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A comparative analysis of bilingual education models
in European countries and their implications for
enhancing Spanish bilingual education

Alumno/a: Rocío Vela Moya

Tutor/a: Dr. José Fernando Martín Villena
Dpto: Filología Inglesa

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*A mi familia, por darme raíces para ser fuerte y alas para volar.
Gracias por vuestro respaldo incondicional en cada una de mis decisiones
y saber brindarme vuestro amor aún en la distancia.*

Abstract

This MA dissertation explores the significance of bilingual education in today's globalised and multicultural society. It emphasises the advantages it offers on personal, academic, and professional levels, and the need to adapt educational systems to cater to diverse societies and prepare students for the global workforce. Early exposure to a second language is crucial for effectively adapting to the changing society. The European Union has taken steps towards bilingual education, leading to increased language proficiency in society. However, the implementation of bilingual education varies across European countries due to factors such as educational policies and pedagogical approaches. The dissertation underscores the importance of comprehensive comparisons of different education systems to identify best practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, it discusses influential factors like educational policies, socio-cultural aspects, and economic status.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Contextualisation of the topic

Today's society is very interested in the topic of bilingual education. The capacity to communicate in more than one language is highly regarded and offers several benefits on a personal, academic, and professional level in today's increasingly globalised and multicultural society. As Cummins (2001, p. 2) rightly explains, 'a consequence of population mobility is linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious diversity within schools'. That is why education systems are adapting to meet the demands of a society that is becoming more diverse and multicultural and to educate students for a globalised workplace.

The concept of bilingualism has existed for as long as there has been a diversity of languages and cultural exchange in humankind. Bilingual populations are expanding in the same way that trade is becoming more international, the fact of travelling becomes commonplace for the individual, or that linguistic diversity is increasingly present in the media (García, 2011). Through certain pedagogical methods, bilingual education aims to foster strong language proficiency in two languages, typically the native language and a foreign language. These approaches may vary according to the countries and the educational policies implemented. However, as García-Mayo (2017, p. 1) explains, every country and its policies agree on the same thing: the earlier one starts learning a second language, the better the results.

The advantages of bilingual schooling are numerous. According to Bennot (1997), as quoted in Mazón (2019, p.8), some of these benefits include new opportunities, more fluid communication, greater creativity, easier problem solving, greater intentional control, larger cerebral cortex, and more neural connections.

It is also important to remember that bilingual education varies greatly throughout European nations. Each nation has its unique educational policies and methods for encouraging bilingualism and teaching foreign languages. The models of bilingual education practiced in each nation, the resources and supports offered to bilingual students, teacher preparation in bilingual teaching, policies for language assessment and certification, as well as academic results and employment prospects are some aspects of

bilingual education that vary between countries.

It is therefore important to carry out a comprehensive comparison of the different education systems in order to identify good practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

1.2. Problem statement

Bilingual education has been a subject of study and implementation in various European countries for several decades now. The adoption of bilingual education models in Europe can be attributed to a combination of factors, with migration significantly contributing to the execution of these programmes. The movement of people across borders has led to linguistic diversity within European societies, necessitating educational approaches that address the needs of multilingual populations.

In 2014, the European Commission published the Conclusions on Multilingualism and the Development of Language Competences (see on https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf), which urged member states to adopt policies aimed at enhancing language learning effectiveness from an early age through innovative approaches and to develop appropriate methods for evaluating language competences. This document highlighted the importance of multilingualism and the need for policies that support language acquisition and development.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the outcomes and implementation of bilingual education vary across different regions. The Eurobarometer 386 study conducted by the European Commission in 2012 revealed significant differences in English proficiency among non-English speaking countries. For instance, countries like the Netherlands, Malta, Sweden, and Denmark reported high percentages of English speakers, whereas countries such as Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Spain, and Hungary had lower percentages.

These variations in language proficiency can be attributed, in part, to classroom practices influenced by educational policies. García and Kleifgen (2010) claim that ineffective policies have influenced educational methods, not the students or their languages, as the source of the difficulties in bilingual education.

To provide a closer look at how bilingual programmes are established or oriented in neighbouring countries, the following educational systems can be defined:

- Finland: Bilingual education is offered during the second stage of basic education (from 13 to 15 years of age) and in the Baccalaureate (from 16 to 19 years of age), with subjects taught in a foreign language. English is usually the most popular language, but French, German, and Russian are also offered. (Eurydice, 2017, p. 163)
- France: Bilingual education in France is based on European Sections, or Classes Européennes. These programmes are developed during lower secondary education (collège) and the baccalaureate (lycée). They aim to strengthen language learning and involve teaching one or more subjects in a foreign language, starting from the equivalent of the fourth year of secondary education in other countries. (Roldán, 2012)
- Poland: Bilingual education in Poland is part of secondary education and offers opportunities to learn sought-after European languages. According to Roldán (2012, p. 33), the programme gradually introduces the selected foreign language during the early years of secondary education, with both languages being used to teach the subject in the final years.

These examples highlight the diverse approaches to bilingual education across European countries. Each nation has its own unique educational system, policies, and strategies for promoting bilingualism and language learning. By studying and comparing these models, countries can identify successful practices, address challenges, and find opportunities for improvement in their own bilingual education systems.

1.3. Justification for the importance of the study

The purpose of the present work is to look for the different strategies that countries with a higher level of bilingual education use in order to compare them with Spanish bilingual education. While exploring the strategies employed by countries with a higher

level of bilingual education is an important objective; it is crucial to acknowledge that certain factors influencing education systems are beyond the control of teachers. These factors include educational policies, socio-cultural aspects, and economic levels (Laughlin, 1982).

1. Educational policies. As Schmidt-Nieto (2002, p. 1) explains, ‘politics are an intrinsic and inevitable part of the development of language through education that need to be understood and used to develop workable solutions to the challenges created by language groups in contact’. This is why it is essential to understand how each country's policy works in order to understand the results obtained, as they are the basis of any educational institution. These policies are typically shaped by government bodies and educational institutions at the national or regional level. They encompass decisions regarding curriculum design, language allocation, language proficiency standards, teacher qualifications, and funding allocations. These policies reflect the priorities and goals of the respective education systems and may influence the implementation and success of bilingual education programmes.

2. Socio-cultural aspects: In order for bilingual education to be implemented and be effective, the socio-cultural framework is crucial. Factors such as societal attitudes towards language diversity, support for multiculturalism, and the presence of linguistic minorities can shape the level of acceptance and resources allocated to bilingual education programmes. Socio-cultural dynamics, including the degree of linguistic integration, the prevalence of English as a lingua franca, the level of community involvement, or as Molina (2003, p. 129) explains, ‘the degree of socio-cultural prestige of the language studied’, can impact the success and sustainability of bilingual education initiatives and from there, to the positive impact on society as Zhang(2009) emphasises:

‘Try to imagine, in a country the ability of citizens to speak more than one language will bring much more opportunities for international trade and tourism. To this extent, bilingualism increases the opportunities for exports and imports for foreign trade compared to unilingualism’. (p. 35)

3. Economic level: The economic resources available to educational institutions and systems can greatly impact the implementation and quality of bilingual education

programmes. Countries with higher economic levels often have greater access to funding for language resources, teacher training, support services, and infrastructure. Adequate funding can contribute to the development of comprehensive and effective bilingual education programmes, including the provision of necessary materials, technology, and professional development opportunities for teachers. However, according to Zhang (2009), the real costs and benefits of learning a second language are still not clear.

Considering these aspects, it is important to recognise the limitations that teachers may face in influencing or changing educational policies, socio-cultural attitudes, or economic conditions. Nevertheless, teachers can still play a crucial role in the successful implementation of bilingual education within their classrooms and schools. According to Molina (2003, p. 136), teachers emphasise the comprehension aspects of the language while creating contexts of use that allow learners to gradually master a second language. They can advocate for the importance of bilingualism, create inclusive and supportive learning environments, adjust your teaching methods to accommodate different student demands, and collaborate with colleagues to share best practices.

Furthermore, while examining and comparing strategies from countries with successful bilingual education systems, teachers can gain valuable insights and adapt relevant aspects to their own contexts. This process may involve exploring innovative instructional approaches, incorporating cultural elements into language learning, leveraging technology, fostering partnerships with local communities or international organisations, and seeking professional development opportunities that enhance their pedagogical skills in bilingual settings.

Ultimately, while acknowledging the broader influences on bilingual education, teachers can make a significant impact by focusing on their immediate sphere of influence creating engaging and effective bilingual learning experiences for their students, collaborating with colleagues, and advocating for the value of bilingual education within their educational communities.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Definition of key concepts

In order to understand this work and its study, it is necessary to define different concepts. The following concepts are fundamental to understanding and addressing bilingual education effectively and equitably.

First, bilingual education, is defined as a part of the educational process by authors such as Cummins (2000) or García (2010). Bilingual education's main objective is to give pupils fluency in both languages, usually their native tongue and a second language. This strategy seeks to advance academic success, cognitive growth, and cultural awareness. The structure and intensity of bilingual education programmes can vary, but they frequently include the use of both languages for communication, instruction, and content.

Then, according to Krashen (1981), the process through which people learn a language, either their mother tongue or a second language, is known as language acquisition. The purpose of bilingual education is to promote the acquisition of the second language in a relevant and straightforward manner.

On the other hand, according to Chomsky (1965) language competence refers to the body of knowledge and skills that an individual possesses in a given language, i.e., unconscious knowledge of the grammar of the learned language. It includes oral and written comprehension, oral and written expression, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Additionally, following authors such as Fishman (1991) and Hornberger (2002), a minority language is a language spoken by a minority group within a particular region or country. Minority languages are often contrasted with majority or dominant languages, which are more widely spoken and hold greater social, political, and economic influence. Preserving and promoting minority languages is important for cultural diversity, identity preservation, and the rights of linguistic minorities.

