



Embracing Linguistic Diversity: Notes Toward a Comprehensive Study of Bi-multilingual Education in Spain

La acogida de la diversidad lingüística: apuntes para un estudio integral de la educación bi-multilingüe en España

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive overview of bi-multilingual education¹ in Spain and highlights the intricate interplay between linguistic diversity, regional autonomy, and educational policy. Spain's sociolinguistic landscape is shaped by the coexistence of Spanish with official regional languages and by the growing importance of foreign languages. Thus, while bi-multilingual programs in monolingual regions focus on Spanish and additional language instruction through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), bilingual regions also incorporate regional languages as core components of instruction. These programs serve dual purposes: enhancing students' communicative competence in multiple languages and preserving regional linguistic heritage. This study first explores historical foundations, legal frameworks, and pedagogical models of bi-multilingual education. Then, it provides a descriptive analysis of the 17 bi-multilingual programs implemented in each region of Spain. Finally, the comparative analysis reveals key differences in language policy, instructional models, and educational goals between monolingual and bilingual regions. Despite these differences, all regions share several unique challenges, alongside a commitment to multilingualism, intercultural understanding, and educational equity. This study provides a clear picture of the complexity and adaptability of Spain's educational system in addressing linguistic diversity and in offering valuable insights into bi-multilingual education in a decentralized context.

Keywords: Bilingual education, multilingual education, sociolinguistics, research, diversity, Spain

Resumen

Este estudio ofrece una visión global de la educación bi-multilingüe en España y destaca la interacción entre diversidad lingüística, autonomía regional y política educativa, en un panorama sociolingüístico marcado por la coexistencia del español con las lenguas regionales y la popularización de las lenguas extranjeras. Así, mientras que los programas bi-multilingües en las regiones monolingües se centran en la enseñanza del español y de lenguas extranjeras mediante el Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (AICLE), las regiones bi-multilingües también incorporan las lenguas regionales, con un doble objetivo: mejorar la competencia comunicativa del alumnado y preservar el patrimonio lingüístico. El estudio comienza explorando los fundamentos históricos, legales y pedagógicos de la educación bi-multilingüe. Seguidamente, un análisis descriptivo muestra los 17 programas bi-multilingües implantados en cada región para avanzar hacia un análisis comparativo, que revela diferencias en la política lingüística, los modelos de enseñanza y los objetivos educativos entre regiones monolingües y bi-multilingües. A pesar de las diferencias, todas comparten diferentes retos y el compromiso con el plurilingüismo, la interculturalidad y la equidad educativa. Finalmente, el estudio muestra la complejidad y adaptabilidad del sistema educativo español a la hora de abordar la diversidad lingüística, ofreciendo valiosas perspectivas sobre la educación bi-multilingüe en un contexto descentralizado.

Palabras clave: Educación bilingüe, educación plurilingüe, sociolingüística, investigación, diversidad, España

¹ We use the term bi-multilingual to denote the complexity of programmatic approaches: (a) bilingual programs (Castilian Spanish–English) and (b) multilingual programs (Autonomous Languages–Castilian Spanish–English).

Introduction

Extensive linguistic heterogeneity is one of the main features of Spain's sociolinguistic context (Claesson, 2022; Lynch, 2011; Ribero 2002). In this context, languages function not only as instruments of communication but also as representative symbols of cultural identities (Guardado, 2008). Consequently, in accordance with the Spanish Constitution, Spanish is established as the official language of the state while regional languages hold co-official status within their respective territories. In Article 3 of the Constitution, Spain's linguistic diversity is recognized as an essential aspect of the country's cultural heritage and, therefore, the object of undivided respect and protection. Languages in Spain with co-official status include Aranese Occitan, Basque, Catalan, and Galician. In addition, Aragonese, Arabic, Asturian, Portuguese, and Tamazight are considered historical minority languages, although these do not hold co-official status (Vila et al., 2017). Spain's multilingual reality places complex demands on its educational system, which must navigate and accommodate diverse sociolinguistic needs across its 17 autonomous communities. In the same way, the motto of the European Union (EU)—“United in Diversity”—alludes to the prominent role that linguistic diversity plays in the EU project (European Commission, 2021). Such regard for multilingualism has prompted the European Commission to officially promote the teaching and learning of foreign languages, a practice that has gained prominence across Europe (European Commission, 2021). Within national and international contexts, the confluence of teaching and learning Spanish concurrently with regional and foreign languages has resulted in a complex landscape of autonomous and regional bi-multilingual education programmatic approaches across Spain (Fernández Fontecha, 2009; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

In the last 150 years, multilingualism in Spain has been the object of a multitude of approaches to language planning: first, the bi-multilingual linguistic recovery initiatives of the last decades of the 19th century (Martínez González, 2015; Zabaltza, 2018); then, the imposed monolingualism of 20th-century dictatorships; thereafter, the post-dictatorship period of the 1980s, 1990s, and the first years of the 21st century, where monolingual and bilingual models coexisted in monolingual and bilingual regions, respectively (Claesson, 2022); and currently, the existence of 17 bi-multilingual programs, each for a different autonomous region of Spain (Fernández Fontecha, 2009). The practical success of these 17 bi-multilingual models, tailored to the specific linguistic needs of each region, has been hindered by a number of persistent challenges: unequal allocation of resources, divergent teacher training and proficiency, disparities in governmental and political support, and the prevalence of Spanish and other foreign languages in the vast majority of linguistic domains (Miguélez, 2014; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024; Vila et al., 2017). Furthermore, the coexistence of monolingual and bi-multilingual models within the same regions perpetuates disparities in students' linguistic repertoires (Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020). Thus, the challenge that Spain now faces is that of implementing effective multilingual education across all regions amidst divergent monolingual and bilingual linguistic realities (Claesson, 2022; Fernández Fontecha, 2009).

The present work aims to carve out a clear picture of the current state of bi-multilingual education in Spain by considering the heterogeneous nature of Spain's sociolinguistic context; by delving into historical and legal foundations, educational programs, and existent bi-multilingual programs; and by highlighting the contrast between monolingual regions (where Spanish and foreign languages are the languages of instruction) and bilingual regions (where regional languages play a central role in their society). This work centers not only on the achievements but also on the persistent obstacles that Spain's multilingual education system faces in catering to linguistic diversity. Finally, a call for action is proposed to address these challenges by advocating for equitable policies that ensure the sustainability of bilingual models.

Historical Foundations of Bi-Multilingualism and Bi-Multilingual Education in Spain

To understand how deeply rooted linguistic diversity is in Spain, one need look no further than the several kingdoms that called the Iberian peninsula home and which spoke different languages: Basque, Castilian, Catalan, and Galician. These regional languages were forbidden in public affairs and limited to the private sphere with the unification of Spain in the 15th century by the Catholic Monarchs, who imposed Castilian Spanish as the national language (Entwistle, 1973). This suppression of regional languages lasted through the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries (Ribero, 2002). It was not until the middle of the 19th century that the flourishing of Nationalist and Romanticist literary movements throughout Europe—which endorsed the revitalization of languages—led to a renaissance of and renewed interest in regional languages (Martínez González, 2015; McRoberts, 2001; Zabaltza, 2018). The first two decades of the 20th century saw various attempts to build bilingual educational systems in Basque, Catalan, and Galician (Martínez González, 2015; Ribero, 2002; Zabaltza, 2018). However, the first (1923–1930) and especially the second dictatorship (1939–1975) imposed strict linguistic control that deterred all emerging bilingual and multilingual experiences from taking root in Spain's educational system (Claesson, 2022; McRoberts, 2001; Ribero, 2002). During the two dictatorships, Spanish was the only authorized language of instruction to teach non-linguistic subjects in Spain (Claesson, 2022).

