



Literature Review

An Approximation to What Language Immersion Programs are Like

Una aproximación a cómo son los programas de inmersión en lengua

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Abstract

In this article, I present the results from an analysis that looked at relevant studies in relation to language immersion programs (and similar ones), as well as their implementation in various contexts. First, I will show how the concept of immersion has evolved and been shaped and re-shaped through time and different geo-political positions. Second, I will problematize language immersion programs and their implementation based on a decolonial perspective.

Key words: decolonial perspective, language immersion programs

Resumen

En este artículo mi objetivo es presentar los resultados del análisis de los estudios más importantes desarrollados acerca del concepto de programas de inmersión en lengua (y unos conceptos similares) así como su implementación en varios contextos. En primera medida, mostraré cómo el concepto de inmersión ha evolucionado y se ha formado y re-formado a través del tiempo y diferentes posiciones geo-políticas. En segunda medida, problematizaré dicho concepto y su implementación desde una perspectiva decolonial.

Palabras clave: perspectiva decolonial, programas de inmersión en lengua

Introduction

In this article, I describe the most relevant theoretical constructs related to immersion programs in relation to language. Also, I will show the concept has evolved and has been adapted under various contexts. Consequently, I support the need to understand the concept of immersion from a decolonial perspective, as well as how implementing language immersion programs impact geo-political contexts.

In the first part of this text, I will present where, when, and who has published research or theory-based articles regarding language immersion programs. The second part of this article will be devoted to defining the concept of immersion, how it has been used under various geo-political contexts, and, as a result, the emergence of new concepts or re-conceptualization of the former. In the third part of this document, the reader will find information about the implementation of language immersion programs in Colombia. In the next part of the paper, I describe the decolonial perspective in relation to the implementation of language immersion programs. Finally, I present my conclusion based on the information presented.

Profiling about Language Immersion Programs

Castañeda-Peña (2012, p. 10) mentioned the relevance of profiling academic fields “to undertake more informed research processes.” Profiling in research refers to considering all possible areas of interest in regard to the topic of study, rather than the mere topic per-se. In order to profile language immersion programs, I decided to search for information provided by the database SCOPUS (Elsevier’s abstract and citation database launched in 2004). By limiting the search to the key words *immersion*, *program*, *dual immersion*, *two-way immersion*, *English*, *Spanish* and *Colombia*, I found results that could answer the following three fundamental questions: 1. Who has published in relation to Language Immersion Programs? 2. Where (what countries and academic journals) have publications in relation to Language Immersion Programs been issued? 3. When have publications in relation to Language Immersion Programs been issued? The results were grounded upon a biometric analysis and a Vantage Point software analysis.

It is important to mention that the more limits added to the search in the database, the narrower and more specific the results. Initially, I started searching with the key word *immersion programs*, for which the amount of publications overpassed two thousand (2,000). Therefore, I

decided to include more specific key words, similar concepts or constructs related to immersion programs, and a limit on the language of publication. Additionally, I focused on information published about/from or in any connection with Colombia (to make connections with my own local context).

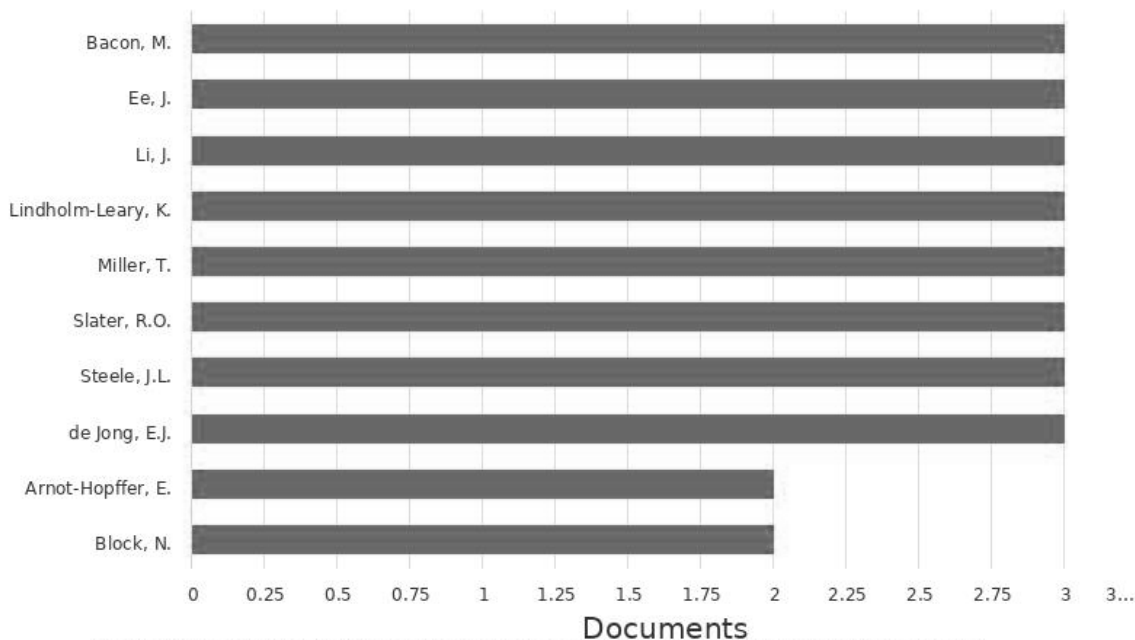
When narrowing the search to *Language Immersion Programs* the number lowered to almost eight hundred (800). After limiting the search to *Two-way, English and Spanish language*, as well as the area of interest to *social studies* and *human sciences*, the result lowered to less than six hundred (600). Once the key words *Dual immersion programs* and *Immersion education* were included, the search number lowered to less than fifty (50) sources. One of the things I found interesting about the findings was that authors like Genesse, who has written a lot about language immersion programs, did not have any connection to other constructs about immersion, even if they were similar or coined by other authors. The previous demonstrated how the initial concept has evolved, changed, or been used differently by authors or contexts (time and place) to the point that the same concept can mean something different or exclusive.