Finally, early bilingual education refers to the teaching of two or more languages from the earliest stages of educational development, usually in early childhood or

Primary Education. This approach aims to take advantage of the plasticity of the brain at an early age and to promote a balanced development of language skills (Mora, 2013).

2.2. Background: bilingual education

According to Molina (2003, p. 127), bilingual education is a very widespread form of education around the world which has led to the existence of many variants of it in order to achieve the same objective, among which we find (Baker, 1997 quoted by Molina, 2003):

- ‘1. Teaching by submersion, in which the mother tongue of the pupils is completely ignored.
2. Teaching with withdrawal classes, i.e. with compensatory classes in the L2.
3. Segregationist education, in which classes in the L1 are envisaged.
4. Transitional bilingual education, where they are taught just enough to communicate and can use the L1. The conversion work is usually carried out by a bilingual.
5. General education, closely related to the teaching of a foreign language, in which children are taught in the L1 and an additional class in the L2, making the L2 an additional subject.
6. Separatist teaching: promoted by the community itself so that its mother tongue is not overwhelmed by an L2.
7. Immersion teaching, which considers factors of age, time, etc. and aims to make true bilingual children. [...]
9. Two-way bilingual education in two languages, where classrooms are filled with children of different languages (in identical proportions) and where alternate class schedules are established (e.g. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in L1 and Tuesday and Thursday in L2).
10. General bilingual education, where both languages are included in the curriculum at the same time. This type of teaching is usually found in European countries.’ (p. 135)

Authors such as Krashen (1981) defined immersion teaching as an instructional strategy that includes thorough or significant exposure to a certain language. In a curriculum that focuses on linguistic immersion, students are immersed in a setting where the language of instruction is the main form of communication. By encouraging participation and encouraging natural language acquisition via ongoing exposure.

Europe is renowned for its remarkable array of languages, encompassing a diverse range of regional, minority, and immigrant tongues that coexist within various countries and regions. Consequently, the manifold linguistic diversity is acknowledged as a valuable cultural heritage, prompting efforts to safeguard and foster these languages. Furthermore, the significance of acquiring foreign languages is duly acknowledged, alongside the endorsement of bilingual education and language teaching initiatives, all aimed at nurturing effective communication and fostering cooperation among member nations.

Therefore, the implementation of that general bilingual education in Europe is essential so that the language differences between countries are not a disadvantage. The development of bilingual education in Europe has been influenced by various historical, political, social, and linguistic factors and the Lisbon Strategy in 2010 set the goal of making Europe an international quality benchmark with the establishment of a language proficiency indicator in order to measure the foreign language skills of all Member States.

In the following, an overview of strategies for the development of bilingual education in Europe is provided:

- Recognition of regional and minority languages: according to Eurydice (2019, p. 11), in many European countries, especially in regions with regional or minority languages, the importance of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity has been recognised. In some regions, bilingual education programmes have been established to encourage the use and revitalisation of these languages.
- Multilingualism policies in the EU: according to European Education Area (2020), the EU has promoted multilingualism as a fundamental value and has established policies and programmes to encourage bilingual education, such as Erasmus+ programme, LISTIAC project, or the MultiMind project, among others. The goal is to guarantee that each individual is proficient in at least two languages in addition to their native tongue, which necessitates the creation of bilingual educational initiatives and the teaching of foreign languages.

- International education and exchange programmes: Europe is home to a wide range of international education and exchange programmes, such as European Schools and International Baccalaureate programmes, such as the SIS Swiss International Schools Group (see on <https://www.bilingual.education/>) offer bilingual education programmes that prepare students for a globalised world. These programmes often encourage bilingual education by providing instruction in more than one language and promoting interaction between students from different linguistic backgrounds.

It is important to note that the development of bilingual education varies considerably between European countries, as each country has its own approach and language policies. This is why great differences are generally found as specified earlier.

Particularly, according to Izquierdo (2017) bilingual education in Spain started in a general way at the end of the 20th century with the elaboration of the White Paper on Education and Training: Teaching and Learning: Towards the Knowledge Society, where Spain was obliged to use a new methodology that met the objectives demanded by the EU. However, as Izquierdo (2017, p. 298) states: ‘this education was characterised as ineffective and did not achieve the proposed objectives. If we add to this the pressure exerted by the EU, we find ourselves with an imperative need to reinforce and re-establish this curricular training’.

However, the different educational laws that have been developed over the years (LGE, LOGSE, LOE, LOCE and LOMCE) have studied and implemented language learning and it has been subject to continuous evolution and adaptation since the end of the 20th century. This is true even though the implementation of bilingual programmes in Spain has been a contentious issue due to the great efforts and enormous measures involved in its implementation.

2.3. Foreign language learning in Spain: Background and current context

For some years now, language learning and bilingual education have been topical issues in today's society, both of which require a lot of attention and study by professionals. From early childhood education to tertiary education, language learning has been a contested and controversial issue that has been subject to continuous evolution and adaptation since the end of the 20th century.

Foreign language learning in Spain has undergone significant changes over the years. Therefore, it is essential to review the evolution of this country's context with regard to this main issue.

2.3.1. Background

According to Sánchez (2017) and Guede (2014), bilingual education in Spain has varied as its education laws have changed. Traditionally, in Spain, with the General Law of Education (LGE), the process of foreign language teaching-learning was reduced to Baccalaureate studies until more than half of the 20th century and during the Franco regime, access to foreign language learning was limited and focused mainly on French.

Nevertheless, according to Izquierdo (2017):

‘However, in 1970, the teaching of a foreign language was taken into consideration and, with the entry into force on 4th August of the General Law on Education and the Functioning of the Educational Reform (Law 14/1970), two transcendental modifications were made. One of them would be the restructuring of the stages of schooling (Pre-school, EGB, Secondary, and University Education), and as far as language teaching is concerned, this would be favoured and would be introduced in the 6th year of EGB, which would be the second stage of General Basic Education. However, in the 1990s, with the introduction of the LOGSE, language learning was brought forward from the age of twelve (6th year of Primary Education) to the age of eight (3rd year of the newly introduced Primary Education).’ (p. 300-301)

Subsequently, in 1992, with the Organic Law 9/1992 of 23rd December 1992, the political reality of the country was decentralised and the transfer of competences to the Autonomous Communities was established, which, little by little, assumed responsibilities and decision-making in educational matters, which has led them to gradually shape their respective language policies.

Therefore, according to Izquierdo (2017):

‘On 1st February 1996, Jerónimo Saavedra [...] and the Director of the British Council, Peter John Whittaker, signed a collaboration agreement. [...] The project meant the expansion of bilingual education in our country, since its aim was to develop a bilingual education programme (Spanish-English) in Spanish public schools’ (p. 305)

With the introduction of the LOCE (Organic Law on the Quality of Education 10/2002, of 23 December 2002), it also emphasizes the need to have proficiency in two Community languages as a testament to European integration, underscoring the importance of introducing foreign language instruction in the final year of preschool education. (Izquierdo, 2017)

The LOMCE (Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education) emphasised the promotion the recognition of bilingual education as one of the most crucial steps for strengthening our nation's educational system:

‘The mastery of a second language, or even a third foreign language, has become a priority in education as a consequence of the globalisation process in which we live, while at the same time it is shown to be one of the main shortcomings of our education system’. (LOMCE, 2013. Chapter XII)

2.3.2. Current context

Foreign language learning has become increasingly relevant in Spain due to globalisation, international mobility, and European integration. The following data are as follows:

Table 1: Percentage of students studying foreign languages. Academic year 2020-2021

	2020-21				2015-16	2010-11
	Inglés	Francés	Otras lenguas extranjeras	Total	Total	Total
Primera lengua extranjera						
E. Infantil Segundo Ciclo	82,8	0,5	0,3	83,5	82,3	73,3
E. Primaria (1)	99,0	0,7	0,3	100,0	100,0	99,4
ESO (1)	98,3	1,3	0,4	100,0	100,0	99,7
Bachillerato (2)	95,3	1,5	0,4	97,3	97,0	97,2
Segunda lengua extranjera						
E. Primaria	0,7	18,1	1,2	20,0	7,0	5,9
ESO	1,3	36,2	4,9	42,4	43,2	40,5
Bachillerato	1,4	20,2	2,3	23,9	23,3	23,3

(1) Para el cálculo de los porcentajes para estas enseñanzas se han ajustado las cifras de alumnado matriculado a la cobertura del alumnado que cursa la primera lengua extranjera obligatoria.

(2) En la enseñanza de Bachillerato, donde es obligatorio el estudio de una lengua extranjera, las diferencias con el 100% son debidas en su mayoría a situaciones de matrícula parcial o adaptada en la que no se cursa esta materia.