The end of the dictatorship in 1975 marked a paradigm shift in Spain's sociolinguistic situation (Claesson, 2022). The Spanish Constitution's endorsement of regional languages in 1978 gave rise to several emerging bilingual experiences in bilingual regions (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020). At the same time, foreign languages started to be taught: first French and then English as a second language (in monolingual regions) or third language (in bilingual regions) (Ribero, 2002). Although several emergent bilingual programs combining regional languages and Spanish started to be implemented in bilingual regions, there was still no room for the use of foreign languages as languages of instruction in content/non-linguistic classrooms (Vila et al., 2017). These emergent bilingual programs, however, represented a significant step forward in the recognition of the sociolinguistic plurality of Spain and the integration of foreign languages in the educational system (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Vila et al., 2017).

The beginning of the 21st century marked the implementation of the first bilingual programs (Spanish and a foreign language) in monolingual regions, as well as multilingual programs in bilingual regions (Spanish, regional languages, and foreign languages) (Miguélez, 2014). This resulted from the enactment of the Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2006) and its amendment (LOMLOE, 2020), which provides a national educational framework, and within this framework provisions for bilingual and multilingual programs. After the enactment of the LOE (2006), regional governments were granted the necessary autonomy to design their bi-multilingual educational programs according to their local sociolinguistic reality. This legal articulation has ensured a decentralized educational system, where regional governments have significant control over language policy in education (Vila et al., 2017).

Consequently, in the last two decades, Spain's educational system has experienced an undeniable push for programs both bilingual (predominantly Spanish–English) and multilingual (Spanish/regional languages–English) in order to facilitate the revitalization of regional languages and their cultural heritage, as well as to embrace European policies' emphasis on multilingual and intercultural competences (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021). As a result, the different configuration of the various languages of instruction has given rise to 17 different bi-multilingual models for each of Spain's regions (Fernández Fontecha, 2009; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

Current Situation of Bi-Multilingual Education in Spain and the Role of CLIL

In the last two decades, Spain has made significant progress on bi-multilingual education, which has enhanced the quality of its bi-multilingual programs (Coyle, 2010). The aforementioned decentralization of the Spanish educational system, in which each autonomous community is accountable for the vast majority of education, has resulted in a wide variety of educational models and thereby bi-multilingual programs (Alcaraz Mármol & Guadamillas Gómez, 2019; Vila et al., 2017). Although this decentralized model enables policymakers to tailor bi-multilingual programs to the linguistic needs and identity of the individuals in each region (Alcaraz Mármol & Guadamillas Gómez, 2019), it also leads to significant disparities across the country, as students' opportunities to engage in bilingual education are heavily shaped by the policies and resources of each regional educational authority. This has resulted in dramatic differences among regional educational systems, with widely-varying language competences among learners depending on their geographic location (Alcaraz Mármol & Guadamillas Gómez, 2019; Vila et al., 2017).

Despite the different configurations and outcomes of their bi-multilingual programs, all regions—Andalusia, Aragón, Asturias, Balearic Islands, the Basque Country, Canary Islands, Cantabria, Castilla La-Mancha, Castilla y León, Catalonia, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid, Murcia, Navarra, and the Valencian Community—share Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as their unifying approach (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Comisión Regional para el Análisis y Propuestas de Mejora del Programa Secciones Bilingües en Castilla y León, 2017;

Consejería de Educación y Deporte de la Junta de Andalucía, 2023; Consejería de Educación del Gobierno de Canarias, 2016; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2018; Orden 7, 2017; Orden 20, 2017; Orden 27, 2018; Orden de 18 de mayo, 2018; Orden de 3 de junio, 2016; Orden ECD/123, 2013; Orden Foral 57, 2024; Resolución de 14 de junio, 2023). CLIL—the European approach to bi-multilingual education (European Commission, 2021)—consists of the integration of content and language learning through the teaching of non-linguistic content in additional languages, such as foreign, regional, minority or co-official languages (Baker & Wright, 2014; Eurydice, 2006). Beyond simply delivering subject matter in another language, CLIL simultaneously targets language development, subject mastery, cognitive challenge, and intercultural awareness (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2016; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2022).

The 4Cs Framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—serves as a central planning tool (Coyle et al., 2010). Content refers to students' development of their own knowledge and skill set (Coyle et al., 2010) by bridging the gap between previously-acquired and newly-gained content (Somers, 2017). To accomplish this, they interact not only with peers but also with materials (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2022) through the implementation of receptive and productive skills. Communication refers to accessing CLIL content and demonstrating their understanding of it through communicative exchanges in the target language(s) (Sommers, 2017). Cognition refers to the cognitive processes and networks required in thinking and learning, which are constantly evolving and reshaping due to the integration of new skills and knowledge. CLIL tasks need to be dovetailed with learners' cognitive needs (Marsh, 2013) and therefore challenge learners' cognitive schemata by progressing from less demanding, low-order tasks toward high-order thinking ones (Bloom, 1956). Culture entails all the cultural elements that surround the learning process, which culminate in the acquisition of the target language and culture while allowing learners to develop their own (Coyle et al., 2010). In sum, CLIL entails working on specific non-linguistic content through communicative and cognitive tasks in the target language within the target culture (Somers, 2017).

Since its establishment, CLIL has experienced ups and downs in popularity in Europe, particularly in Spain. Originally considered “the potential lynchpin to tackle foreign language deficit” (Pérez Cañado, 2016, p. 17) or the “European solution to a European need” (Marsh, 2002, p. 11), it was heralded as “the magic bullet” to address foreign-language learning in Europe as researchers and educational stakeholders “hastened to jump on the CLIL bandwagon” (Pérez Cañado, 2016, p. 17). During the 2010s, the outlook of CLIL shifted from a “celebratory rhetoric” to placing the spotlight “on the problematic issues of CLIL” (Paran, 2013, p. 334) such as its elitism, its vague conceptualization, and its limited corpus of studies (Barrado-Timón, 2024; Fernández Sanjurjo et al., 2018; Oxbrow, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2019; Rumlich, 2019). As a way to address these challenges, CLIL was implemented in compulsory education so as to guarantee bi-multilingual education for all students regardless of their personal background. Furthermore, this implementation triggered extensive classroom observation and research in a wide variety of CLIL settings: elementary and high schools; public, private, and charter schools; and rural and urban contexts (Oxbrow, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018; Rumlich, 2019). These reassessments not

only painted a clear picture of its deployment at grassroots level, but also highlighted best CLIL practices as well as potential difficulties in its implementation (Pérez Cañado, 2019; Oxbrow, 2019). The result was the development of a full-fledged corpus of studies on the implementation of CLIL, which is constantly evolving and progressing to ensure the success of bi-multilingual education for all European learners. In recent years, CLIL skeptics have been jumping on the CLIL bandwagon again, as this new approach more closely aligns with European sociolinguistic contexts and language learning needs (Oxbrow, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020). This alignment is due to the inherent fit between CLIL's integration of content and language learning and Europe's multilingual reality, which includes a rich mosaic of regional languages and a strong commitment to multilingualism as a core European value (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021).