In the initial findings, I found various types of immersion concepts, such as one related to chemistry (chemical solutions and their reactions under different circumstances). I also found studies on programs offered overseas, such as internships or assistantships, especially in the fields of medicine (for doctors, nurses, and medical students). Other articles reported on religious communities that promote social work in other contexts. This information shows an example of the type of concepts that do exist in the academic field, but that are unrelated to language immersion programs exclusively.

As mentioned previously, I sought to answer three fundamental questions. The first one was *Who has published in relation to Language Immersion Programs?* The following figure displays the last names of the authors and number of articles published by each one found on the SCOPUS database.

Figure 1

Documents by author in relation to Language Immersion Programs



Note. Taken from Elsevier (2019).

It can be inferred by the information above that there is a significant number of authors, 8 out of 15, whose research interests focus on immersion programs. For this search, concepts like two-way immersion and dual immersion programs were at the core. Because of this, previously mentioned authors like Genesse or Cummins, are not present in the chart. The timeline for the search was between 1991 and 2019. Despite sharing the same terminology as the first articles on immersion programs published in the mid to late 1970s, the concepts, implementations, and processes have different meanings. The authors listed in the graph have all published more than 2 article each about language immersion programs (Dual Immersion Programs or two-way immersion). Also, it is important to highlight the fact that ten authors have published 28 articles about the same topic in a 25-year span. Therefore, it is evident that the topic of language immersion programs remains relevant in the fields of learning-teaching and bilingual education.

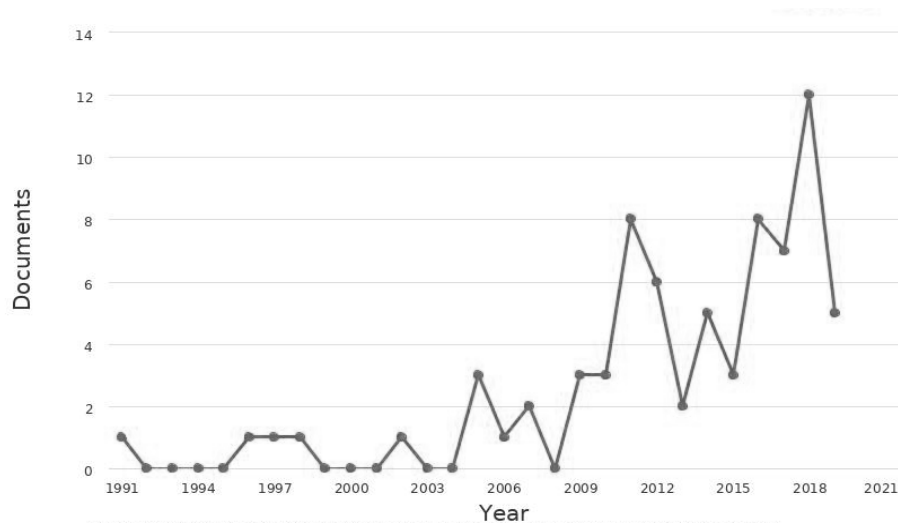
The second aspect of this analysis focused on when articles were published with immersion programs as the main topic. In Figure 2, we see an increase in language immersion programs as a

research topic over time, especially after the year 2000. Publications reached the highest point in 2018 with 12 articles being published in total. It is also noteworthy that when I conducted this analysis, five articles had already been published by mid-2019. Therefore, the number of articles for 2019 could possibly exceed the previous year.

Though the number of articles increased after the year 2000, it is fundamental to understand that the topic of immersion is not new in the fields of language teaching and learning. The first research reports on this topic were published in the early 1970s. However, they were not under the scope of dual immersion or bilingual education; rather, they were under the umbrella term of immersion programs.