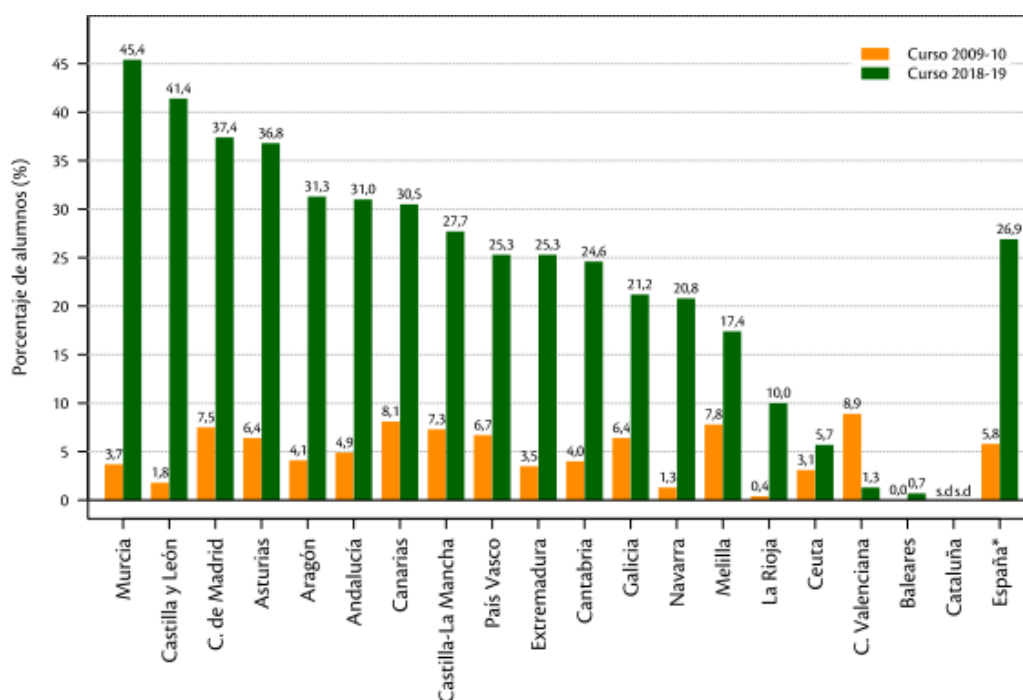
Source: *Estadísticas de la enseñanza no universitaria. Ministerio de Educación*

As can be seen, the percentage of pupils who have a first foreign language in primary and secondary education is 100% compared to 20% and 42.4% respectively who have a second foreign language and 23.9% in Baccalaureate.

However, although the percentage of second foreign language is low and does not even exist in early childhood education, as can be seen in Primary Education, it has increased in recent years from 5.9% in the academic year 2010-11 to 7% in the academic year 2015-16, and from the latter to 20% in the academic year 2020-2021. However, in secondary education we can see that from the academic year 2015-2016 to 2020-2021 there is a slight decrease in the percentage.

On the other hand, this table shows the progressive increase in student enrolment in the field of bilingual education, covering the period between the academic year 2009-2010 and the academic year 2018-2019. During this period, there was a notable increase, evidenced by the percentage increase in the number of students, which rose from a modest 5.8% to a significant 26.9%, respectively.

Figure 1. Evolution of the percentage of pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes, by Autonomous Community. Academic years 2009-10 and 2018-19.



Source: Lacasa, Gisbert and Vinuesa (2021)

English remains the most widely studied foreign language and the one most in demand in academic and professional circles. However, the importance of encouraging the learning of other foreign languages, such as French, German, and Italian, has been recognised in order to increase linguistic competence in different languages.

In Spain, foreign language learning begins in Primary Education, generally from the age of 6. English is compulsory at all levels of education. According to Tsuchiya and Murillo (2019), in recent decades, there has been an increase in the implementation of bilingual education programmes, especially in Autonomous Communities such as Madrid, Catalonia, and Valencia. These programmes offer partial or total immersion in a foreign language, usually English, in different areas of the curriculum.

Andalusia may be regarded as one of the Spanish regions that has actively advanced and promoted multilingual education since the Governing Council of Andalusia (BOJA) adopted the Language Policy for Andalusian Society on March 22, 2005. It has the most multilingual schools in our nation than any other Autonomous Community, in fact. According to the Order of April 27, 2016, which authorized new public bilingual schools for the 2016–17 academic year, expanded bilingual education to new educational stages in schools already authorized as bilingual, and approved new bilingual Vocational Training cycles in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, there are currently more than 1000 bilingual schools spread out across the community. (Izquierdo, 2017)

In addition to formal education, there are other options for learning foreign languages in Spain, such as language academies, online courses and student exchange programmes. In fact, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, the following data can be observed:

Table 2. Percentage of students participating in experiences of using foreign languages as a language of instruction. Academic year 2019-2020.

	Aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua extranjera ⁽¹⁾		Otras experiencias ⁽²⁾		Centros extranjeros	
	E. Primaria	ESO	E. Primaria	ESO	E. Primaria	ESO
TOTAL	38,2	28,3	4,7	3,9	1,5	1,3
Andalucía	41,0	42,3	0,0	0,0	1,1	1,0
Aragón	50,9	26,1	10,8	1,9	0,0	0,0
Asturias, Principado de	37,7	25,2	7,9	4,7	0,8	0,5
Baleares, Illes	1,2	1,0	7,0	5,3	2,8	2,4
Canarias	44,7	23,3	1,3	1,1	2,8	2,3
Cantabria	31,3	16,4	0,0	1,6	0,0	0,0
Castilla y León	63,3	35,7	2,2	1,4	0,2	0,1
Castilla-La Mancha	40,4	22,0	4,0	0,8	0,0	0,0
Cataluña	..	..	..	..	1,3	1,1
Comunitat Valenciana	2,1	1,0	4,6	6,4	2,9	2,8
Extremadura	34,5	28,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Galicia	37,1	15,2	17,7	12,0	0,5	0,2
Madrid, Comunidad de	49,6	39,3	9,0	5,5	2,9	2,4
Murcia, Región de	76,6	41,2	0,3	0,4	0,8	0,8
Navarra, Comunidad Foral de	47,9	3,5	0,0	21,4	0,3	0,1
Pais Vasco	29,1	36,2	3,5	6,3	0,8	0,7
Rioja, La	14,3	3,8	27,7	29,0	0,0	0,0
Ceuta	13,2	2,8	8,3	0,0	0,0	0,0
Melilla	40,2	7,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0

(1) Recoge la oferta de programas que garantizan su impartición por lo menos en todos los cursos de cada una de las etapas de la educación obligatoria (Primaria y/o ESO) y que también puede abarcar segundo ciclo de E. Infantil y/o la enseñanza post-obligatoria.

(2) Recoge aquellas experiencias de profundización en el conocimiento de una lengua extranjera, que incluyen su utilización como lengua de enseñanza para una o más áreas o materias, diferentes de la propia lengua extranjera. Estas experiencias no suelen estar orientadas a su continuidad en cada uno de los cursos de las etapas obligatorias, e incluso, a veces pueden estar condicionadas a la disponibilidad en el centro de profesorado que pueda participar en ellas.

Source: *Datos y Cifras. Curso Escolar 2021-2022. Ministerio De Educación, Cultura y Deporte. (p. 36)*¹

As can be seen, most of the foreign language learning originates from the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology which is used by 38.2% of the total population in Primary Education and 28.3% in Secondary Education. Through other experiences, 4.7% and 3.9% respectively, and in foreign schools, 1.5% and 1.3% respectively.

CLIL methodology is the way in which foreign language is most widely used in schools, with the first place going to the Murcia region in Primary Education with 76.6% and Andalusia in general Secondary Education with 42.3%. In the CLIL approach, different educational approaches are integrated at the same time. As we can see in the following figure (Vinuesa, 2016), there is a wide variety of programmes that the CLIL methodology encompasses in its own right.

¹ <https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/d/25355/19/0>

Figure 2. Methods covered by CLIL methodology.



Source: Vinuesa (2016, p. 300)

This methodology is an adaptable methodology, seeking trade-offs and proportionality and applying the best that each approach can provide to achieve the proposed objectives (Sanchez, 2017).

2.3.3. Possible challenges and perspectives

Despite the advancements made in foreign language learning in Spain, challenges still persist, particularly concerning the lack of communicative competence among the Spanish population in foreign languages. According to Hymes and Bernal (1996) the communicative competence is the ability to form sentences that are not only grammatically correct but also socially appropriate. At first glance, without going too deeply into the subject, it could be said that some of the challenges that can be encountered are the following:

1. Teacher training: Providing teachers with effective training is essential for improving foreign language instruction. Teachers should receive professional development opportunities that focus on enhancing their language proficiency, pedagogical techniques, and intercultural competence. As Pérez Cañado (2014) suggests, experiences abroad provide teachers with learning in all these areas of language and language teaching. Training programmes should equip teachers with the necessary skills

to create engaging and communicative language learning environments, facilitate authentic interactions, and employ effective assessment methods.

2. Adequate resources: Access to adequate resources is vital for effective foreign language teaching. This includes textbooks, supplementary materials, audio-visual resources, technology tools, and authentic cultural materials according to Ramírez (2008) and Rodríguez (2018). Having a wide range of resources supports varied instructional approaches, caters to different learning styles, and promotes authentic language use and cultural understanding (Manga, 2008). The use of different resources during the teaching of English as a foreign language allows for increased learner motivation and participation (Rodríguez, 2018).

3. Diversification of language learning: While English remains a dominant foreign language in Spain, there is a need to promote greater diversification in language learning. Encouraging the study of less common languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, or Russian, can broaden linguistic skills and open up new opportunities for intercultural communication and professional development (Geeslin, et al., 2021). Supporting multilingualism within Spanish society fosters a more inclusive and diverse language landscape.

4. Communicative approach and innovative methodologies: Promoting a communicative approach to language learning focuses on developing practical language skills for real-life communication. This approach emphasises meaningful interactions, authentic tasks, and the integration of all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (Tarrisi, 2020). Innovative methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching can make language learning more engaging, interactive, and relevant to students' lives, offering language experiences, language analysis, inclusion of all learners, or extra-curricular experiences (Dos Santos, 2020). The Communicative Language Teaching method of teaching languages places a high value on interaction as both a tool and a goal of language acquisition. It is often referred to as the communication strategy. (Hymes, 1972)

Fernando (2019) also asserts the need of creating a positive and inspiring learning atmosphere. Students' enthusiasm and self-assurance in utilising foreign languages may be increased in the classroom by encouraging active involvement, offering chances for

cultural immersion and appreciating linguistic variety.

To address these challenges and promote effective language learning, collaboration among stakeholders is essential. This includes collaboration between teachers, schools, educational authorities, language institutions, and parents. By working together, they can share best practices, advocate for language learning initiatives, and secure the necessary resources and support for improving foreign language education in Spain.