In Spain—the focus of this study—CLIL is the recommended approach to address foreign and regional language learning, according to the European Union directives (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021). This underscores the crucial role that multilingualism plays in the mobility, employability, and cultural understanding of current European society. As such, CLIL is widespread across bilingual and monolingual autonomous communities (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Comisión Regional para el Análisis y Propuestas de Mejora del Programa Secciones Bilingües en Castilla y León, 2017; Consejería de Educación y Deporte de la Junta de Andalucía, 2023; Consejería de Educación del Gobierno de Canarias, 2016; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2018; Orden 20, 2017; Orden 7, 2017; Orden 27, 2018; Orden de 3 de junio, 2016; Orden de 18 de mayo, 2018; Orden ECD/123, 2013; Orden Foral 57, 2024; Resolución de 14 de junio, 2023). In Spain, the implementation not only of bi-multilingual programs but also of the CLIL model is well aligned with the sociolinguistic needs of each of the 17 autonomous communities of Spain. In the following sections, the bi-multilingual model for each region is discussed along with relevant aspects of the sociolinguistic reality that pertain to the region's educational model.

Monolingual Regions

In Spain's monolingual regions, Spanish is the sole official language (Ribera, 2002). Mostly located in inland Spain, these include Madrid, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Extremadura, La Rioja, Murcia, Andalusia, Aragón, Cantabria, and the Canary Islands (Hofmann, 1995). Since these regions are officially monolingual, they have opted for the implementation of a bilingual education model wherein Spanish is taught alongside a foreign language (Anghel et al., 2016), the most prominent of these being English taught through CLIL (Durán-Martínez et al., 2025). It is also important to remark that some of these programs have progressively incorporated a second foreign language as a language of instruction in addition to English and Spanish (Anghel et al., 2016). In the vast majority of cases, these third languages are French or German. Even within monolingual regions, there is great variation and diversity in how CLIL programs are implemented within a bi-multilingual model.

Andalusia

Located in the southern part of Spain, Andalusia is the largest and most populous region (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023). As a monolingual region with Spanish as its official language, this region implements a plurilingual model based on CLIL (Bychkova, 2023; Durán-Martínez et al., 2025; Pérez Cañado, 2018; Pérez Cañado, 2019) that aims at a proficient command of Spanish and a communicative competence in English (Orden de 28 de junio, 2011; Pérez Cañado, 2018). The most common bi-multilingual model consists of schools that deliver their curriculum in Spanish and one or two foreign languages (English and/or French) (Bychkova, 2023; Orden de 28 de junio de 2011). Those educational institutions that provide instruction exclusively in Spanish are currently transitioning toward bi-multilingual models that have proven to be successful elsewhere in the region (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Orden de 28 de junio, 2011; Pérez Cañado, 2018; Pérez Cañado, 2019). What accounts for the success of this model is a curricular integration that allows for flexibility through the integration of objectives, contents, materials, and assessment under the umbrella of CLIL (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2018). This model stems from an understanding of linguistic competence as a comprehensive ability that transcends the specific features of individual languages (Cummins, 1984). However, Delicado Puerto and Pavón Vázquez (2015) decry the meager number of bilingual/CLIL trained teachers, which—along with practitioners' limited English-language proficiency to conduct lessons in English—is one of the main concerns in the implementation of bilingual education in Andalusia (Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019). The rapid growth of bi-multilingual schools requires extensive teacher training to ensure the sustainability of bi-multilingual education in this context; without this training, the success of this educational model will be jeopardized (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2019).

Aragón

Aragón is a monolingual region located in the northern part of Spain. Although Catalan is spoken in a few small villages of its eastern border (La Franja), the official and dominant language is Spanish (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Huguet Canalis et al., 2008). Bi-multilingual programs are aimed at students' acquisition of appropriate communicative competence in Spanish and a foreign language (Orden de 14 de febrero, 2013; Liberal Obanos, 2013). As such, its bilingual model is quite similar to Andalusia's (Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019). This educational system, in which bilingual and non-bilingual tracks coexist within public institutions, is progressing toward a bilingual system in which 35% of instruction hours are conducted in a foreign language other than Spanish; predominantly, the foreign language is English, though there are some tracks with German or French (Orden de 14 de febrero, 2013). As in Andalusia, schools are allowed to provide their educational community with the possibility of learning a third language or a second foreign language (Liberal Obanos, 2013; Orden de 14 de febrero, 2013). There is, however, a significant gap in the implementation of bilingual models between urban and rural schools, as urban schools with bilingual models outnumber their rural counterparts (Orden de 14 de febrero, 2013). This implementation gap poses a threat to the linguistic equity goals pursued by Spain's educational system (Cortázar y Taberner, 2020).

Canary Islands

The Canary Islands are an archipelago located 100 kilometers to the northwest of the African continent. It is the southernmost region of Spain with Spanish as its sole and official language (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018). Bilingual models are similar in scope to those of other monolingual regions. However, this region's bilingual model is exclusively focused on the acquisition of a communicative command of English (Consejería de Educación del Gobierno de Canarias, 2016; Oxbrow, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018; Vila et al., 2017). This leaves little room for the incorporation of foreign languages other than English in the existent bilingual programs. Currently in the Canary Islands, non-bilingual schools are working toward a progressive incorporation of a bilingual model (Consejería de Educación del Gobierno de Canarias, 2016; Oxbrow, 2019; Vila et al., 2017). In fact, all state educational institutions have been required to implement bilingual programs where at least 40% of the elementary school curriculum and 30% of the high school curriculum must be taught in English through a CLIL approach (Consejería de Educación del Gobierno de Canarias, 2016). To this end, there is a dire need of training for CLIL teachers in language-based classroom procedures along with improving their communicative competence in English or of Master's programs that focus specifically on CLIL methods training. This approach requires that teachers possess a range of skills that depart from mere proficiency in the foreign language (Oxbrow, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018).

Cantabria

Cantabria is a monolingual region located in the northern part of Spain (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018). Its approach to bilingual education consists of one predominant bilingual model: Spanish–English (Lozano-Martínez, 2017). As such, it is aligned with the Canarian model in that for both the aim is the learners' proficient command of Spanish and a communicative command of English through the CLIL approach by the end of the learners' compulsory education (Lozano-Martínez, 2017; Orden ECD/123, 2013; Oxbrow, 2019). However, a few educational institutions offer bilingual programs in Spanish–German and Spanish–French (Orden ECD/123, 2013). Bilingual and non-bilingual schools coexist within the Cantabrian educational system— and within bilingual schools, it is possible for students to enroll in bilingual and non-bilingual tracks (Orden ECD/123, 2013). For instance, students enrolled in the bilingual track of a bilingual school receive an appropriate bilingual education program in which at least 35% of classroom hours are delivered in a foreign language; this foreign language can be either English as a foreign language, a second foreign language, or a non-linguistic subject taught in English (Lozano-Martínez, 2017). Nonetheless, bilingual programs face difficulties that could hinder their success: high student-to-teacher ratios, meager numbers of CLIL resources, reduced coordination among CLIL and language teachers, limited corpus of studies on diversity in CLIL, and insufficient CLIL teacher training (Lozano-Martínez, 2017). Therefore, some strategies that are necessary to ensure the viability of bilingual education in Cantabria include advocating for smaller classes in CLIL lessons, establishing a coordinator to manage bilingual programs, and improving CLIL teacher training (Lozano-Martínez, 2017; Pérez Cañado, 2019).

