later than normal, but research shows that this delay is only temporary (Strickland, 2001). Actually, between five and ten percent of all children experience language delays whether they are bilingual or not (Steiner, 2008). All children struggle to learn their first language as well. It is not effortless or quick but rather consumes several years of a child’s life (Dicker, 2003). Bilingual children who experience mild delays usually exhibit a normal level of language comprehension but suffer temporarily in language output. They will, however, return to a normal stage of development before age five (Steiner, 2008). A temporary delay at a young age is considered an appropriate sacrifice especially if bilingualism is the final outcome (Strickland, 2001).

Several different types of bilingualism exist and researchers strongly agree that certain types are not effective. Folk bilingualism is the result of a situation in which a person must become bilingual in order to survive (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). This is the situation of many immigrant groups in the United States. Learning English and/or becoming bilingual is a necessity for these children, not a luxury (Tse, 2001). This type of bilingualism has been associated with negative cognitive and academic consequences. Such sociolinguistic factors such as the attitudes of students and parents, the prestige of the bilingual’s two languages, the functions of the languages, negative stereotyping, and discrimination lead to this negative effect.
(Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Some of these factors have also led to higher dropout rates (Tse, 2001).

When discussing folk bilingualism, the research does not explain how such sociolinguistic factors can affect cognitive development. A student’s positive attitude will probably lead to success in learning a second language but it does not prove that a student’s negative attitude has anything to do with his/her cognitive deficiencies (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). As for dropout rates, research only suggests that these rates are higher among those students who were trying to learn a second language but not yet fully bilingual. Actually, bilingual students had a better rate than monolinguals, only 7.7% dropped out versus 7.8% (Tse, 2001).

Two other types of bilingualism are additive and subtractive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism is bilingualism in which a person attains balanced competencies in two languages (Francis, 2005). This would be a positive form of bilingualism and is also sometimes called balanced bilingualism (Steiner, 2008). However, subtractive bilingualism is a type of bilingualism in which a person has an imbalanced competence of one language more than another. This is likely to occur when the second language is more prestigious or carries more social relevance. The result of this is that the student will lose his/her first language and replace it with the second language (Baker & Hornberger, 2001).

In reality, there are very few “balanced bilinguals” who are equally proficient in two languages (Steiner, 2008). According to Webster’s Dictionary and the common public, bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages (Merriam-Webster, 2008). According to Steiner, however, bilingualism can be defined as the ability to speak, read, write, or comprehend more than one language (Steiner, 2008). The extent of a child’s bilingualism is affected by the
languages spoken by his/her parents, friends, family, community members, and the languages he/she hears and uses in school.

Bilingualism is also affected by the purpose a language serves in a person’s life. A child’s brain is adaptable to his/her needs which may cause a shift in the balance of his/her languages (Steiner, 2008). If a student only comprehends a language because he/she was never required to read or speak it, that student is considered to have passive bilingualism, yet another type of bilingualism. Most often however, a student is capable in more than one of these aspects (speaking, reading, writing, or comprehension) and is in fact considered bilingual by most people’s standards.

Furthermore, some students will appear to be completely bilingual when talking to their friends and then struggle in the classroom. This is due to the differences between social and academic language (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) make up the two types of languages (Markham et al, 2008). These two types of languages create confusion in the classroom and to the public who cannot understand why a child appears to be bilingual but then demonstrates low performance levels in the classroom.

Because most bilinguals are not balanced bilinguals, several misconceptions arise. One common misunderstanding is that bilingualism confuses children and causes them to mix languages (Steiner, 2008). Mixing languages is caused when a bilingual uses words or phrases from two languages in one sentence or utterance (Strickland, 2001). Nevertheless, Arefi and Alizadeh (2008) argue that bilinguals encompass an analytical strategy in order to offset the interference between two languages. Cummins (2007) also suggests that keeping the two
languages completely separate is not consistent with current theories of second language development.

Critics use the expectation that a bilingual should always be able to find the correct word he/she is looking for in both languages, when in reality most monolinguals have trouble finding appropriate words every once in a while (Steiner, 2008). Not always being able to find the correct word in either language causes bilinguals to mix their languages. However, it does not mean that bilinguals have poor proficiency in both languages. This language mixing is more common among younger children. It is just a phase they go through during the transition to bilingualism (Dicker, 2003). By the time students enter the school system, they usually are aware they are speaking two different languages and can decipher the differences between the two (Steiner, 2008).