2.4. Legislative framework and educational policies

Every change in education, such as the implementation of bilingual education, must be reflected in the different educational laws that will regulate and guide these educational changes. In the following, the different European and Spanish educational laws or agreements that help the implementation of bilingual education are specified.

As far as European laws are concerned, there is no specific legislation at European level that directly regulates bilingual education in all member countries. However, the EU promotes multilingualism as a fundamental value and supports linguistic diversity in Europe. In addition, there are EU initiatives and recommendations that promote language teaching and bilingual education in the Member States. However, the EU has developed different agreements and treaties that have helped the implementation of bilingual education over the years. These include the following:

- The Maastricht Treaty laid the foundations for the creation of the EU as we know it today, such as economic and monetary union, European citizenship, or common foreign and security policy.
- European educational mobility programmes. One of the best-known programmes is the Erasmus+ programme. This programme was established by the European Commission and provides exchange and mobility opportunities for students, teaching, and administrative staff in the field of education, training, youth, and sport. The Erasmus+ programme encourages transnational collaboration, the acquisition of new skills and experiences, and promotes mobility and cooperation in education across Europe.
- The Lisbon Strategy, also known as the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, was adopted by the European Council in 2000 with the aim of boosting competitiveness, sustainable economic growth, and job creation in the EU. The

strategy focused on areas such as innovation, education, training, and research, with the aim of making Europe a knowledge-based economy and improving the quality of life of European citizens.

- The White Paper on Education established the foundations for the creation of a single European area.

All this helped the European social framework to unify and seek the promotion of bilingual education to promote such a union.

Particularly, in the case of Spain, the regulation of bilingual education is mainly established through national and Autonomous Community legislation. Below, some relevant laws are mentioned:

Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE): This law, enacted in 2006 and subsequently amended, establishes the general framework for education in Spain. The LOE recognises the importance of multilingualism and establishes the principles and objectives of bilingual education.

Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (LOMCE): Passed in 2013, the LOMCE also provides for bilingual education in Spain. This law establishes the basis for the teaching of foreign languages and the promotion of multilingualism in the education system.

Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOMLOE), also known as the "Celaá Law", is an education reform passed in Spain in December 2020. The LOMLOE addresses various aspects of education, including bilingual education. Below are some relevant points that the LOMLOE establishes on bilingual education:

1. Promotion of plurilingualism: The LOMLOE establishes the promotion of plurilingualism as one of the fundamental principles of education in Spain. It recognises the importance of acquiring competences in several languages, both nationally and internationally.
2. Competence in foreign languages: The law emphasises the need for students to develop a solid competence in at least one foreign language. It states that this competence should be assessed and certified at the end of compulsory education.

3. Bilingual education programmes: The LOMLOE establishes that educational administrations may establish bilingual education programmes in schools. The aim of these programmes must be the balanced development of competences in the different languages used.
4. Teacher training: The law emphasises the importance of adequate training for teachers participating in bilingual education programmes. The aim is to ensure that teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach in a bilingual environment.

Autonomous Community laws: The Autonomous Communities in Spain have competences in the field of education and can therefore enact specific laws regulating bilingual education within their respective territories. Each Autonomous Community has the power to develop its bilingual education programmes and plans in accordance with its linguistic and cultural needs and characteristics.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

For the process of this research, this work will use a mixed method approach which is a valid and valuable research paradigm as it takes the best of both fields for rigorous and more accurate research. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) point out, the use of mixed approaches allows for more complex research questions to be addressed and provides a more complete understanding of the phenomena being studied.

According to Creswell (2014), instruments such as interviews, questionnaires, observation or document review can be used to collect data in research. In this research, we will mainly use document review for the extraction of the data that we will analyse and from which we will draw the final conclusions.

Also, following Creswell (2014), mixed method can be defined as a method that combines both qualitative and quantitative elements in a single study. It uses multiple data sources and employs a sequential or concurrent approach to data collection and analysis. Some of the advantages that can be gained by using this method include a more complete and holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Also, it combines the strengths of both approaches, complementing the descriptive richness of

qualitative with the precision and generalisability of quantitative and it allows for triangulation of data to validate results.

However, it has some limitations that should be considered when drawing conclusions from the study. For instance, it requires additional time and resources to conduct data collection and analysis in both approaches. Integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches can be challenging and require methodological expertise.

3.2. Selection of countries and education systems to be compared

As discussed previously, there is a wide variety of levels of second language proficiency in Europe. Table 3 below is an analysis of the percentage of citizens in each country who can hold conversations in one, two, or three different languages or where they are only able to hold conversations in their own language.

Table 3. Percentage of citizens who are able to hold conversations in languages other than their own by number of languages.

	Uno	Dos	Tres o más	Ninguno
Media Unión Europea 27	54%	25%	10%	46%
Luxemburgo	98%	84%	61%	2%
Latvia	95%	54%	13%	5%
Países Bajos	94%	77%	37%	6%
Malta	93%	59%	13%	7%
Eslovenia	92%	67%	34%	8%
Lituania	92%	52%	18%	8%
Suecia	91%	44%	15%	9%
Dinamarca	89%	58%	23%	11%
Estonia	87%	52%	22%	13%
Eslovaquia	80%	43%	18%	20%
Austria	78%	27%	9%	22%
Chipre	76%	20%	7%	24%
Finlandia	75%	48%	26%	25%
Bélgica	72%	50%	27%	28%
Alemania	66%	28%	8%	34%
Grecia	57%	15%	4%	43%
Francia	51%	19%	5%	49%
Polonia	50%	22%	7%	50%
República Checa	49%	22%	6%	51%
Rumania	48%	22%	8%	52%
Bulgaria	48%	19%	4%	52%
España	46%	18%	5%	54%
Irlanda	40%	18%	4%	60%
Reino Unido	39%	14%	5%	61%
Portugal	39%	13%	4%	61%
Italia	38%	22%	15%	62%
Hungría	35%	13%	4%	65%

Source: Eurobarometer 386 in Benavent Sancho (2014)

In this table, across the EU 54% of the population can speak in one foreign language, 25% in two, 10% in three or more, and 46% in no language. As we can see in this table, Spain is in the 22nd place, with only 46% of the population able to hold a conversation in a language other than their own, 18% in two languages, 5% in three or more, and 54% only in their mother tongue. In comparison with Luxembourg, 98% of the population can speak in one foreign language, 84% in two, and 61% in three or more languages, and only 2% only in their mother tongue.

There is a huge difference between the two countries, but it is also striking to note that in the EU, whose member countries do not share the same language, only 54% of the population is able to speak even one foreign language. The lack of a common language in Europe is a real challenge and has led to the growing importance of English as a lingua franca in the European context. Even, English has become a fundamental skill for international communication, especially in the professional, academic, and tourism fields (Álvarez, 2010, cited by Romero, 2016). EU is considered a very advanced union that deals with many issues and seeks progress in many aspects, but considering vital communication between people when they have different mother tongues, EU still has a lot of work to do on this issue so that countries like Spain that have a very low level improve to be able to enter into a more inclusive society (Elton, 1997, cited by Phillipson, 2003).

Therefore, this research is based on the education systems of the countries with the highest level of second languages in Europe, specifically in the English language. In the European Study of Language Competence, we can find the following results:

Table 4. Percentage of pupils with competency in English as a first language, broken down by achievement levels.

	-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
Malta	9	7	2	22	60
Sweden	11	6	1	25	57
Netherlands	18	14	2	30	36
Estonia	12	20	7	20	41
Slovenia	19	22	6	25	29
Greece	16	23	14	22	26
Croatia	18	23	11	24	23
Bulgaria	16	28	20	16	19
Portugal	16	33	20	16	15
Belgium-Fr.	24	36	11	19	10
Spain	17	35	22	14	13
Poland	17	34	24	15	10
France	15	40	31	9	5

Source: Own elaboration with the information of European Survey of Language Competence, 2011

As we can see, the country with the highest level of English (B2) is Malta with 60% of the population, and Belgium-Fr. with the highest percentage at the lowest level (-A1). Spain has 13% of its population at the highest level and 17% at the lowest level.

On the other hand, in this study, we can see the average number of years studying English among 15-year-olds, from which we can draw the following statistics:

Table 5. Average years spent studying English worldwide.

Country	Average years spent studying English at 15 years of age
Malta	9.17
Sweden	6.53
Netherlands	4.95
Estonia	7.03
Slovenia	6.18
Greece	5.96
Croatia	6.9
Portugal	6.01
Spain	9.20
Poland	7.46
France	4.22

Source: Own elaboration with the information of European Survey of Language Competence, 2011

As we can see in both tables, there is a clear difference in the number of years that a 15-year-old student in France has studied English as a second language compared to a student of the same age in Spain. From this we can understand why the level between France and Spain is different. However, there is the case of Spain-Netherlands, where the difference is just as clear, but the level of English is far inferior to that of Netherlands.

For all these reasons, this study is focused on the education systems with the highest proficiency level in English, i.e., Malta, Sweden, and the Netherlands, for comparison with the Spanish education system.

3.3. Selecting the variables to be analysed

As stated by Baetens Beardsmore (1995) quoted by Housen (2002):

‘Research undertaken in varied setting throughout the world has clearly indicated that the effectiveness of a bilingual model depends on a myriad of variables (several of which are beyond the control of policy makers, programme designers and educators) and that no model, no matter how well tried in its original context, should be transplanted in its entirety to other contexts’. (p. 6)

Therefore, when comparing bilingual education and the education system of two different countries, there are some common variables that could be considered according to Spolsky et al. (1974), Baker (1996), and Baetens Beardsmore (1993) quoted by Housen (2002) such as contextual, output, and operational variables. Of these three main variables, the following can be observed:

- Educational policies: The policies and regulations established by each country in relation to bilingual education are analysed. This includes aspects such as legislation, curricula, bilingual education programmes, funding, and government support.
- Bilingual education approach and model: The specific approaches and models used in each country to implement bilingual education are explored. This may include the use of language immersion, intensive bilingual education programmes, dual language education, or staged bilingual education, among others.
- Languages and proficiency level: This considers the languages used in bilingual education in each country and the level of language proficiency achieved by students in both languages. This may include the number of languages taught, the importance and status of each language, and language teaching and assessment programmes.
- Resources and support: Consideration is given to the resources available and support provided for the implementation of bilingual education in each

country. This may include school infrastructure, educational materials, professional development programmes for teachers, and support for students and families.