Castilla La-Mancha

Castilla-La Mancha is a monolingual region located in the central part of Spain (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018). Bilingual programs here are aimed at a proficient command in Spanish and a communicative competence in a foreign language, as per the directives of the European policies (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021). As with other Spanish regions, Castilla-La Mancha has adopted a bilingual model where bilingual and non-bilingual schools coexist, and bilingual schools can offer bilingual and non-bilingual tracks (Moya Guijarro & Ruiz Cordero, 2018; Orden 27, 2018). Not surprisingly, only bilingual tracks offered in bilingual schools provide their students with an actual bilingual education (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2019). It is, however, essential to underscore that this region embraces the implementation of bilingual and multilingual programs in which one or two foreign languages are used as languages of instruction in non-linguistic subjects (Moya Guijarro & Ruiz Cordero, 2018). Although bilingual schools with a Spanish–English model are the most common, there are also some that offer German, French, or Italian alongside Spanish in their bi-multilingual programs (Moya Guijarro & Ruiz Cordero, 2018; Orden 27, 2018). The number of classroom hours conducted in foreign languages in bilingual programs falls within the spectrum of 25–50% in primary and secondary schools and between 30–50% in high schools (Orden 27, 2018). As a result, this represents a departure from the widespread Spanish–English model and goes one step further by offering the students the possibility of becoming communicatively competent in other languages. A study by Moya Guijarro & Ruiz Cordero (2018) shows that students who attended bilingual programs in Castilla La-Mancha outperformed those in monolingual programs. Although the study concludes that there is still room for improvement, bilingual education in this region is certainly on the right path (Moya Guijarro & Ruiz Cordero, 2018).

Castilla y León

Castilla y León, which shares its borders with Portugal, is a monolingual region located in the western part of Spain (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018). As with other regions, the aims of its bilingual education program include a high command of Spanish and a communicative competence in a foreign language through CLIL (Hernando Garijo et al., 2018; Orden EDU/6, 2006). The foreign language in question does not necessarily need to be English. Given Castilla y León's proximity to Portugal and the bidirectional influence between them (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018), it is one of two regions—the other being Extremadura—that offers a bilingual Spanish–Portuguese model. Additionally, bilingual schools with bilingual tracks offer programs with English, French, German, or Italian as additional languages to Spanish (Orden EDU/6, 2006). These bilingual programs must guarantee a maximum of 50% of hours of instruction distributed across two or three non-linguistic subjects (Orden EDU/6, 2006). Although the importance of going beyond the traditional Spanish–English bilingual model is emphasized in Castilla y León, the region has yet to explore multilingual programs (Hernando Garijo et al., 2018). Moreover, the limited number of studies on the implementation of bilingual education in this region is one aspect that has hindered the improvement of bilingual programs.

Extremadura

Extremadura is a monolingual region located in the western part of Spain's territory. Like Castilla y León, it is in close contact with the border of Portugal (Manzano Vázquez, 2015). Its bilingual program strives for learners to achieve high-level competence in Spanish and communicative command of a foreign language (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019). Unlike most monolingual regions, Extremadura has an advanced bilingual program due to the presence of fully bilingual schools—Spanish–English, Spanish–French, or Spanish–Portuguese—alongside non-bilingual schools with bi-multilingual tracks (Orden de 20 de abril, 2017). Bilingual schools must offer at least 40% of classroom hours conducted in the foreign language through CLIL (Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Orden de 20 de abril, 2017). For bilingual tracks in non-bilingual schools, the number of classroom hours taught in the foreign language amounts to a minimum of 20% and a maximum of 50% of the total number of hours of instruction (Orden de 20 de abril, 2017). For multilingual tracks, at least two content subjects must be conducted in two different foreign languages, which include English, French, Portuguese, German, or Italian (Manzano Vázquez, 2015). As a result, bilingual education programs in Extremadura are making great strides to promote bilingualism in a monolingual region (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015, 2016; Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019). However, as in Andalusia, bilingual programs in Extremadura could benefit from enhancing CLIL/foreign language teacher training (Manzano Vázquez, 2015), given that students' achievement of language proficiency does not only depend on the number of hours of exposure but also on the quality of this engagement (Llinares-García, 2006, 2007).

Madrid

Madrid, the capital of Spain, is a monolingual region located in the center of the country (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018). Bilingual schools offer at least 30% of classroom hours in English, whereas high schools divide bilingual education into bilingual programs and bilingual tracks (Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Orden 5958, 2010; Pires Jiménez & Gallego Losada, 2022). In a bilingual program, students receive one language session and at least one non-linguistic subject in English every day; as part of a bilingual track, on the other hand, students also receive one English-language lesson per day, but all non-linguistic subjects—except for Mathematics, Spanish, Latin, and a second foreign language—are conducted in English (Orden 5958, 2010). Although the preferred model for bilingual education in Madrid is Spanish–English, certain schools provide students with French and German tracks where five hours of language instruction and two or more non-linguistic subjects are delivered in the chosen language (de Castro, 2014; Durán-Martínez & Fernández-Costales, 2025; Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Pires Jiménez & Gallego Losada, 2022). CLIL as the central framework to Madrid's bilingual model has dramatically improved students' competence in foreign languages. However, this improvement comes at a price. The use of foreign languages to teach non-linguistic subjects has been a detriment to the mastery of the same subject material in elementary school (Pires Jiménez & Gallego Losada, 2022), which aligns with findings in Anghel et al. (2016). This lack of balance between the acquisition of non-linguistic content material and a foreign language, however,

works itself out by the time students finish high school (Durán-Martínez & Fernández-Costales, 2025; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019). Additionally, the presence of bi-multilingual and non-bilingual schools contributes to a type of school segregation that undermines the equity goals pursued by Spain's educational system (Anghel et al., 2016; Cortázar y Taberner, 2020). Another hindrance—highlighted in the aforementioned study by Anghel et al., (2016)—concerns the correlation between students' low CLIL results and the education level of their parents. Not addressing these inequities poses a threat to the implementation of bilingual education programs in Madrid (Casas Pedrosa & Rascón Moreno, 2023; Pérez Cañado 2023a, 2023b; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

La Rioja

La Rioja is a monolingual region located in the north of Spain (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018). Bi-multilingual programs in this region aim to develop a high proficiency in Spanish and communicative competence in one or more foreign languages (Jiménez Catalán & Geoghegan, 2023; Orden 7, 2017). Schools with bilingual tracks and non-bilingual schools can be found in La Rioja, therefore, true bi-multilingual education is only found in bilingual tracks that implement a CLIL approach (Jiménez Catalán & Geoghegan, 2023; Manzano Vázquez, 2015). These bilingual tracks whose students attend for part of the day are organized as curricula exclusively in English. Considering that at least one third of classroom hours must be delivered in English, educational institutions are allowed to design their own bilingual program and decide which subjects are to be conducted in English. This aligns with bilingual programs in other monolingual regions such as Andalusia or Extremadura (Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019). Additionally, educational institutions that decide to deploy a multilingual program must offer at least two subjects in English and one in a second foreign language (Orden 7, 2017). Thus, the possibility of accessing coursework in either or both foreign languages provides learners with a unique opportunity to develop competency in foreign languages and in Spanish (Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019). Nevertheless, some of the flaws of this bilingual model include limited training of CLIL teachers in foreign-language proficiency and CLIL methodological principles, given the rapid growth and demand for bilingual education in La Rioja; for this reason, this region is trying to close the gap between CLIL teachers' requirements and their actual abilities (Manzano Vázquez, 2015) to ensure learners' exposure to quality input (Llinares-García, 2006, 2007).