Figure 2

Number of documents related to Language Immersion published by year



Note. Taken from Elsevier (2019).

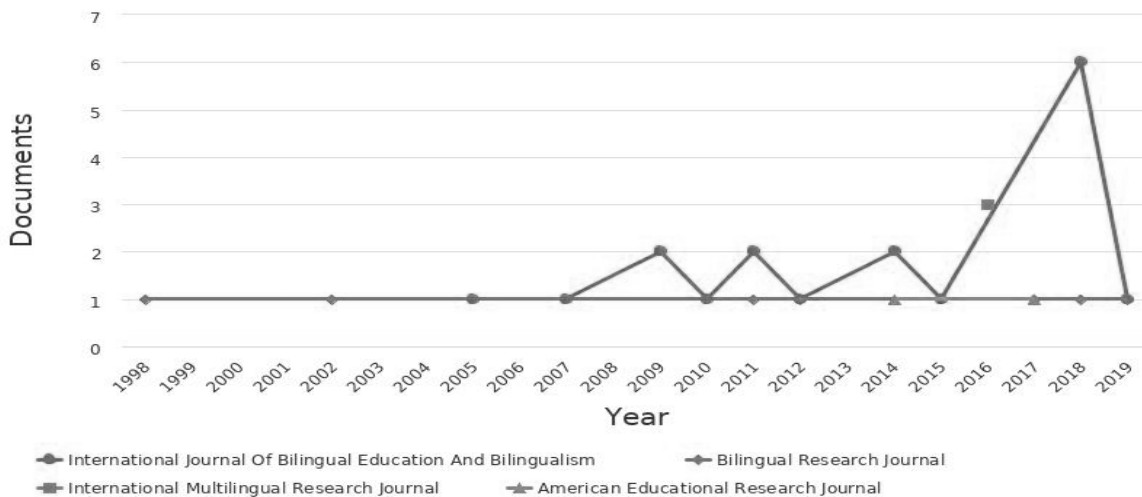
Thirdly, I analyzed in which journals the articles were published in to understand where research interests and implementation were coming from (see Chart 3). The majority of articles were published in 4 academic journals in the past twenty years. The highest number of articles

were published in the International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism with more than 16 articles in the last twelve years. Given the previous, it is possible that this topic is relevant to language teaching and learning and, more importantly, to bilingual education and where this type of education is implemented and promoted. Another important fact to mention is the country where these articles come from. Over 97% of the articles are originally from the United States. The other 3% is distributed among various countries. It is relevant to mention that it was not possible to find any articles in the database related to immersion programs in Colombia, which was one of the interests of this study.

The other three journals I found that published articles about immersion programs were International Multilingual Research Journal, Bilingual Research Journal, and American Education Research Journal. It was also surprising to find no Colombian journals mentioned given that the country has had a National Bilingual Program for almost 20 years. In this time, the country has promoted the growth of academic journals and publications related to language teaching and learning and immersion programs.

Figure 3

Representation of what journals have published articles related to immersion programs



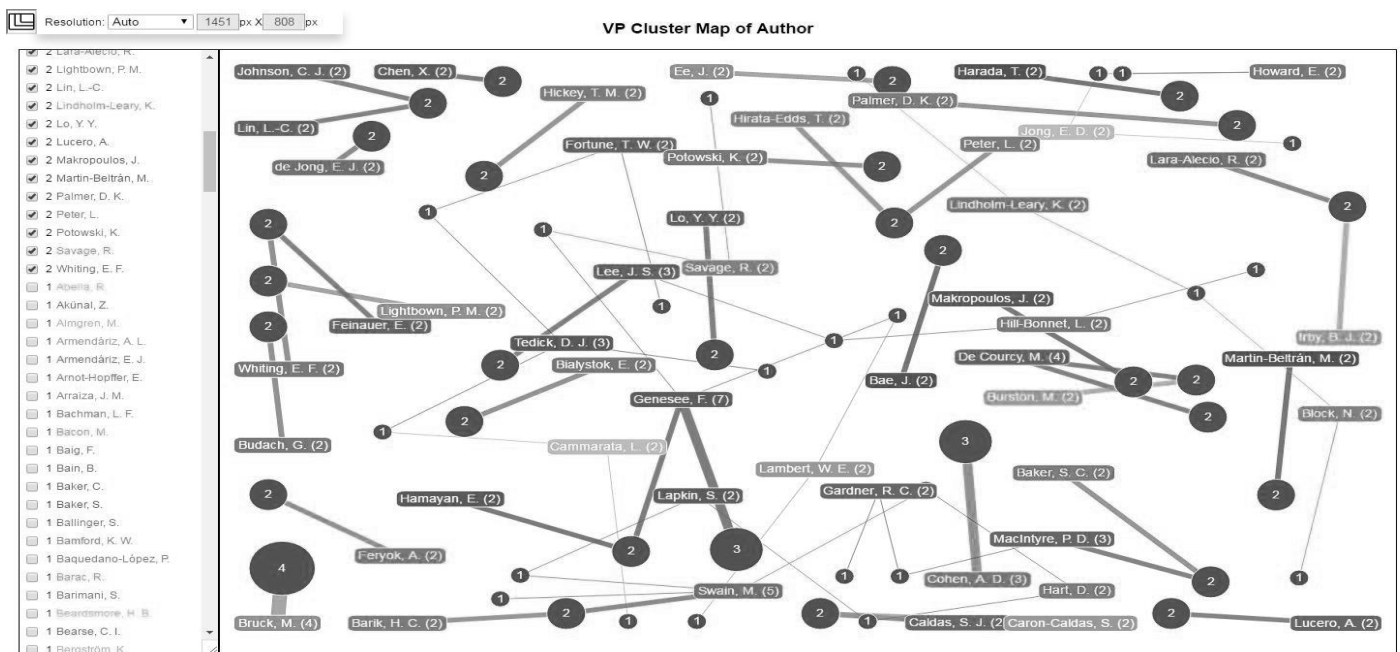
Note. Taken from Elsevier (2019).