- External variables: As Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011) point out, in language acquisition, there are variables that need to be considered such as exposure to the target language, interaction with native speakers, motivation and attitudes towards language learning. Therefore, variables considered such as the socio-economic situation of the country, aspects such as the subtitling of films in that country, among others.
- Relationship between cognitive factors and academic performance: Collier and Thomas (2015) explore how cognitive factors such as working memory, selective attention and problem-solving skills, are related to English language learners' academic performance. They examine how these cognitive skills may influence the learning process and long-term academic development.

Many more variables can be considered when evaluating an education system. However, this MA dissertation will focus on the variables mentioned above.

4. Analysis and discussion

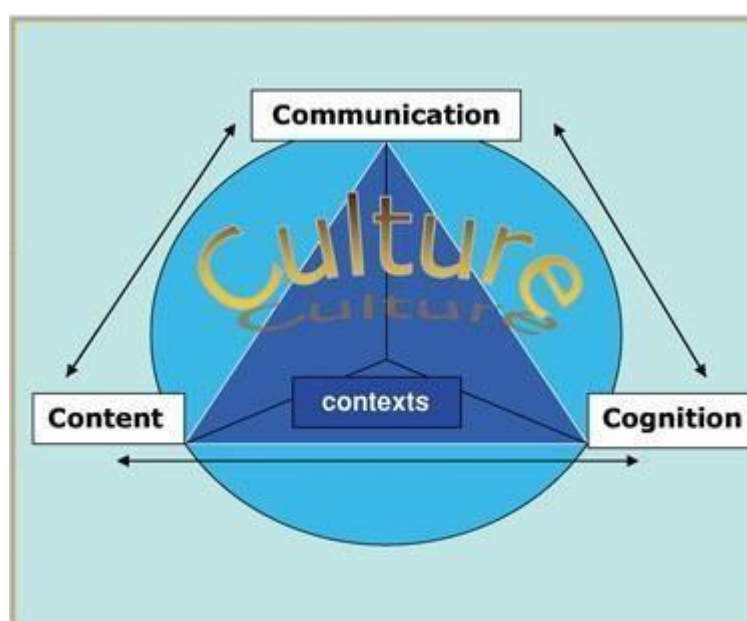
4.1. Elements that make up bilingual education

In order to make a good analysis of bilingual education in all countries, we have to be clear about the main components of bilingual education and its main methodology, i.e., Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

The CLIL methodology and bilingual education has four main components that make this teaching complete and meaningful for the students. As Coyle (2002) states, the four fundamental components have been called as the 4 Cs: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. Combining the above 4Cs when teaching a non-linguistic subject in a foreign language, the acquisition by the learner of the basic competences established by the Royal Decree (126/2014) is favoured, especially the one referring to linguistic and communicative competence.

Thus, content involves the analysis and study of specific topics and skills which, although taught in the foreign language, will be determined by the subject in question. On the other hand, communication is one of the foundations of this approach, since the aim is to create communicative situations that foster the learning of content while learning to use the foreign language. As regards the development of cognitive skills, the aim is to link the formation of concepts with knowledge of the language and the context in which it might be used. Finally, culture involves learning about the cultural aspects implicit in the subject matter which will facilitate understanding and tolerance of others.

Figure 3. The '4 C' framework for CLIL.



Source: Coyle (2005)

4.2. Analysis of bilingual education in Europe: the case of Malta, Sweden, and the Netherlands

In the following section, the education system and bilingual education in Malta, Sweden, and the Netherlands will be analysed.

According to the European Study of Language Competence (2011, p. 38): 'Malta and Sweden have more than 70% of their students at the highest B2 level, followed by the Netherlands with 60%'. In their study, they considered five explanatory variables: parental knowledge of English, use of English through the media, contact with English,

contact and use of English in extracurricular contexts and frequency of travel to English-speaking countries. On three of these variables, Malta and Sweden score highest: parental knowledge of English, use of English through the media, and frequency of travel to English-speaking countries.

Table 6. Standard country scores on the explanatory study variables

	Parents' knowledge of English Scale: 0-3	Contact with English Scale: 0-7	Use of English Scale: 0-4	English through the media Scale: 0-4	Travel Scale: 0-3
Netherlands	1.83	2.4	1.05	2.34	0.94
Malta	2.17	4.5	2.35	2.93	1.29
Sweden	2.13	2.78	1.52	2.63	1.47

More specifically, the contexts and practices in each country that make bilingual education a success will be developed. All the statistical data for each country below are taken from the Eurydice report (2017). Education and Training in Europe - Key Figures on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe (2019 Edition).

4.2.1. Netherlands

The history of bilingual education in the Netherlands goes back several decades and has undergone significant development over time. As the country has become more globalised and multicultural, the need has arisen to foster competence in more than one language and to promote bilingual education as an integral part of the education system.

In the Netherlands, according to Maljers (2007) quoted by Mearns and de Graaff, (2018), It was originally implemented in a small number of schools in 1989 but has since expanded into a vast educational paradigm that is governed on a national scale. English has become a language of crucial importance in the international arena, and proficiency in English has increasingly been considered essential for global communication and educational and employment opportunities.

As bilingualism gained importance, specific bilingual education programmes were established at different levels of education. These programmes, known as 'tto' (Tweetalig Onderwijs), focused on teaching part of the curriculum in English, while the rest was taught in Dutch. According to the guide (see on <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/paisesbajos/dam/jcr:b2ff375a-a64e-47bf-8e72-1089082cffa6/guia-para-estudiar-en-pb.pdf>) to study in the Netherlands by the Spanish Embassy in Netherlands (2017, p. 13), 'although bilingual education used to be offered only to pupils going on to university preparatory education ('VWO'), in recent years it has been extended to general secondary education ('HAVO') and vocational preparatory education ('VMBO'). Currently, 130 secondary schools in the Netherlands offer bilingual education. This allows students to develop academic skills in both their mother tongue and English, giving them a competitive advantage in the globalised world.

In the 1990s, there was a major push towards bilingual education in the Netherlands with the creation of international schools and schools of international education. According to the guide to study in the Netherlands by the Spanish Embassy in Netherlands, each international school uses its own enrolment process. These institutions offered a bilingual or multilingual curriculum and were aimed primarily at international students or those from multicultural backgrounds. The aim was to provide high quality education and to promote bilingualism and intercultural understanding.

In addition, the Certificate of Bilingual Education (Cambridge English Language Assessment) was established as an official recognition of students' level of proficiency in English. As can be seen on its website (<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/bilingual-education/>), Cambridge offers cooperation and validation of bilingual centres for the promotion of English as a foreign language in many countries. This certificate has become very important and is considered a valuable credential for both higher education and employment.

Over the years, the Netherlands has promoted a variety of approaches to bilingual education, including language immersion programmes, early bilingual education, and education in two different languages. Some of these programmes and courses can be

found on websites such as IamExpat² or ESLbase³, which offer various language immersion courses or with English schools. These programmes aim to provide students with a solid foundation in two languages and foster an appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity.

On the other hand, the official languages are Dutch and Frisian, although English occupies a large part of today's Dutch society. As Mearns and Graaff (2018, p. 3) explain, 'Dutch society is relatively multicultural, with nearly 4 million of its 17 million inhabitants coming from a first or second-generation migrant background and approximately 110 different languages being spoken in homes across the country'.

According to the Eurydice report (2017), in the Netherlands, schools decide when to introduce the teaching of the first foreign language, although most schools do so when students are between 10 and 12 years old and make the subject compulsory for a period of between seven and nine years, while at the same time making the study of a second foreign language compulsory for five years (González, 2017).

To understand how bilingual education works in the Netherlands, it is necessary to recognise that secondary education (which starts at the age of 12) is divided into three areas: VWO (pre-university), HAVO (general), and VMBO (pre-vocational). Placement in each area depends on the recommendation of the primary school, which is based on the performance and characteristics of the students as well as on the results of primary school examinations (Eurydice report, 2017). It is also influenced by the preference of the students and their parents. However, English is taught throughout secondary education (Mearns & Graaff, 2018, p. 4).

However, bilingual education in each area is divided differently according to the Standard for Bilingual Education (European Platform, 2012), which requires that in the first 3 years of HAVO and VWO there should be at least 50% contact with English and 30% in VMBO. However, there is no national curriculum for vocational education: each qualification has its own programme designed to meet the needs of specific professions (Eurydice report, 2017).

² <https://www.iamexpat.nl/education/language-schools/english-courses-netherlands>

³ <https://www.eslbase.com/schools/netherlands>

Bilingual education does not include the teaching of official regional languages, but only bilingual education using only the foreign language. According to the Dutch Ministry of Education, more specifically in general upper secondary education, more than 60% study two or more foreign languages and in vocational upper secondary education at least 20% study two or more foreign languages. However, it is a compulsory subject with flexible time allocation, which allows each school to administer itself (Eurydice report, 2017).

According to González (2017, p. 68), ‘by the end of lower secondary education, students are expected to have acquired a level of proficiency B2 (Framework of Reference).

With regards to methodology, the models of bilingual education in this country are as follows:

- Bilingual programmes in primary and secondary schools: These programmes offer classes in both Dutch and English.
- International education programmes: The Netherlands has a number of international schools providing bilingual education, where classes are taught in English and follow an internationally recognised curriculum.
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): This approach is used in some schools where non-language subjects such as science or geography are taught in English. However, national regulations prohibit teaching in a language other than the official language before the age of 12 (Maljers & Wooning, 2003).