Región de Murcia

The Región de Murcia, located in the southeastern part of Spain, is a monolingual region (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018) with a compulsory bi-multilingual program in its educational institutions aimed at students' achievement of a proficient level of Spanish and a communicative command in one or two foreign languages (Esparza Montero & Belmonte, 2020; García Abellán, 2022). This bi-multilingual program is organized into three different models: (1) a basic model wherein one or two classroom hours—in addition to the foreign-language subject hours—are delivered in the foreign language (Orden 3 de junio, 2016); (2) an intermediate model wherein two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half hours (before high school), and between three and six hours (in high school)

are delivered in the foreign language, in addition to the foreign-language subject hours; and (3) an advanced model wherein more than five hours (before high school) and more than six hours (in high school) are delivered in the foreign language, in addition to the foreign-language subject hours (Orden 3 de junio, 2016). The foreign languages of instruction under this model are English, French, or German; regardless of the first foreign language of instruction chosen, students have access to a second foreign language from these (Esparza Montero & Belmonte, 2020). Two studies conducted in this region (Brady & García Pinar, 2022; García Abellán, 2022) found that bilingual programs significantly enhance students' communicative competence in foreign languages. However, the mere implementation of bilingual programs does not ensure their success. In fact, teacher training in CLIL, as well as attitudes toward bilingual programs, play an essential role in their likelihood of success (Esparza Montero & Belmonte, 2020; Mortimore, 2023). Furthermore, considering that CLIL training requires additional time and effort from in-service teachers, making it compulsory can have a negative impact on their motivation; thus, compensating teachers for undergoing the training would address issues with teacher training (García Abellán, 2022).

Bilingual Regions

Bilingual regions in Spain are those where Spanish, the official language of the state, shares official status with a regional language (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Martí Climent, 2024). In fact, both languages—Spanish and each region's language—share status as co-official languages with the exception of Asturias, where Asturian is not recognized as an official language but rather as part of the cultural heritage of the region. Among the bilingual regions—Galicia, the Basque Country or Euskadi, Navarra, Asturias, Catalonia, the Valencian Community, and the Balearic Islands—some share the same co-official language in addition to Spanish: Basque for the Basque Country and Navarra; and Catalan for Catalonia, the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024). The remaining two co-official regional languages are Aranese Occitan and Galician, while Asturian is not officially recognized (Ribero, 2002; Vila et al., 2017).

Catalan is a Romance language, derived from Latin and spoken by 9 million people in Catalonia, the Valencian Community, the Balearic Islands, a few villages in Aragon, some regions in the southeastern part of France, and some towns in Sardinia, an Italian island (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Zabaltza, 2018). However, at various times and in different regions, Catalan has experienced marginalization and minoritization (Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Pasqual, 2020; Ramón Ramos, 2023) from the strong linguistic censorship during the 20th century dictatorships (Claesson, 2022) to the current dominance of Spanish and English due to globalization (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). As a result, each Catalan region has established its own measures to ensure the preservation and use of the language according to their sociolinguistic reality (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024).

A language with co-official status in Catalonia—in addition to Catalan and Spanish—is Aranese Occitan, a Romance language derived from Latin and spoken by 4,000 people in the Val d'Aran, nestled in the Catalan Pyrenees (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2020). Part of the

Occitan linguistic and cultural region, Occitania covers an area that stretches from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean and from the Alps to the Pyrenees and is administered by four different states: France, Italy, the Principality of Monaco, and the Val d'Aran in Spain (Ribero, 2002; Vila et al., 2017; Zabaltza, 2018). As its name suggests, Aranese Occitan is a variety of the Occitan language; its preservation and maintenance are jeopardized by its lack of official status in France, Italy, and Monaco (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2020; Vila et al., 2017). However, legitimization efforts made by Catalan authorities to preserve the language by ensuring its vitality in schools has resulted in an increase in proficiency in Aranese Occitan among its speakers (Departament de Cultura & Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2019).

Galician, also a Romance language that shares strong linguistic roots with Portuguese due its proximity to Portugal, is spoken by 3 million people, most of them in Galicia (Decreto 79, 2010; Entwistle, 1973; Vila et al., 2017;). Like Catalan, Galician has also experienced marginalization at the hand of the 20th century dictatorship's imposition of Spanish and the current effects of globalization (Claesson, 2022; Miguélez, 2014; Ribero, 2002). To address this situation, Galicia strongly advocates for its revitalization by ensuring students' proficient command in the language in education and by providing this language with a prominent role in this region's administrative affairs (Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez González, 2015; Decreto 79, 2010).

Basque, a unique non-Romance language in Spain whose origins remain undetermined, is spoken by 750,000 people in the Basque Country, the northern part of Navarra, and the southern French region of Iparralde (Etxebarria, 2015; Ribero, 2002; Vila et al., 2017). Along with Spanish, Basque is the official language of the Basque Country (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Ley 17, 2023) as well as the northern part of Navarra (Claesson, 2022). Basque has also experienced minoritization and marginalization, but the main challenge has been recovering its social use in spite of educational and administrative policies for its revitalization (Miguélez, 2014).

Asturian, a Romance language spoken by 500,000 people in Asturias (Claesson, 2022), has suffered from a lack of official status that has hastened its suppression and substitution by the dominance of Spanish in this region's social life (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Vila et al., 2017). Nevertheless, in recent years, there have been some initiatives toward a revitalization process (Miguélez, 2014) by providing students with an elective course that focuses on Asturian, since its non-official status prevents it from being a compulsory language of instruction (Claesson 2022; Ribero, 2002).

Most of these regional languages are experiencing linguistic minoritization (Miguélez, 2014; Ramón Ramos, 2023) as a result of globalization and its effects on social media, international mobility, and the importance of mass media and technology in current society. Therefore, most bi-multilingual programs in these regions aim at the revitalization or recovery of the social use of these languages (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ramón Ramos, 2023) to ensure students' proficient command of Spanish as well as a communicative command in one or more foreign languages, according to the European directives (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021). These multilingual programs are based on CLIL approaches (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme,

2019; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2018; Orden Foral 57, 2024; Resolución de 14 de junio, 2023) as they are the bi-multilingual models that best align with the sociolinguistic realities that they seek to address (Pérez Cañado, 2018). Taking these realities as a point of departure, each region organizes its bi-multilingual programs differently to cater to their particular context (Martí Climent, 2024). In the following sections, an outline of the sociolinguistic situation of each bilingual region is presented, as well as an overview of their bi-multilingual education programs.

Catalonia

Located in the northeastern part of Spain and in close contact with France through the Pyrenees mountain range, Catalonia is a trilingual region where Catalan and—albeit to a lesser extent—Aranese Occitan in the Val d’Aran have traditionally played prominent roles in all domains of language use (Entwistle, 1973; Departament de Cultura i Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya, 2019; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2020; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; McRoberts, 2001; Pons Seguí, 2020; Zabaltza, 2018). Due to a surge in social media use in Spanish and English, international emigration, and the decline of intergenerational transmission of Catalan and Aranese Occitan, Catalonia is experiencing a paradigm shift in terms of its sociolinguistic situation that has been detrimental to the preservation of these two languages (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Ramón Ramos, 2023). As a result, exposure and social use of these languages has plummeted in recent years, resulting in the implementation of compulsory multilingual programs in all Catalan schools with the following ends: (1) to increase the social use of Catalan and/or Aranese Occitan in the Val d’Aran (Departament de Cultura i Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya, 2019; Generalitat de Catalunya, 2020, 2025); (2) to facilitate students’ acquisition proficiency in these languages and Spanish; and (3) to acquire communicative competence in foreign languages in order to develop the multilingual competence required by European directives (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021). To meet these goals, most non-linguistic classroom hours are conducted in Catalan or Aranese, whereas Spanish and English are studied as linguistic subjects, and each educational center has the autonomy to decide the non-linguistic subjects taught in these two languages (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025). Additionally, a second foreign language, usually French, is introduced as a linguistic subject in secondary education (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025). This multilingual model is accomplished through the implementation of an integrated curriculum of languages, as well as the CLIL approach (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025; Pons Seguí, 2020). However, despite the implementation of immersion programs in Catalonia (Miguélez, 2014), a study by Pons Seguí (2020) underscores the extensive training that teachers require in CLIL approaches to ensure the viability of this educational model, which aligns with findings in monolingual regions (Lozano-Martínez, 2017; Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2019).