Another source of information that has to do with the topic of interest for this research is the one obtained from the map cluster of authors who have published about immersion programs, immersion education, dual immersion programs and two-way immersions. The figure below was the result of using Vantage Point, for which I entered the previous information that I used to answer the who, when, and where of immersion programs publications.

In Figure 4, we can see the relationship among the authors, whose research interests are the same, but they have had different views and experiences about language immersion programs. I would like to highlight the connections authors have amongst themselves based on the fact that they may have researched together, influenced others, or grounded their studies on others' previous studies. In addition, certain authors have worked by themselves at least twice, while others are linked with two, three, and up to four authors. Finally, the selected group of authors was chosen based on the fact that they have written at least two articles and were selected by the database.

Figure 4

Cluster map of authors who have written about immersion programs

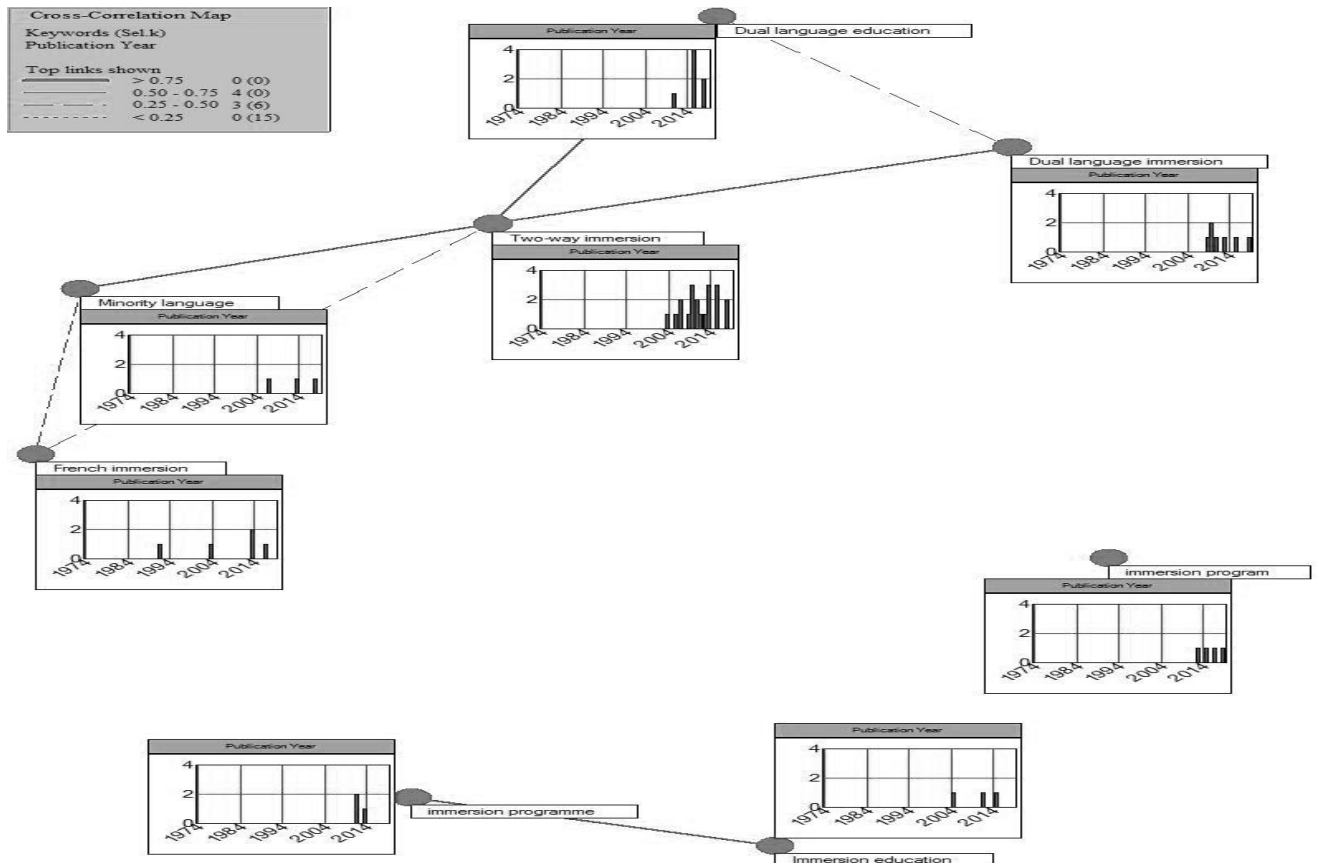


Note. Created by the author utilizing Vantage Point software analysis.

The last figure displays the analysis of the constructs for this study, which are: dual language education, dual language immersion, two-way immersion, immersion program, and minority language. Based on this figure and the previous ones, it is evident that authors have connected the concepts in their work. When the first articles were published in the mid-1970s, the topics were related to French immersion in Canada. Since then, studies have tried to replicate this concept, while introducing innovations that have re-shaped or created new concepts depending on the author. It is also noticeable how after the year 2000 there was a significant increase in articles about immersion programs.

Figure 5

Constructs related to Immersion Programs



Note. Created by the author using Vantage Point software analysis.

To wrap up the first part of this paper about language immersion program articles published between 1991 and 2019, I would like to mention that the definition of immersion has varied depending on who, when, and where it is used. This fact was evident in the connections and interactions among authors. The second and most interesting aspect understood from this analysis is the growing tendency to put into practice and research about language immersion program implementation (replicate) in the last two decades. In the following paragraphs, I will approach language immersion program implementation from a decolonial perspective.

Language Immersion Programs

In this section, the reader will find research reports on language immersion programs from different contexts and time periods, which will show how relevant and significant this practice has become in the field of language teaching.

To begin the second part of this paper, it is fundamental to introduce the concept of immersion coined by Genesse (1984). The author carried out more than three decades of research in immersion implementation in Canada as a response to

the concerns of a group of English-speaking parents in Quebec that existing methods of teaching French, as a second language, were not providing their children with the communicative proficiency they would need to function and succeed in an increasingly French-speaking community. (1995, p. 541)