With regard to teachers, foreign language teachers in primary and general secondary education in the Netherlands are qualified to teach foreign languages only, and they are required to be native English speakers or to have an advanced level of English (C1-C2 according to the CEFR and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (Eurydice report, 2017).

According to the website www.datosmacro.expansion.com, public expenditure on education in the Netherlands increased by €3,267.7 million in 2018, reflecting an increase of 13.57% to €41,467.5 million. This educational expenditure constitutes

12.91% of total public expenditure.

4.2.2. Sweden

The history of bilingual education in Sweden is rooted in the country's linguistic and cultural diversity. Over the years, Sweden has undergone significant changes in its approach to education, especially in relation to language teaching and the promotion of bilingualism.

The official language of Sweden is Swedish (svenska). It is the main language used in public administration, education, media, and everyday interactions in the country. In addition to Swedish, other languages are recognised and spoken in Sweden, especially in minority communities and specific regions. The following languages are officially recognised in Sweden: Finnish, Sámi, and Meänkieli (also known as "Tornedal Finnish").

In recent decades, Sweden has shown a strong commitment to promoting bilingualism and multilingual education. One of the key factors driving this approach is the recognition of minority language rights and cultural diversity in the country (Galantini, 2014). Bilingual education in Sweden began to take shape in the 1960s, when policies were implemented to promote the teaching of foreign languages in schools due to the large increase of immigrants in Sweden (Galantini, 2014). The importance of learning languages other than Swedish was recognised, and bilingual education programmes were introduced to encourage competence in two languages since The European Year of Languages (2001) emphasised different ways of promoting learning and linguistic diversity (Galantini, 2014).

A significant change in Swedish education policy occurred with the adoption of the General Education Act (Skollagen, 2010). This Act established the right of students to receive bilingual and multilingual education and access to education in their mother tongue or in a recognised minority language, such as Sami. As Swedish society became more multicultural, bilingual education became an important component of education policy. Bilingual education programmes were introduced in several regions of the country since 1977 (García Granado, 2019). These programmes enabled students to develop academic skills in two languages and promoted respect and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity.

On the other hand, in Sweden, according to the guide to study in Sweden by the Spanish Embassy in Sweden (see on <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/suecia/dam/jcr:2de16be8-dff6-4953-b259-60b54371e63a/estudiar-en-suecia-2015--1-.pdf>), the education system is divided into several levels covering compulsory education and higher education. Below is an overview of the structure of education in Sweden:

- Pre-school education: Pre-school education in Sweden is optional and is intended for children between the ages of 1 and 5 years.
- Compulsory education (Grundskola): Compulsory education in Sweden, known as 'grundskola', covers nine years and is compulsory for all children aged 6 to 16. Compulsory education is divided into three cycles:
 - a) Primary School (Årskurs 1-3): students begin primary school at age 6 and continue through third grade.
 - b) Middle School (Årskurs 4-6): After primary school, students continue in middle school for grades 4-6.
 - c) Upper School (Årskurs 7-9): Upper school covers grades 7-9 and provides a more comprehensive and specialised education in different areas of knowledge. It prepares students for secondary education and national examinations.
- Upper secondary education (Gymnasieskola): Students have the choice to continue their education in upper secondary school, also known as "gymnasieskola," after finishing compulsory education. A range of academic and practical programs are available for upper secondary education, which is optional.
- Higher education: Universities, technical institutions, and schools of higher education all offer higher education in Sweden. Numerous academic and professional areas provide bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degree options for students.

The education laws specify that in addition to Swedish, the co-official languages Finnish and Sami must be taught, with the aim of ensuring that students belonging to minority communities in Sweden have the opportunity to learn and maintain their languages and cultures. Thus, bilingual education may be offered in some cases, where Swedish is combined with instruction in the minority language. However, in this country it is not compulsory to learn two foreign languages before leaving compulsory full-time

education.

On the other hand, according to the Eurydice report (2017, p. 164) Although the federal education administration defines an age range between 7 and 10, i.e., in obligatory education especially at primary school level, Sweden is free to choose in which grade the first foreign language is offered as a requirement. Additionally, the minimum education curriculum includes the choice of two foreign languages from the age of seven to sixteen, and up to three languages beginning at the age of sixteen. All students must take one foreign language between the ages of 16 and 19, but in addition to English, schools must also offer three other languages. During these years, students may choose certain pathways or types of schools in which they have to study two foreign languages as compulsory subjects. The number of hours in which this foreign language is taught is 480 hours during the academic year. (Eurydice report, 2017)

In bilingual education in Sweden, work is also carried out in the country's minority or regional languages. However, in general upper secondary education, 80% of the students' study 2 or more foreign languages and in vocational upper secondary education almost 100% of the students study at least one foreign language (Eurydice report, 2017).

Teachers teaching foreign languages in lower secondary education are semi-specialist teachers while teachers in general upper secondary education are specialised teachers of the subject. In addition, teachers are required to be native English speakers or have an advanced level of English (C1-C2 according to CEFR and IELTS).

In Sweden, a communicative approach to language teaching is implemented. Emphasis is placed on the development of listening and speaking skills from the earliest stages. Interactive activities, games, dialogues, and practice of real-life situations are used to encourage students' active participation. In addition, the integration of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in language learning is encouraged, using digital resources and applications.

According to the website www.datosmacro.expansion.com, public expenditure on education in Sweden decreased by 368.9 million in 2018, or 3.65%, to €35,963.4 million, accounting for 15.67% of total public expenditure.

4.2.3. Malta

The history of the evolution of bilingual education in Malta is fascinating and is intrinsically linked to the country's rich history and culture. Malta, an archipelago located in the Mediterranean Sea, has undergone a number of changes in its educational approach over the years, especially in relation to bilingualism (Camilleri, 2013 and Vella, 2013).

For many centuries, Malta was under the influence of various colonial powers, including the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, and the British (Alvarez, 2005). These cultural and linguistic influences left an indelible mark on the country's education. In the 19th century, Malta was colonised by the British, and English became the official language. This had a significant impact on education, as English was introduced into the school system and became the main language of instruction (Camilleri, 2013). However, Maltese, a Semitic language descended from Arabic, continued to be widely spoken and used in everyday life.

According to Camilleri (2013), during this colonial period, the education system in Malta was dominated by English education, which led to a certain marginalisation of Maltese in schools. However, as Maltese nationalism grew and the country's cultural identity was sought to be preserved and promoted, there was a gradual shift towards a more balanced bilingual education.

In 1936, an official policy was implemented that recognised Maltese as a co-official language alongside English. This led to the introduction of Maltese as a medium of instruction in primary schools and the teaching of English as a foreign language was promoted. This was an important step towards valuing and promoting Maltese in education (Zammit, 1992). In the following decades, bilingual education in Malta continued to evolve. Bilingual programmes were established in secondary schools, with the aim of ensuring that students acquired competence in both Maltese and English (Camilleri, 2013). In addition, official Maltese and English language examinations were introduced to assess students' language skills.

Today, bilingual education in Malta remains an important aspect of the country's education system. The importance of maintaining and promoting both Maltese and English has been recognised and efforts have been made to ensure that students acquire

competences in both languages (Mifsud & Vella, 2018). This has contributed to Malta's linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as to its position in the international arena.

Nowadays, Maltese is still the official language of Malta and English continues to have official status and is also widely used in everyday life, especially in business, tourism and international communication (Vella, 2013, p.7). It is worth noting that Malta also has a regional language called Gozitan, which is spoken mainly on the island of Gozo, one of Malta's main islands. However, although English is an official language, for statistical purposes it is counted as a foreign language. Gozitan, as a regional variant of Maltese, is not taught as such in Maltese schools. In the Maltese education system, the main focus is on the teaching and promotion of Standard Maltese (Vella, 2013), which is the official language of the country. Standard Maltese is used in all educational institutions, including primary and secondary schools.

In Malta, the education system is divided into several levels covering compulsory education and higher education. Below is an overview of the structure of education in Malta:

- Pre-school Education: In Malta, pre-school instruction is elective and geared toward kids between the ages of 3 and 5 years old.
- Primary Education is a six-year program that is required for all students between the ages of 5 and 11 and lasts six years.
- Secondary Education: Secondary education in Malta is divided into two cycles: the first cycle, which covers three years, and the second cycle, which covers a further two years. During secondary education, students study a wider range of subjects and can choose from different areas of focus, such as humanities, science, or technical and vocational studies.
- Post-secondary and Tertiary Education: After completing secondary education, students have the option to continue their education at post-secondary and tertiary institutions. These institutions offer a variety of programmes and courses of study, including vocational, technical, and academic programmes.

In Malta, 14.9% of teaching time is devoted to foreign language teaching. However, teaching is provided in both Maltese and English in all state schools. Foreign language hours per academic year range from 118 to 190 hours (Eurydice report, 2017).

According to Eurydice report (2017):

‘all students begin to study English as a foreign language at age 5. A compulsory second language is introduced at age 11. The compulsory two-language requirement (one of which must be English) is extended to age 16. Also, from the age of 13, all students in certain educational pathways have to study a third foreign language until the age of 16. From the age of 16, all schools must offer at least seven languages as optional subjects. Students taking the entrance examination for higher education must study at least one of these languages. In general upper secondary education, more than 60% of students study 2 or more foreign languages, and in tertiary education 100% of students study a foreign language.’ (p. 162)

Foreign language teachers are qualified to teach one or more foreign languages as well as other subjects. In addition, teachers are required to be native English speakers or to have an advanced level of English (C1-C2 according to the CEFR and IELTS) (Eurydice, 2017).

Language teaching in Malta is based on a communicative and practical approach. The use of the target language in real-life situations is encouraged and oral and written interaction is promoted. Interactive activities, role-plays, discussions and listening exercises are used to develop communication skills.