Valencian Community

The Valencian community is a bilingual region located in the east of Spain. Its proximity to Catalonia and the Balearic Islands accounts for the cultural and linguistic relationship among

these three Spanish regions (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Martí Climent, 2024; Zabaltza, 2018). The two official languages of the Valencian Community are Catalan and Spanish (Ramón Ramos, 2023; Vila et al., 2017). In spite of its co-official status, Catalan has undergone linguistic suppression in the last century as Spanish has taken over most domains of language use: work, culture, mass media and, recently, social media (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014). Therefore, unlike in Catalonia—where Catalan has only reduced its social presence and the linguistic policies aim at increasing its social use—the Valencian community would need to advocate for a complete revitalization of Catalan in addition to ensuring that students reach high proficiency in Spanish and communicative competence in one or more foreign languages (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

In the bi-multilingual model in the Valencian community, each town or city is classified in one of two different categories: predominantly Spanish-speaking or predominantly Catalan-speaking (Ramón Ramos, 2023). On the one hand, schools located in Spanish-speaking areas implement their entire curriculum in Spanish, except for the Catalan linguistic subject and between 15–25% of classroom hours in English (Llei 1, 2024). On the other hand, parents whose children attend educational institutions in Catalan-speaking areas have the right to decide whether they want their children to attend non-linguistic lessons in Catalan or Spanish, always observing a minimum requirement of 25% of school hours conducted in the official language not chosen, a maximum of 20% difference between co-official languages, and between 15% and 25% of hours of instruction in English (Llei 1, 2024). As a result, this model does not appropriately address the needs of the Valencian community since the limited presence of Catalan in the most endangered areas—as far as the social presence of Catalan is concerned—does not guarantee its revitalization (Miguélez, 2014; Ramón Ramos 2023, 2024). Likewise, a maximum of 25% of classroom hours conducted in English remains insufficient to ensure students' achievement of communicative command in English at the end of compulsory education (Pérez Cañado, 2019; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

Balearic Islands

The Balearic Islands are an archipelago near the eastern coast of Spain. In this bilingual region, the presence of Catalan in society had traditionally outweighed the Spanish presence (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Munar, 2013; Zabaltza, 2018). Nevertheless, the high numbers of tourists arriving from other Spanish and European regions, along with the emergence of social media predominantly in Spanish and English, have relegated the social use of Catalan to communicative exchanges in private spaces (Miguélez, 2014; Munar, 2013). Taking into account this sociolinguistic situation as a point of departure, the Balearic Islands offer multilingual programs aimed at revitalizing Catalan (Ballester Cardell, 2022; Miguélez, 2014) while maintaining Spanish and achieving communicative command in one foreign language; this entails a proficient command of Spanish and Catalan as well as a basic communicative competence in one foreign language (Llei 1, 2022). Its multilingual program states that at least 50% of non-linguistic classroom hours be conducted in Catalan, and educational institutions have the

autonomy to distribute the remaining 50% of hours of instruction between Spanish and English through CLIL approaches (Llei 1, 2022). This plurilingual program ensures the preservation of Catalan (Ballester Cardell, 2025), but the attainment of a proficient command in Spanish and a communicative command of a foreign language depends on each school's decisions to offer X number of hours in each language and the subjects to be conducted in the foreign language (Ballester Cardell, 2025). This variation in achievement is due to the fact that not only does the amount of exposure to the language determine students' language learning, but so does the quality and content of this input (Llinares 2006, 2007).

Galicia

Galicia is a bilingual region located in the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula. In this region, Galician and Spanish have historically coexisted at a similar level of language use (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Entwistle, 1973). As is the case in other Spanish bilingual regions, the use of Galician has declined especially among young people in urban settings as a result of extensive use of Spanish in mass media and social media, along with the limited intergenerational transmission of Galician (Miguélez, 2014). Consequently, the Galician educational system has implemented a multilingual system in order to level the playing field between Spanish and Galician and to incorporate one foreign language (Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; Decreto 79, 2010; Miguélez, 2014; San Isidro-Smith, 2017). Educational institutions have the autonomy to design their own language programs and to allocate the number of hours devoted to each official language, as long as each language receives the same number of hours of instruction (Decreto 79, 2010). Additionally, a maximum of one third of classroom hours must be conducted in a foreign language (Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; San Isidro-Smith, 2017). To address the teaching of both Galician and English, it is mandatory to implement pedagogical strategies based on the principles of CLIL (Decreto 79, 2010; San Isidro-Smith, 2017). However, the equal treatment provided to Spanish and Galician in educational institutions can further inequalities between these two languages, since this model does not guarantee the balance that Galician and Spanish had in the past (Miguélez, 2014).

The Basque Country

The Basque Country or Euskadi is a bilingual region located in the northern part of Spain and in very close proximity to the southern French border (Ribero, 2002). Unlike other bilingual regions, its regional language—Euskera—has experienced significant growth (Etxebarria, 2015; Vila et al., 2017; Zabaltza, 2018). Although its social use has not grown at the same level as knowledge and awareness of the language, its use has remained steady over the years due to the important role played by the educational system in its preservation (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Etxebarria, 2015). This region has designed its own multilingual project whose goal is to preserve Euskera and develop proficient competence in Spanish and communicative command of one foreign language (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Ley 17, 2023; Vila et al., 2017). Based on the recommendations of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), Euskadi's multilingual program establishes that it

is essential that regional languages be the backbone of the school curriculum. To this end and to level the playing field between the dominant language of power and a regional language striving to maintain its co-official status (Spanish and Euskera, respectively), the predominant language of instruction must be Euskera. The aforementioned program corresponds to Linguistic Model D, according to the Basque development of its multilingual programs (Ley 17, 2023). Although its presence is limited, it is also necessary to highlight the existence of a Linguistic Model A—in which Spanish is the predominant classroom language and Euskera is only treated as a subject—and Linguistic Model B—in which both Euskera and Spanish keep the same percentage of classroom hours (Ley 17, 2023). These two models, reflected in educational language programs, interact with the allocation of hours of instruction to one foreign language, in most cases English (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Lasagabaster, 2025; Ley 17, 2023). As such, this multilingual program promotes a balance between Euskera and Spanish while fostering foreign language learning (Ley 17, 2023). However, a correct implementation of this multilingual program has to go hand in hand with an appropriate teacher training model not only in linguistic proficiency in the languages of instruction but also in CLIL methodologies (Fernández-Costales & Lasagabaster, 2025; Lasagabaster, 2025).