Based on the previous, Genesse defined immersion as “not as much a method of second language teaching as it is a pedagogical approach that promotes second language learning” (1995, p. 543). In addition, Genesse referred to immersions as a “communicative approach that reflects the essential conditions of first language learning and at the same time responds to the special needs of second language learner” (p. 543). Genesse highlighted the fact that immersion programs are designed to create the same kinds of conditions that characterize the first language.

From these first definitions, other aspects emerged later on. Immersions as a social practice (Schatzki, 2002) were created to provide better possibilities for students to interact within their own community and local context. Also, they were an answer to a request from the community to

promote equality for newcomers from English speaking regions to French speaking ones in Canada. The second aspect to bear in mind is that **both** languages (English and French) were used and promoted as means of communication and instruction. Another aspect to be highlighted is the condition of immersion as a *program*, as a *second* language teaching-learning method.

Genesse (1995) mentioned five immersion programs based on students' ages, learning objectives, and contexts of interaction. These five immersion programs are: Early, Delay, Late, Partial, and Total Immersions. Each one has its own approach, aim, and procedure. The main difference among the programs is the level of exposure to the language to be learned. Additionally, it is advisable for the teachers in these programs to be either native or native-like speakers in terms of proficiency. Today, many of these features continue to be present in immersion programs around the world.

Cummings (1998) wrote about the phenomenon of immersion education bearing in mind the examples seen in Canada during the 1960s. According to Cummings, immersion programs were not an innovative way to “immerse” students in a second language. Instead, they were being used as a means to teach communication and instruct learners about the language. As Genesse (1995) pointed out in his five immersion programs, participants were provided with the necessary tools to be proficient in English and French and to have the same academic level, which was proven through standardized tests.

Another contribution to the topic was the eight core characteristics of immersion programs organized by Johnson and Swain (1997):

1. The L2 is a medium of instruction.
2. The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum.
3. Overt support exists for the L1.
4. The program aims for additive bilingualism.
5. Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom.
6. Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency.
7. The teachers are bilingual.
8. The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community.

From these points, there are some ideas I would like to expand upon. First, the authors refer to the language not as an object of study but as a means of learning. Likewise, as it was mentioned

by Genesse (1995), language should not be grammar based. Instead, it should be used for communication. In this case, language is related to learning content; therefore, that content should be relevant for students. However, students were also required to learn what was stipulated in the curriculum without having different learning objectives. Moreover, there are two aspects that work hand in hand. The first is the inclusion of the first language or L1. As previously stated, learning and communication are at the core of the immersion programs. Consequently, the type of bilingualism implemented is additive, which allows for the co-existence of both languages (the mother tongue and the second language) in the case of English and French.