According to the website www.datosmacro.expansion.com, public expenditure on education in Malta grew by €19.2 million in 2017, or 5.72%, to €555.2 million, accounting for 13.37% of total public expenditure.

4.3. Analysis of bilingual education in Spain

The history of bilingual education in Spain has arisen from the need to foster competence in languages other than Spanish and to promote bilingual education as part of the education system.

According to Aparicio (2009), in 1996, when many Spanish-language schools adopted bilingualism as a new approach to teaching, it started to be used as a model for education. The introduction of a bilingual curriculum in 42 Spanish-speaking schools was made possible by a partnership agreement between the Ministry of Education and the British Council in the same year. This indicated that English was taught for 40% of

In 2004, the Bilingual Education Programme was established in Spain, with the aim of extending bilingual education nationwide. This programme was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the different Autonomous Communities of the country. The programme initially focused on the teaching of English as a foreign language, although it was later extended to include other languages such as French and German (Soriano, 2021, pp. 5-6).

Over the years, bilingual education in Spain has evolved in terms of approach and scope. Different models of bilingual education have been developed, such as the CLIL model, which combines the teaching of academic content with the teaching of a second language (Soriano, 2021, p. 10). This approach has enabled students to acquire knowledge in different areas while developing their language skills in a bilingual environment.

In addition, agreements and exchange programmes have been established with other countries to promote language immersion and foreign language learning, such as grants for English language immersion courses organised by the Melendez Pelayo International University with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education. These programmes give students the opportunity to study abroad and live in an environment where the target language is spoken, allowing them to improve their fluency and understanding of the language.

However, it is important to note that the implementation of bilingual education in Spain has not been without challenges. Some of the challenges, according to Custodio (2019, p. 7), are the following:

Challenge 1. CLIL teacher training should be designed from a holistic perspective of 'CLIL teaching competence'. Language competence is a necessary but not a sufficient condition.

Challenge 2. The definition of competences and the identification of competence profiles can and should guide the design of future initial and in-service training plans for CLIL teachers in order to optimise time, effort and resources and

guarantee a greater impact on the teaching profession as a whole.

Challenge 3. The qualification should cover CLIL competence and not only language competence which, although essential, is not sufficient to guarantee quality bilingual teaching. (p. 7)

In addition to all this, it is crucial to remind that several languages are spoken in Spain, with Spanish (Castilian) being the official and most widely spoken language throughout the country. However, other co-official languages are also recognised in certain autonomous regions. These are:

- Catalan: It is spoken mainly in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and the Valencian Community, where it is known as Valencian.
- Galician: The official language of Galicia, in north-western Spain.
- Euskera: Also known as Basque, it is spoken in the Basque Country and parts of Navarre.
- Aranese: Spoken in the Aran Valley, located in the province of Lérida, in Catalonia.

In Spain, the education system is composed of several compulsory and non-compulsory educational stages. The main stages are described below:

1. Infant Education (Pre-school Education): This is the non-compulsory stage up to the age of 6. It is divided into two cycles: the first from 0 to 3 years of age and the second from 3 to 6 years of age.
2. Primary Education: This is the first stage of compulsory education and runs from 6 to 12 years of age. It comprises six academic years, from the first to the sixth.
3. Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO): This is the compulsory stage of education from the age of 12 to 16. It is structured in four academic years, from the first to the fourth year of ESO.
4. Baccalaureate: This is a non-compulsory stage which is generally taken from the age of 16 to 18. It comprises two academic years and provides more specialised training in different areas: sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Upon completion, students obtain the *Bachiller* diploma and are prepared to enter higher education.
5. Vocational Education and Training (VET): Vocational Education and Training

(VET) offers educational programmes oriented towards technical and vocational training. It is divided into intermediate (2-year) and advanced (2-year) training cycles in various subject areas. These programmes enable students to enter the world of work or to continue on to higher education.

After these stages, students can opt for university education, either by pursuing undergraduate studies at universities or higher education institutions, or by continuing their education in other fields, such as continuing vocational education or adult education.

According to Eurydice (2017):

‘All students must begin to study a foreign language on a compulsory basis from the age of 6. In four Autonomous Communities (Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, and the Valencian Community), the starting age for the first foreign language as a compulsory subject is 3 years; in two (Principado de Asturias and the Canary Islands), it is 4 years. In some Autonomous Communities (Castilla-La Mancha, the Valencian Community, Principado de Asturias, the Canary Islands and La Rioja), this language must be English. [...] all general education students between the ages of 12 and 18 may select a second foreign language since schools are required to provide at least one foreign language as an elective in the basic education curriculum. This choice is accessible to residents of several autonomous communities as early as age 10 or 11, including the Region of Murcia and the Canary Islands. Along with Cantabria and Galicia, these two are the only regions in which learning a second foreign language is a required topic in the curriculum. In Cantabria and Galicia, it is required beginning at the age of 12, while in the Region of Murcia and the Canary Islands, it begins at the age of 10.’ (p. 160)

According to Eurydice (2017) in Spain, foreign language teaching accounts for approximately 11% of total instructional time, thus spending from 77 hours to 126 hours per academic year. Almost all students (97.5%) study English in general upper secondary education, but only 20.4% do so in vocational education, so that by the end of their school education, all students in vocational education will have studied a foreign language on a compulsory basis for at least 10 years, particularly in the Autonomous Communities where they start learning

their first language before the age of 6.

In general upper secondary education, just over 20% of students study two or more languages and 5% do not study any foreign language; and in vocational upper secondary education, almost 80% of students do not study any foreign language.

As can be seen in the table below, teacher training also varies according to the Autonomous Community:

Table 7. Teacher training and requirements for bilingual education in Spain.

CC. AA.	MCER	PIFL/M (1)	Vigencia (2)	Mérito (3)	Incentivo (4)	Dedicación horaria (5)	Otras actuaciones (6)
Andalucía	B2			Mérito		Sí	PEE
Aragón	B2				Créditos	Sí	
Asturias	B2				Créditos	Sí	PEE
Baleares	B2	Sí	3 años	Mérito	Créditos	Sí	
Canarias	B2	Sí		Certifica		Sí	
Cantabria	B2		Indefinida	Certifica	Créditos	Sí	Ayudas
Castilla y León	B2					Sí	
Castilla La Mancha	B2			Mérito	Económico	Sí	PEE
Cataluña	B2			Certifica	Créditos		PEE
C. Valenciana	B2	Sí		Mérito			
Extremadura	B2	Sí		Mérito	Ambos	Sí	Ayudas
Galicia	B2			Certifica	Créditos	Sí	Ayudas
Madrid	C1		3 años	Mérito	Económico	Sí	Ayudas
Murcia	B2			Certifica	Créditos	Sí	Ayudas
Navarra	C1					Sí	
País Vasco	B2					Sí	Ayudas
La Rioja	B2	Sí			Créditos	Sí	
Ceuta	B2	Sí				Sí	
Melilla	B2	Sí				Sí	

Leyenda. 1. Plan inicial de formación lingüística/metodológica. 2. Vigencia de la habilitación necesaria para impartir en programas bilingües. 3. Reconocimiento de la participación en el programa como mérito específico en las convocatorias y concursos. 4. Reconocimiento de créditos de formación o complemento de productividad o ambos. 5. Dedicación de horas de docencia del profesorado bilingüe al programa bilingüe para programación, formación, elaboración de materiales, etc. 6. Programas educativos europeos que incluyen acciones dirigidas al profesorado o ayudas a la formación

Source: Custodio (2019)

In Spain, language teaching is mainly based on communicative and practical approaches. The development of oral and written communication skills is promoted through interactive activities such as role-plays, debates, discussions and projects. A combination of teaching materials is used, such as textbooks, multimedia resources and online activities. In addition, the importance of language immersion is emphasised and the use of the target language is encouraged both inside and outside the classroom.

According to the website www.datosmacro.expansion.com, public spending on education in Spain grew by 1,384.1 million in 2018, or 7.58%, to 50,299.2 million euros, accounting for 10.03% of total public spending.

4.4. Comparison of bilingual education in Europe and Spain

After the different analyses, the following differences can be found between the 3 countries with the highest foreign language proficiency and Spain:

Table 8. Comparison of bilingual education in Europe and Spain.

	Spain	Malta	Sweden	Netherlands
Age of onset to the first foreign language	Decisions are made by the Autonomous Communities, but at around 6 years of age	5 years old	7-10 years old	10-12 years old
Hours taught per academic year	77-126 hours depending on the course	118-190 hours depending on the course	480 hours	Not specified
Study of foreign language in professional secondary education	20% one language	100% one language	100% one language	+60% on e language 20% two or more languages
Language qualification of the	B2-C1 (the latter in only two	C1-C2	C1-C2	C1-C2

specialist teacher	Autonomous Communities)			
Public expenditure on education	10.03% of total public spending	13.37% of total public expenditure	15.67% of total public expenditure	12.91% of total public expenditure
What languages does bilingual education focus on?	First foreign language, regional languages	First foreign language, regional languages in Gozo Island	First foreign language	First foreign language, regional languages
Number of foreign languages studied	One foreign language in Primary Education Two foreign languages in secondary education	One foreign language in Primary Education Two foreign languages in secondary education Seven optional foreign languages	Two foreign languages in Primary Education Three foreign languages in secondary education	One foreign language in Primary Education Two or more foreign languages in secondary education

Source: Own elaboration

On the other hand, based on the information previously provided, certain similarities in the field of bilingual education between Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Malta can be defined:

Priority focus on English: All four countries focus mainly on the learning of English as a foreign language. English is considered a very important tool for global communication and is taught intensively in bilingual education programmes.

Development of oral skills: All countries prioritise the development of oral skills in the foreign language. Bilingual education programmes focus on fostering fluency and effective communication in the target language.

Division into educational stages: The education systems of the four countries are structured into different stages, such as primary, secondary and tertiary education. The implementation of bilingual education takes place in different stages, with specific programmes adapted to each educational level.