Navarra

Navarra is a bilingual region that shares borders with the Basque Country. This explains the presence of Basque in certain towns of this region, especially in its northern part (Etxebarria, 2015). Navarra is divided into three linguistic areas: the Basque-speaking area, located in the north of Navarra; the mixed area, located in the middle of the region and in which there is certain recognition of Basque in some domains; and the non-Basque speaking area, located in the south of the region (Ribero, 2002). Similarly to the situation in the Basque Country, use of Basque has remained steady in recent years; while in the mixed area use of Basque has increased, its use continues to be limited (Miguélez, 2014; Vila et al., 2017). Since Basque has co-official status in the northern part of Navarra, but not in the southern part, there are four different bi-multilingual educational programs: (1) Linguistic Model A positions Spanish as the articulating language of the school curriculum and uses Basque only as a subject; (2) Linguistic Model B consists of a predominant use of Basque as the language of instruction, while Spanish is used as a language subject but can also be used as a language of instruction for one or more subjects; (3) Linguistic Model D offers full instruction in Basque, except for the Spanish language subject (Orden Foral 57, 2024); (4) Linguistic Model G does not include either instruction or a subject taught in Basque. The deployment of each linguistic model depends on the sociolinguistic context in which each school is immersed (Etxebarria, 2015). In the Basque speaking area, Models A, B, or D are implemented, whereas in the non-Basque speaking area it is Models A or G that are implemented (Orden Foral 57, 2024). Along with the Basque Country, Navarra has to combine the implementation of these linguistic models with foreign language instruction in non-linguistic subjects. Although the aforementioned linguistic models are applied to all educational institutions in Navarra, multilingual schools that incorporate foreign languages as languages of instruction coexist with non-multilingual schools that do not offer classroom

hours conducted in foreign languages (Orden Foral 57, 2024). Keeping in mind the four different linguistic models, multilingual schools also implement between seven and 12 classroom hours conducted in a foreign language that can be English, French, or German (Orden Foral 57, 2024). As a result, this model is an appropriate fit to the diverse sociolinguistic context of Navarra by balancing out the inequalities between their regional language and Spanish in Basque speaking regions and by promoting foreign language learning with English, French, or German as languages of instruction (Etxebarria 2015; Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015; Vila et al., 2017).

Asturias

Asturias is a bilingual region located in the north of Spain. Its regional language is Asturian, although this language is not recognized as an official language, but it is considered part of this region's cultural heritage (Cuza & Guijarro-Fuentes, 2018; Vila et al., 2017; Zabaltza, 2018). In recent years, the spread of Spanish to every linguistic domain has been a detriment to the preservation of Asturian (Miguélez, 2014). In fact, its use has dramatically decreased in the last twenty years to such an extent that less than one third of its population (mostly elderly people in rural areas) uses it (Miguélez, 2014; Vila et al., 2017). Due to its status as a non-official language of this region (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024), its learning is not mandatory but rather elective (Resolución de 14 de junio, 2023). Consequently, this region does not provide all educational institutions and students with the possibility of learning Asturian. The confluence of Spanish and regional languages, combined with the necessary acquisition of a communicative command in foreign languages in the Asturian bilingual landscape, necessitates bilingual and non-bilingual schools (Fernández-Sanjurjo & Arias-Blanco, 2015). Bilingual schools are the most ambitious ones due to the number of hours conducted in the foreign language (English or French) (Resolución de 14 de junio, 2023). These bilingual schools can opt for a basic bilingual program where at least two non-linguistic subject hours are conducted in a foreign language (before high school) and between one and four subjects (in high school level) or for an advanced bilingual program where all subjects except for Spanish are conducted in the foreign language (Resolución de 14 de junio, 2023). However, research conducted by Fernández-Sanjurjo et al. (2017) draws attention to the poor scores obtained by CLIL students in science learning in comparison to students taking these courses in their mother tongue. Although CLIL students outperform non-CLIL ones in language competence, they underperform non-CLIL learners in non-linguistic content. This calls for action on the part of the administration to improve organization of bilingual programs, teacher training in CLIL and foreign languages, as well as to provide more support for CLIL teachers; this study demonstrates that an inappropriate implementation of CLIL can jeopardize its success (Fernández-Sanjurjo et al., 2017; Pérez Cañado, 2020).

Comparative Analysis: The Approach to Bi-Multilingual Education in Monolingual vs. Bilingual Regions

Spain's decentralization of its educational system, in which the different regions or autonomous communities are accountable for most aspects vis-à-vis education, gives rise to a broad

amalgam of different educational systems, and therefore, bi-multilingual programs (Miguélez, 2014; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024; Vila et al., 2017). This model allows regional governments to better address the “mixture of heterogeneous language situations that lead to different ways of understanding and managing L2 education” (Fernández Fontecha, 2009, p. 21).

The descriptive analysis of each region’s sociolinguistic situation, its challenges, and the bi-multilingual education programs implemented to address them are necessary to draw a comparison between the different ways that monolingual and bilingual regions of Spain treat bi-multilingual education. The most salient difference between bi-multilingual programs in monolingual and bilingual regions are the languages of instruction. Indeed, monolingual regions use predominantly Spanish as the classroom language, although most of them include a foreign language that tends to be English—the extent to which English is used depends on the applied bi-multilingual program (Bychkova, 2023; Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Sanjurjo & Arias-Blanco, 2015; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020). Regarding bilingual regions, the vast majority of them opt for incorporating regional languages as the languages of instruction but use English or other foreign languages to different extents (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Pons Seguí, 2020; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). As a result, learners in bilingual regions benefit from a more diverse linguistic exposure since they are continuously in close contact with Spanish, the regional language, and one or two foreign languages (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; Fernández-Costales & Lasagabaster, 2025; Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Lasagabaster, 2025; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

The purpose of bi-multilingual programs also contrasts between monolingual and bilingual regions. Thus, bi-multilingual programs in monolingual regions focus on the students’ proficient command of Spanish and communicative competence in one or more foreign languages, which optimizes their social skills, their access to information, opportunities for mobility, their job prospects, and their ability to respond to societal needs; therefore, the more languages the student knows, the better their chances are of getting ahead in the world (Bychkova, 2023; Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Sanjurjo & Arias-Blanco, 2015; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020). However, in bilingual regions, this purpose of bi-multilingual programs includes the revitalization of regional languages (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Fernández-Costales & Lasagabaster, 2025; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Lasagabaster, 2025; Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). In fact, in most bilingual regions, bi-multilingual programs are sanctuaries or shelters against the disappearance of regional languages (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024).

Although each bilingual region constitutes a different sociolinguistic reality, regional languages remain at risk. If schools in bilingual regions stop advocating for the preservation of regional languages and stop teaching them, future generations will lack the ability to communicate in them since opportunities for exposure to regional languages outside of schools is very limited, and Spanish and English are dominant in every other domain (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ballester Cardell, 2022, 2025; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE

Plurilingüisme, 2019; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Munar, 2013; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024; Vila et al., 2017). This potential lack of advocacy and reduction in instruction, along with the devastating effect brought about by globalization, could pave the way for the disappearance of regional languages (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent 2024). Revitalization of regional languages in bi-multilingual programs is a crucial way of recovering and strengthening their speakers' cultural identities (Guardado, 2008). Not only do bilingual regions establish bi-multilingual programs to ensure student success in a current globalized society, but they also herald them as an instrument for ensuring social cohesion strengthened through regional languages (Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ballester Cardell, 2022, 2025; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Miguélez, 2014; Munar, 2013; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024; Vila et al., 2017).