Exposure to the second language or L2 is limited to the classroom because this is the language of instruction. Likewise, the culture students interact and are part of will always be that of the host community. In the case of Canada, it was the French culture in Quebec, which allowed students to actually interact with and practice the language of instruction.

In regard to language exposure and culture, it is necessary to mention that additive bilingualism permits the use of both languages. Students and teachers are both bilingual; therefore, the level of proficiency in the target language is not the only deciding factor in student placement within an immersion program. Age and academic level help define which class students are placed in.

As part of the pedagogical framework for immersion programs, effective content-based instruction in the L2 is considered. This idea is grounded on the use of meaningful activities related to students' learning strategies, message (content or new knowledge), language (includes grammatically structures, language in use, and appropriateness), and use (motivation and practice in authentic situations). The four previous components were proposed by Cummins (1998) as a result of evaluating language immersion program implementation in Canada for more than 30 years.

In a comparative study done by Day and Stan (1986), another factor emerged in language proficiency among students in Early and Late immersion programs. Their study revealed that younger children developed language acquisition processes faster than older children. Also, older children tended to use the language they learned in social environments more than younger students. I decided to mention this study because it highlights the history of language immersion program studies over the past fifty years. Furthermore, this study supports the fact that Canadian

immersion programs, depending on their own conditions and contexts, have largely been successful.

Dual Language or Two-way Immersion Education

In 1996, Gale published an article on the positive effects of immersion programs all over the United States, as well as being an opportunity for Christians to learn a language. The popularity of immersion programs was witnessed in an increase if schools where immersion program objectives were utilized and achieved. In most cases, the goal was to reach bilingual proficiency, academic achievement, and positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors. The idea was to improve relationships between the majority and minorities by enhancing cross-cultural appreciation. Given the emphasis on dual language proficiency, the terms dual language or two-way immersion education were coined.

In relation to dual language or two-way immersion education, Rugasken and Harris (2005) reported the results of such a language immersion experience promoted by a university in Thailand. The university worked in collaboration with another university in the United States and called the program English Camp Immersion. The authors described the program as follows,

When discussing language immersion programs, the general reference is to teach students a new “foreign” language by immersing them in the new language (L2), as if they were born into it, so they learn through context as they did their first language (L1). Typically, the second language acquisition class has a blend of grammar instructions and contextual conversations, the balance of which is determined by the mission, goals and objectives that the program administrators establish. (p. 44)

According to Rugasken and Harris, English Camp Immersion was an adoption of an immersion and a second language acquisition class led by English Native speakers, who had been taught general information about the Thai culture and had the freedom to teach their classes and perform as they felt it was best for their students. Additionally, they were given the same lesson plans to be covered during the 15 days of immersion. These lesson plans consisted of grammar lessons, clarification of idioms, oral practice, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other

Languages (TESOL) exercises. The reading and writing were at the core of every morning session. As for the afternoon, students took field trips, where they practiced informal conversations related to the essays they had written earlier.

According to Lucido and Montague (2008, p. 102), there were over 329 dual programs in 29 states in United States by 2006 operating all with the “objective of producing communicative and literate children who can negotiate between two languages in their daily interactions.” One thing I noticed in this report was the lack of distinction between two-way immersion, dual language, and immersion programs. Rather, the study emphasized the 90:10 and 50:50 models, in which the exposure to the L2 varies from 90% (kindergarten) to 50% (fourth grade). Another crucial component from this study was that the majority of language users in these dual education classes were linguistically competent in inductive skills. Nevertheless, they were not considered productive bilingual. The results differed from the goals achieved by the participants in the Canadian immersion programs from the 1960s.

A couple of decades after the first reported implementation of these programs in Canada, De Jesus (2008) wrote about the impact of a Dual Language Program (also called two-way immersion program by the author). The program was implemented on a group of students who studied at a public school in the United States and whose community was mainly composed of Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican descendants. In this report, one interesting aspect was that the school population had lower standardized test scores. The main reason was that the students and their families spoke other languages in addition to English. Two-way immersion programs were used to close the “achievement gap”, as well as improve language proficiency.

The implementation of these programs grew all over the United States, Canada, and even the Basque Country of Spain by more than 500% within 15 years. Due to its popularity, the teaching staff was limited, which created a problem with underqualified teachers. Despite the issues with finding qualified teachers, De Jesus (2008) suggested that immersion programs could be replicated in other contexts like Puerto Rico in its public schools given the fact that “even under conditions far from the ideal...the dual language program produced excellent results” (p. 195).

As a consequence of closing the “achievement gap”, the participants in the two-way immersion program began to outperform their monolingual peers in the standardized tests. It seemed that they had developed higher order thinking skills, as well as becoming biliterate,

bilingual and bicultural. Finally, these students “overperformed Spanish-dominant students who had been part of other bilingual programs or standardized Spanish language assessment” (p. 196).