Government support: In all countries there is government support to promote bilingual education and language learning. Bilingual education programmes are financially supported and implemented in collaboration with government agencies and education authorities.

Valuing linguistic diversity: All four countries recognise and value linguistic diversity. In addition to English, the learning of other foreign languages such as French, German or Spanish is encouraged, depending on the country and local language preferences.

5. Response to the problem posed

As can be seen, the differences are clear between these 4 countries. The clearest difference between them is the knowledge of the first foreign language (English) and it can be seen that the methodology of bilingual education is not the main problem as they share the same objectives.

However, a big difference can be seen in the number of years that bilingual education has been implemented in education as well as in the public spending on education in each country and teacher training. From this and my previous knowledge

of the Spanish education system, I can draw the main axes of the changes that could be made in Spain to improve bilingual education as well as the knowledge of foreign languages.

- First axis: how long to learn the foreign language. Although Spain is not the country that starts learning the language the latest, it can be seen that it is the country that finishes learning it the soonest, since in vocational and higher education, languages are no longer a subject that is implemented in education.

Possible solutions to this problem could include the following:

1. Integration of languages into vocational training curriculum: It is crucial to incorporate language teaching into the curriculum at all stages of education, including vocational and higher education. This implies establishing language programmes that allow students to continue to develop their language skills throughout their education.
2. More time devoted to language teaching: The number of hours devoted to language teaching in the curriculum can be increased at least 200 hours per academic year (half as long as in Sweden but more than twice as long as in Spain). This would provide students with more opportunities to practice and acquire strong language skills.
3. Transidiomatic practices focused on oral communication: It is essential that language teaching focuses on the development of oral communication skills. This involves providing regular opportunities for students to practise speaking and listening in real-life situations. Bearing in mind that in Spain the ratio is high (25 pupils for Pre-school and Primary Education, 30 in ESO and 35 in Baccalaureate, according to the *Real Decreto 1004/1991, de 14 de junio, por el que se establecen los requisitos mínimos de los Centros que impartan enseñanzas de régimen general no universitarias*), these activities that work on communicative competence could be worked on through group projects, both in small groups and in large groups.
4. Use of active methodologies: Active methodologies, such as project-based learning, teamwork and interactive activities, can make language learning more meaningful and motivating. These methodologies encourage learners' active participation and allow them to apply their

language skills in real-life contexts.

5. Promoting international exchanges and experiences: Encouraging student exchanges and international mobility programmes can provide students with immersive experiences in the foreign language and culture, strengthening their communicative competence, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Some of these programmes include the Erasmus+ programme which gives university students the opportunity to study in another European country or the Language Conversation Assistants programme which allows native English speakers to work as conversation assistants in Spanish schools.
 6. According to Mora (2013), the optimal age to learn a language is between 3 and 5 years old because the brain has critical periods of learning due to the fact that at that age the brain's neuroplasticity is optimal at that stage. Brain neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to recover, restructure and adapt to new situations. Therefore, if we allow pupils at this age to be stimulated by several foreign languages, they will develop a vital neuroplasticity for language learning, which will help them to improve their knowledge of different languages in the future. We must see the child as a sponge that is capable of absorbing any knowledge, as there are no barriers that impede the acquisition of learning.
- Second axis: public spending on education. As can be seen on table 8, Spain spends little more than 10% of public expenditure on education, which limits the resources available to improve school infrastructure, provide up-to-date materials, and support continuous teacher training. The lack of adequate investment has a direct impact on the quality of education and hinders the implementation of new pedagogical approaches and innovative educational programmes.

There are a number of solutions that could address the problem of underinvestment in education in Spain. The following are some possible solutions:

1. Increase the education budget: A key solution would be to allocate a higher percentage of the public budget to education. This would allow for more resources to improve school infrastructure, purchase up-to-

date materials, and provide adequate support for teachers.

2. Prioritise education in public policy: It is essential that education is considered a priority in public policy. Governments must recognise the importance of investing in education as a long-term investment in the development and well-being of society.
 3. Improve efficiency and transparency in resource management: It is important to promote efficient and transparent management of education resources. This involves ensuring that allocated funds are used effectively and corruption is minimised. The implementation of oversight and accountability mechanisms can help to achieve more efficient management.
 4. Encourage public-private partnerships: Public-private partnerships can be a viable solution. Partnerships with companies and organisations can provide additional resources for education, whether through donations, sponsorships, or corporate social responsibility programmes.
 5. Seek European funding and international cooperation: Spain can explore opportunities for funding through European education programmes and funds. In addition, international cooperation with other countries and organisations can help to obtain additional resources and share good practices in improving educational investment, such as the Horizon Europe programme, i.e., the EU's research and innovation programme for the period 2021-2027. It funds projects in various fields, including education, training, and skills development. It can be an option to fund educational projects with a focus on research and innovation.
- Third axis: teacher training. It is clear that adequate teacher training can be decisive in the search for quality teaching, but despite the fact that 80% of foreign language teachers have gone abroad for training purposes (Eurydice, 2017, p. 178), it would be a good idea to require more specific training (master's degree or similar) to ensure that the teaching they provide is of high quality, in the case in point, specific training in bilingual education seems essential, since, at least in Primary Education, the simple fact of having a language qualification is more than enough to be able to teach in that language.
- Similarly, the B2 level is a rather 'low' level for a teacher who is going to

promote the knowledge of a language to students, so it should be discussed how convenient it is for foreign language teachers to have a more advanced level in order to be able to give lessons in the same language.

On the other hand, another problem can be said to lie in the allocation of bilingual posts or placements to teachers and professors. These posts are usually offered as interim posts (vacancies or replacements), thus creating a clear tendency for bilingual subjects to be taught, on many occasions, by teachers with less experience or with very little training or interest in bilingual education, since the few requirements for access to bilingual education mean that anyone can do it. In addition, resistance to change on the part of some educational actors also represents a challenge. Some teachers, parents, and other members of the education community may show resistance or scepticism towards new methodologies or pedagogical approaches, which hinders the adoption of necessary educational reforms. The lack of a common vision and culture of change in education can hinder efforts to improve the education system as a whole.

- Fourth axis: educational laws. In the different countries we have seen, the policy recommendations governing bilingual and foreign language education were national laws regulating all education. In Spain, each Autonomous Community has its own educational law, which means that there is no political unity that regulates all aspects of education. Therefore, in my opinion, in order to seek a national change in social aspects, we should start by unifying the laws in all the regions, which would make it easier to go all together. To solve the challenge of unifying education laws in all regions of Spain, the following solutions can be considered:
 1. Inter-regional dialogue and cooperation: It is essential to promote dialogue and cooperation between the different Autonomous Communities. This implies fostering meeting spaces where decision-makers, educators, parents, and other relevant actors can discuss and share their perspectives. The aim is to seek common ground and work together to develop a unified educational framework.
 2. Establish a common national framework: A national educational framework could be developed that sets minimum standards and fundamental principles for all regions. This framework would provide

a common basis on which each Autonomous Community could build its specific education laws, adapted to its particular needs and characteristics.

3. Coordination and sharing of good practice: Facilitating the coordination and sharing of good practice across regions can help to identify successful approaches and effective methods that can be applied more widely. This could be done through collaborative networks, experience exchange programmes, and the establishment of peer learning platforms.

Fifth axis: families. Currently, there is no significant orientation or relationship with families in most schools. This problem does not only affect bilingual schools but is widespread in Spanish education. However, it is a big problem for families whose foreign language and academic level is low, because in addition to having difficulties in helping their children, they have the handicap of language. For this reason, we consider it appropriate to strengthen the educational guidance teams.

These teams have sufficient skills and knowledge to guide families, thus facilitating their decision-making in relation to their children's education. Obviously, this type of information is important in the choice of primary school. For this reason, we believe that guidance for families should begin before children are enrolled in school. In this way, the guidance teams could guide families and provide them with the necessary information so that they can make more effective and informed decisions for the education of their children. Obviously, after the children's schooling, family counselling can continue to be carried out as at present, through the students' guardians and with the support of the educational guidance teams.

Through the analysis of the various education systems in Europe and Spain's own experience in the field of education, it is clear that there are many opportunities for change, which can be classified into five main areas: the duration of foreign language study, public spending, teacher training, education laws, and family participation. Some changes are extremely challenging for teachers, as they require a transformation at governmental and public policy level. However, there are other changes that are accessible to all of us and that could contribute to improving our education in every academic cycle.

6. Conclusions

Implementing significant changes in Spain's education system can be a complex challenge due to a number of reasons. However, the most significant ones for me are the scarcity of public investment in education and the lack of adequate teacher training. These factors negatively influence the quality of education and make it difficult to implement the reforms needed to improve the system.

Spain allocates a relatively low percentage of its total budget to education, which limits the resources available to improve school infrastructure, provide up-to-date materials and support continuous teacher training. The lack of adequate investment has a direct impact on the quality of education and hinders the implementation of new pedagogical approaches and innovative educational programmes.

In addition, although some teachers have received initial training in foreign language teaching, most lack adequate preparation in bilingual teaching methods and language skills development. This may limit their ability to teach effectively and to foster a stimulating and enriching learning environment for students.

Lack of training also extends to teaching new educational methodologies, using digital technologies and adapting to the educational needs of an ever-changing society. Without adequate and up-to-date training, teachers may feel disoriented and unprepared to implement significant changes in their pedagogical practices.

Overcoming these challenges requires a long-term commitment from both policy makers and society as a whole. Increased public investment in education is essential to provide the necessary resources and infrastructure. This includes improving school facilities, acquiring up-to-date educational materials and implementing continuous teacher training programmes.

This paper has found important clues that could help to improve the Spanish education system, specifically in the field of bilingual education. These clues point to promising opportunities to enrich students' learning process and improve their dual language skills.

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