Bi-multilingual education models also differ in monolingual and bilingual regions. Whereas monolingual regions adopt a variety of models—including fully bilingual schools, bilingual schools with bilingual and non-bilingual tracks, and non-bilingual schools (Bychkova, 2023; Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Sanjurjo & Arias-Blanco, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019)—bilingual regions advocate for bilingual or multilingual schools (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ballester Cardell, 2022, 2025; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Lasagabaster, 2025; Martí Climent, 2024; Munar, 2013; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). However, in bilingual regions the most implemented model is multilingual education wherein the consolidation of Spanish as the language of the state, the recovery of regional languages, and the development of at least one foreign language are integrated (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Lasagabaster, 2025; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). Whereas in monolingual regions bilingual and non-bilingual tracks coexist, this confluence does not happen in bilingual regions (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Martí Climent, 2024; Munar, 2013; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

It is not all about differences, however. Bi-multilingual programs in monolingual and bilingual regions do share some commonalities. First, the most widespread approach to deploying bi-multilingual education is Content and Language Integrated Learning (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2022; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023a, 2023b), as it allows flexibility for the language of instruction, be it the dominant language, a regional language, and/or a foreign language (Oxbrow, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2023a, 2023b). Additionally, in order to increase the efficacy of language learning, and regardless of the number of languages in their bi-multilingual projects, both monolingual and bilingual regions implement an integrated approach to language that allows for cross-linguistic transfer (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2016; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2022). This aligns with the concept of communicative competence being a global competence (Cummins, 1984) in which languages interact and intertwine to enable the individual to participate in communicative exchanges in different languages.

The implementation of bi-multilingual education in both monolingual and bilingual regions of Spain is shaped by the country's decentralized educational system (Vila et al., 2017). The fragmentation of the Spanish state, with educational powers delegated to the autonomous communities, has a considerable impact on the quality of bi-multilingual programs that results in disparities across regions (Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024; Vila et al., 2017). This decentralization, however, is also a strategic opportunity for regional governments to align their bi-multilingual programs with the specific sociolinguistic realities of their regions, thereby enhancing their contextual effectiveness (Alcaraz Mármol & Guadamillas Gómez, 2019). Beyond this structural factor, both bilingual and monolingual regions face a set of common challenges that must be addressed to ensure the sustainability of bi-multilingual education. Among the most salient are the needs for comprehensive teacher training in CLIL methodology and the development of high levels of linguistic proficiency (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Costales & Lasagabaster, 2025; Fernández-Sanjurjo et al., 2017; García Abellán, 2022; Lasagabaster, 2025; Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Oxbrow, 2019; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019; Pons Seguí, 2020). Additional challenges include how to foster and promote positive attitudes toward language learning among both teachers and learners (Esparza Montero & Belmonte, 2020; Mortimore, 2023), how to effectively organize bi-multilingual programs, and how to provide sustained institutional support for CLIL teachers (Fernández-Sanjurjo et al., 2017). However, the most pressing challenge is addressing disparities that are a direct result of the coexistence of bi-multilingual and non-bilingual schools and the differences in parents' academic proficiency, a situation that exacerbates educational inequalities (Anghel et al., 2016; Cortázar & Taberner, 2020). Transitioning all schools to a multilingual framework could foster equity and inclusion (Pérez Cañado, 2023a), but it would inevitably increase the diversity of the student population that bilingual schools must cater to (Pérez Cañado, 2023a, 2023b). To meet this challenge successfully, it is essential to conceptualize diversity as an enriching factor for the educational process, to increase the number of CLIL hours (Pérez Cañado 2023b; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024), and to employ content and linguistic scaffolding alongside student-centered methodologies (Casas Pedrosa & Rascón Moreno, 2023; Pérez Cañado 2023a, 2023b; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). Likewise, the adoption of Universal Design for Learning principles; the differentiation strategies in methodology, materials, and assessment; and the robust coordination among all educational stakeholders (Lozano-Martínez, 2017) are indispensable measures for fostering equitable and high-quality multilingual education for all learners (Casas Pedrosa & Rascón Moreno, 2023; Pérez Cañado 2023a, 2023b; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

Conclusion

Spain's bilingual and multilingual educational landscape is a reflection of its rich linguistic diversity and decentralized governance (Alcaraz Mármol & Guadamillas Gómez, 2019; Vila et al., 2017). The coexistence of the Spanish language with regional languages—Aranese Occitan, Basque, Catalan, and Galician—alongside the increasing emphasis on foreign language acquisition (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021), has led to the development of

a wide array of educational models tailored to the sociolinguistic realities of each autonomous community (Alcaraz Mármol & Guadamillas Gómez, 2019). This diversity is both a strength and a challenge, as it allows for tailored approaches while also creating disparities among regions (Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024; Vila et al., 2017).

Bi-multilingual programs in monolingual regions focus on Spanish and one or more foreign languages—often through CLIL—and aim at improving mobility, employability, and intercultural understanding (Bychkova, 2023; Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Sanjurjo & Arias-Blanco, 2015; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019), whereas multilingual programs in bilingual regions serve a dual purpose: equipping students for global citizenship and safeguarding cultural identity through the promotion and preservation of regional languages (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ballester Cardell, 2022, 2025; Calleja-Lameiras & Rodríguez-González, 2015; CEFIRE Plurilingüisme, 2019; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Munar, 2013; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

The widespread adoption of CLIL across both monolingual and bilingual regions underscores its effectiveness as a methodology for language learning (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2016; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2022). However, the implementation of this approach in bilingual and monolingual regions faces a set of challenges that hinder its full potential. First, there is an urgent need for teacher training in CLIL and foreign language proficiency (Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Costales & Lasagabaster, 2025; Fernández-Sanjurjo et al., 2017; García Abellán, 2022; Manzano Vázquez, 2015; Oxbrow, 2019; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018, 2019; Pons Seguí, 2020), as well as for fostering positive attitudes toward language learning among both teachers and students (Esparza Montero & Belmonte, 2020; Mortimore, 2023). Additionally, the effective organization of bi-multilingual education is essential for ensuring its long-term sustainability (Fernández-Sanjurjo et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the greatest challenge stems from the necessary transition from the current coexistence of bi-multilingual and non-bilingual schools toward the implementation of only bi-multilingual education through all schools, which will increase the diversity of learners that bilingual schools must address (Pérez Cañado, 2023a, 2023b). This requires an increase in CLIL instructional hours and the implementation of content and linguistic scaffolding, student-centered methodologies, methodological differentiation, adapted materials, personalized assessment, and coordination among educational stakeholders (Casas Pedrosa & Rascón Moreno, 2023; Lozano-Martínez, 2017; Pérez Cañado 2023a, 2023b; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024) to guarantee that all students—regardless of background—benefit from multilingual education (Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

In light of these shared challenges, it is necessary that regional governments start designing and implementing bi-multilingual programs that are adapted to the sociolinguistic particularities of each autonomous community and coordinated with both national and European policy frameworks in order to reduce disparities across regions (Vila et al., 2017). To achieve this, policymakers should ensure a sustained investment in and a commitment to teacher training, curricular development, and instructional resources so as to enable schools to deliver

high-quality CLIL instruction across all educational stages (Pérez Cañado, 2023a, 2023b; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024).

Finally, regional governments are nudged by European initiatives and directives to provide EU students with the opportunity of learning foreign languages (European Commission, 2021; Council of Europe, 2021). For this reason, monolingual and bilingual regions struggle toward incorporating foreign languages as languages of instruction (Amondarain-Garrido & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024; Baldaquí-Escandell, 2020; Ballester Cardell, 2022, 2025; Delicado Puerto & Pavón Vázquez, 2015; Fernández-Sanjurjo & Arias-Blanco, 2015; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2024; Martí Climent, 2024; Pérez Cañado, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020; Pavón Vázquez et al., 2019; Ramón Ramos, 2023, 2024). This objective is similar to the one sought by bilingual regions with regional languages: social cohesion. In fact, foreign-language learning contributes to a better understanding of other cultures and countries by fostering the development of intercultural competence that unites people from completely different sociocultural backgrounds (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021). Thus, in an era characterized by the spread and predominance of ideological movements whose aim is to fragment social cohesion, the European Union considers language learning as an unbeatable opportunity to establish bonds among countries and cultures under the European umbrella (Council of Europe, 2021; European Commission, 2021).

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