Not only are there myths that demonstrate bilingualism is negative for individual students in the American school system but also that bilingualism or multilingualism is bad for the United States as a whole. The English language is what holds the United States together and multilingualism threatens that cohesiveness (Tse, 2001). As cited in Tse, Senator Huddleston of Kentucky stated:

Bilingualism has torn apart communities from Canada to Britain, from Belgium to India. It expresses not a sense of tolerance but a demand for divisions. In countless places, differences in language have either caused or contributed significantly to political, social, and economic instability. While the absence of language differences does not guarantee that these problems will not occur, I believe that it does significantly reduce the chances that they will occur. (Tse, 2001, p. 2 & 3)

Many researchers and politicians also agree that if English is not preserved, another language will likely take its place (Steiner, 2008).
English is not going away like many people fear. U.S. Census data shows that immigrants are continuing to learn English at a proficient level and today’s immigrants are learning English faster than previous decades (Steiner, 2008). Not only is English staying a prevalent language in the United States, but around the world as well. It is widely used for international commerce and technology, and one-quarter to one-third of all people in the world understand and speak some English. Besides, monolinguals are the exception, and the majority of the world is bilingual (Strickland, 2001). Most monolinguals are Americans. Lampert, as cited in Dicker (2003, p. 83) states, “There is nothing more damaging to the American capacity to cope in a global society than the abysmally low level of foreign language competency of most Americans.” This is mostly due to the fact that Americans can get through life without knowing another language, and society in general does not value the ability to speak another language (Dicker, 2003).

Another common myth about bilingualism is that ELLs are not motivated to learn English due to the services offered in other languages (Tse, 2001). Language assistance has been mandated at the federal, state, and local levels in the areas of voting, tax collection, social services, disaster assistance, and consumer rights (Strickland, 2001). Not only do these services supposedly cause a lack of motivation among ELLs, but they also cost Americans money. Taxpayers pay an estimated $200 million a year to fund bilingual education programs (Strickland, 2001).

Bilingual education within the American school system is the most controversial of these services offered to ELLs (Tse, 2001). Bilingual education is an English-language school system in which students with little fluency in English are taught in both their native language and English (Merriam-Webster, 2008). A common myth is that bilingual education fails to provide
children with adequate knowledge of English, thus disadvantaging them academically (Strickland, 2001). It also segregates students and slows their integration into American society (Tse, 2001). Furthermore, it causes bilingual education students to feel alienated, ignored, and the butt of jokes, and to experience low self-esteem and confidence.

Even with all the negative research against bilingual education, it has been found that immigrant children are succeeding in schools and in fact learning English well (Tse, 2001). The research showing that bilingualism and specifically bilingual education was not working did not take into account factors such as socio-economic status, educational background, educational materials, and literacy in the native language (Cummins, 2009). For example, students will achieve higher if they come from a wealthier family, if they received an adequate education in their native language, if they have books, computers, calculators, etc... at home, and if they come from an urban area versus a rural one (Tse, 2001).

The research also failed to factor in which bilingual programs were being examined. Some bilingual programs are not successful for reasons other than the students’ abilities (Francis & Mehta, 2010). Besides student ability, a bilingual program could fail due to low expectations of teachers, lack of parental and community involvement, and/or lack of teachers with expertise in second-language learners (Cummins, 2009).

When people suggest that bilingual education is not working and that students are not learning the second language, specifically English, it is usually a misconception. Generally this means that the students do not speak like native speakers, not that they do not know the language (Tse, 2001). In reality, very few non-native speakers speak like native speakers and/or without an accent. Others argue that because a bilingual education program utilizes students’ native languages and not English-only, English is not being learned. In fact, just the opposite is true.
Current findings support these programs and demonstrate that they have a positive impact on English performance (Francis & Mehta, 2010).

Moreover, second language acquisition is very different from learning a first language (Dicker, 2003). Babies are exposed to language as soon as they are born and have greater access to the language for a longer period of time (Ellis, 2008). In contrast, second-language learners generally live in an environment in which access to the second language is limited (Dicker, 2003). For example, many immigrants live in homes where only their first language is spoken. Because of this difference in learning languages, it is necessary for bilingual education programs to exist in order to aid students in learning a second language.

Summary

Bilingualism has many benefits. Bilinguals achieve higher academically, especially in the areas of GPA and ACT or SAT scores (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). They are better readers and have better problem-solving skills. Also, they encompass dual linguistic systems which cause them to be able to analyze unfamiliar words, be better analytical thinkers, and separate sound from meaning. Bilinguals will have improved memory, brain stimulation, and cognitive flexibility (Steiner, 2008). In addition to benefiting academically, they benefit emotionally, socially, and culturally as well. Furthermore, America benefits from bilingualism, too. It allows us to participate in foreign trade, tourism, and international business (Tse, 2001).

As well as research that supports bilingualism, there is evidence that negates it. Some of this evidence shows that bilingualism will lower academic performance levels and IQ scores and not contribute to cognitive development (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Studies also show that bilinguals cannot express their intelligence linguistically (Arefi & Alizadeh, 2008). Yet another
disadvantage is that bilinguals will lose their first language, confuse the two languages they are learning, or encounter language delays (Steiner, 2008). Furthermore, many people believe that bilingualism is bad for America. They think it will get rid of the English language all-together, cause ELLs not to be motivated to learn English, and cost the American citizens lots of tax dollars (Tse, 2001).