The exponential growth of the Language Immersion Programs around the world is undeniable. Moreover, language immersion programs have shown positive linguistic and cultural results among its participants. According to Gerber (2008), a group of 12 professional adults engaged in an in-country language immersion program that offered them interaction within their areas of expertise in order to learn English for Specific Purposes. In this case, language was related to certain tasks rather than level of proficiency. Gerber reported the inclusion of various features from the language immersion programs implemented in Canada for children in public schools. Now, they were being adapted to fulfill the needs of another population. The objectives were only related to the language and the culture but not to the content. She also mentioned five guidelines to conduct these types of in-country immersions (another concept to include in the list of names for these programs). The guidelines dealt with a clear objective established by the participants throughout three different language learning processes known as isolation, interaction, and integration.

Structured English Immersion Program vs. Canada’s Immersion Programs

By 2012, various transition bilingual programs (TBP) in the United States had converted to immersion programs due to the positive results obtained from immersion programs, as well as the fact that they considered cultural objectives rather than mere linguistic ones. García (2012) compared the implementation of two immersion programs promoted by the state of California. One of the programs dealt with bilingualism, while the other was known as the Structured English Immersion (SEI) program. The results of this comparison favored the bilingualism program because of the concept of immersion (called submersion by the author).

Favoring bilingualism programs is not just a belief or a socio-political position. It is grounded on the SEI program objectives according to García (2012). The objectives mainly supported the social and cultural differences of the participants, as well as the socio-political and socio-linguistic status of the immersion programs in both contexts: Canada and the state of

California. The main differences between the two programs were that SEI aimed for students to be monolingual, whereas immersion in Canada promoted the development of additive bilingualism. In the same sense, SEI promoted high academic achievement in English, opposite to Canadian immersion's goal for bilingual academic competence.

One of the socio-linguistic differences mentioned by García (2012) is the fact that participants' L1 in the Canadian immersion programs is considered prestigious, and its use is administratively supported. On the other hand, L1 in SEI programs are subordinate. They are not prestigious, and, therefore, have no support. The social groups who are part of the SEI and Canadian immersion programs come from different backgrounds. For example, in Canada, the social groups belong to upper-intermediate social strata. Participants' parents have a voice and control over the political and economic sources, and these programs are aimed at larger groups. In contrast, in California, SEI participants are considered minorities who come from low socio-economic strata. Participants' parents have no control whatsoever over any administrative aspect of the program. Consequently, the target population for SEI is specific and concrete.

One can understand from this report (García, 2012) that adaptations and adoptions of the features of the Canadian immersion programs should be developed before their implementation based on the context, population, and most importantly on their objectives and concepts of bilingualism and immersion that would be pillars for such innovations.

Immersion Programs in Other Contexts

Years after replicating the immersion program under various contexts, evaluations, results, and procedures, criticism and recommendations emerged among scholars to improve immersion programs. This was especially true for situations like those described by Johnson and Swain in the 1990s, for which immersion program objectives were unfulfilled. In 2012, Jimenez documented a critical analysis of language immersion programs implemented in Spain on behalf of the Department of Education of the Government of Navarre. As was the case mentioned by De Jesus (2008), Jimenez stated that students scored lower in standardized test in comparison to students whose language was the one presented on the test. The belief was that the lower test scores were connected to a lack of proficiency in language instruction. In this particular case, the standardized test administered was PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment). Additionally,

Jimenez (2012) highlighted that students whose L1 was different from the official Spanish languages would struggle more to score higher on the test than those students whose L1 was any of the official Spanish languages (Spanish, Euskera, Catalán, or Gallego).

The students' ages were another crucial factor because it was linked to being able to access school instruction and participation in the program. Therefore, he suggested that different strategies based on students' ages should be included in the program to solve issues with students' linguistic competence and knowledge construction. Keeping in mind Jimenez's (2012) suggestion, aspects like professional development for language immersion teachers were necessary for the program's success, which would also ensure continuity and governmental support. It is important to note that the teachers who taught in the language immersion programs were usually hired based on availability rather than their linguistic competence or bilingual, bicultural, or biliteracy skills. Other aspects to fulfill the programs' objectives included the inclusion of appropriate and relevant instructional materials, corresponding facilities for classes, a realistic timeline to achieve goals. These were all aspects of the language immersion program criticized by Jimenez.

Considering the first immersion program objectives in Canada, students were able to linguistically and culturally interact within the context in a social and academic manner. This was not the case of the language immersion program reported by Jimenez (2012). Instead, the objective of the program was for students to achieve an A2 language proficiency level based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

In South Korea, Mihyon (2012) studied an English immersion program. The author touched upon various points like the concept of bilingual education and immersion programs as the basis for national policy. Mihyon defined bilingual education as "instruction in two languages and the use of the two languages as media of instruction for any part, or all, of the school curriculum" (p. 396). For this study, immersion was understood as a type of bilingual education. Here, we also see the concept of submersion explained as the type of education in which students acquire the L2 naturally as they did with their L1. In this case, submersion can also be synonymous to an English-only program. As for transitional bilingual program, the author defined it as an early-exit bilingual program. Students' L1 is used as the language of content instruction for the first two school years until they are introduced to monolingual instruction.