Even though all this negative research exists, there is evidence that suggests that much of this research is false or invalid. For example, many of the studies did not take into consideration factors such as socio-economic status, gender, age, academic background, comparability of native language, etc… (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). The research also does not take into account the fact that monolinguals struggle in language learning, too and that bilinguals do not learn a second language like most people learn their first (Steiner, 2008).
Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, bilingualism is becoming a highly controversial topic in America and especially in the public school system. The number of ELLs in public schools has doubled in the last 15 years and is expected to double again within the next five (NEA, 2010). Bilingual education programs and social services have been offered throughout the country, thus inducing several negative misconceptions and stereotypes regarding bilingualism in America.

This paper discusses both the positive and negative research regarding bilingualism. However, it seems the advantages outweigh the disadvantages by a great margin. Even though there are several misconceptions surrounding bilingualism, most of them have been refuted, proven to be incorrect, or established as using invalid research procedures.

Some of the benefits of bilingualism include higher test scores and academic performances (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Bilinguals also benefit socially, culturally, and emotionally from knowing more than one language (Steiner, 2008). Not only do individuals benefit, but America as a country benefits as well due to an increase of international business and foreign trade opportunities (Tse, 2001).

These benefits lead to advances for both bilingual individuals and America as a whole. Bilinguals will achieve higher in school and have better employment opportunities. They earn higher GPAs, are better readers, and have better problem-solving skills just to name a few (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Bilinguals also have improved memory, brain stimulation, and cognitive flexibility all of which lead to more success in education (Steiner, 2008). Bilinguals will earn more money in the work force, sometimes up to 50% more than monolinguals (Tse, 2001). Thus, it is easy to see why bilingualism would be an advantage to anyone.

Even though research has shown the benefits of bilingualism, there is still research that points out the negative effects of bilingualism. It has been stated that bilingualism does not
stimulate cognitive development and actually will lower cognitive performances (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Early IQ testing as well as comparison of drop-out rates proved this to be true. Both Arefi and Alizadeh (2008) and Markham, et al (2008) agree that bilinguals were found to be unable to express their intelligence verbally, thus leading to a larger number of bilinguals being labeled as special education students. Other research suggests that students will lose their first language when trying to acquire another (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). Another probability is that children will encounter a language delay and start producing language at a later time than their peers because of confusing the two different languages to which they have been exposed (Steiner, 2008).

Significant research shows that bilingualism is bad for America as well. Many citizens and politicians agree that if English is not preserved, another language will likely take its place (Tse, 2001). They also believe this will be the result of incorporating bilingual education programs into the public school system (Strickland, 2001). Because of all the services offered to ELLs, many think this causes them to be unmotivated to learn English, thus segregating them from mainstream society (Tse, 2001).

The previous literature on bilingualism has led to the conclusion that even with all this negative research, most of it has been suggested to be false or invalid. During early IQ testing, researchers did not take into account factors such as socio-economic status, sex, and the extent of the bilingual’s knowledge of his/her two languages (Baker & Hornberger, 2001). There is no longer any evidence that shows that bilinguals differ from monolinguals in IQ testing or academic achievement.

The argument of bilinguals losing their first language has also been negated. Learning another language will actually increase awareness of one’s first language and aid in learning a
third or more languages (Tse, 2001). Evidence also suggests that any child without a language delay can learn up to seven languages (Steiner, 2008). Humans do not have a limited capacity for knowing language, and all are born with an innate language acquisition device (Ellis, 2008). As for language delays, most are temporary which is just as likely to happen to monolinguals (Steiner, 2008). Most delays have disappeared by the time a child is five years old.

Research that states bilingualism is bad for America and its educational system is simply untrue. English is still the most commonly used language in the United States and widely used throughout the world (Steiner, 2008). Bilingual education programs are successful in teaching students to learn English while maintaining knowledge and use of their native languages as well (Tse, 2001). Immigrants today are in fact learning English at a faster rate than previous decades (Steiner, 2008).

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that America institutes bilingual education programs for ELLs. Because people do not learn a second language like they learn their first language, regular education programs would not be appropriate (Dicker, 2003). Studies show that students are learning English at a proficient level through these programs while acquiring academic content as well (Tse, 2001). ELLs need some language assistance in order to be successful in school.

It is also recommended that America’s leaders continue to provide support in other languages for minority groups. This will not only help those individuals, but American society as well. Having bilingual citizens in America will aid in international business and foreign trade thus boosting its economy (Strickland, 2001). Having more bilingual citizens will also put America on par with the rest of the world. Most monolinguals are Americans with the majority of the world being bilingual. This would make America more competitive with other world
powers in the areas of education, industry, and technology. Finally, it is recommended that American children are taught to be bilingual. This can be done at an early age especially when the language acquisition areas of a child’s brain are still developing (Steiner, 2008). It also can be accomplished in schools through immersion, bilingual, or foreign language programs.

In conclusion, the benefits of bilingualism far outweigh the negatives. Even if a child struggles temporarily, the eventual outcome will be bilingualism. Bilingualism not only benefits an individual cognitively, socially, emotionally, and culturally, but it benefits America as well. Knowing more than one language is a great advantage that any individual or America as a whole would be fortunate to have.
References