Mihyon (2012) also defined one-way immersion as the use of L2 for content instruction of L1 users, as was the case in Canada. Finally, two-way immersion or dual education is described as the type of education that permits the participation of both L1 and L2 in the same learning context. Content learning is the focus instead of language proficiency. The author clarified all of these concepts as a means of understanding the context and realities of South Korea.

Shifting away from defining concepts and objectives, Lopez and Chacón (2015) focused on the tensions a teacher goes through when taking part of an immersion program. They remarked on the objectives of the Two-way Immersion Program (TWI) implemented in the United States, such as academic achievement, additive bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural competence development. The authors mentioned that the objectives for the TWI program were similar to that of Canada's immersion programs. However, the five immersion types (Early, Delay, Late, Partial, and Total) were omitted. Instead, they relied on the 90:10 and 50:50 model. In this case, third graders were instructed 90% in the minority or L1 language. Meanwhile, they received 10% instruction in English, which was the majority language. Once students entered fourth grade, they received 50% instruction in majority and minority language.

One of the challenges the authors mentioned was determining what language to provide content in, as well as how much content to give. In fact, the use of Spanish, or the minority language, in the TWI program was higher than English, even among English speakers. The reason for this phenomenon was that students wanted to interact with their peers and their teacher. Additionally, Spanish was the language of power and academics in the classroom. The authors concluded that even though Spanish was the most used language in the first stage of the TWI program implementation, what mattered most was the interaction and cooperation when performing tasks. In this case, language moved to a second place in comparison to communication.

The research report by Lopez and Chacón (2012) is relevant to this current study because it shows adaptations to the original language immersion program. Over time, the program has suffered major changes. However, the context had also dictated whether such adaptations were necessary. Therefore, different results were obtained, which may be considered unsuccessful in comparison to the initial programs.

The authors mentioned yet another challenge, which was not directly related to the teachers but promoted by them. The authors found that English speaking students were excluded because Spanish was the preferred language used by the teacher. It was the teacher's belief that students

would lack exposure to Spanish outside of the classroom. Thus, everyone had to speak in Spanish in the classroom, even the native English speakers.

Parents' participation also seemed to be absent in other implementations of language immersion programs. As mentioned previously, García (2012) pointed out the lack of parental participation during important decision made for the SEI programs in California. Likewise, Aguayo and Dorner (2017) discussed the one-way relationship of SEI programs in the United States. That is to say, policies were issued by the schools or their administration board, and the participants' parents were not considered when making decisions or implementing the model. Simply, they were excluded based on the belief that they were unknowledgeable of the policies. In addition to thinking that parents were unaware of the policies, the aim of the program was to promote monolingualism. It is a fact that most of the participants' parents were immigrants, whose L1 was not promoted by the program.

Other issues that have emerged from studies on language immersion programs have been the lack of conceptualization and unity of what bilingual education and English immersion programs are (Valentino & Reardon, 2014). As a result, various models have been implemented in numerous contexts, thereby, making it hard to conclude of the benefits of either concept. For Valentino and Reardon (2014), bilingualism was similar to the concept of additive bilingualism, which was considered for the Canadian French immersion programs. However, their view on immersion instruction mirrors that observed in the SEI classroom, which promoted a monolingual environment. Though the concept of immersion is used by many authors, its definition still remains unclear in their papers.

A new term was defined by Valentino and Reardon (2014) as transitional bilingual classrooms as the scenarios where immersion programs teach content in the L1 to L2 learners. This seems more likely to happen where students' contexts permit them to be exposed to the L2 outside the school setting. Opposite to that, the authors mentioned immersion education as the type that teaches content in the L2 for those students whose linguistic competence is high enough to understand the input.

These latter ideas of bilingualism and immersion (transitional bilingualism or immersion education as referred to by the authors) confirm the various understandings that the concept of *Immersion* has had throughout the years, as well as its various geo-political scenarios. Because of

this, it is difficult to determine the main concept of study between bilingual education and immersion programs.

Conceptualization on Immersion Programs

For the rest of this paper, the concept of language immersion program will be the one initially defined by Johnson and Swain (1997), which is the educational process in which a second language, or L2, is used as the language of instruction for academic content. Furthermore, the eight core features previously mentioned by the authors are also part of this definition.

Immersion programs have helped participants develop knowledge aside from just linguistic or cultural information, which were originally two objectives of the Canadian immersion programs. In fact, immersion programs have aided in learning specific content, such as medicine (Godkin & Savageau 2001; Ogur, Hirsh, Krupat, & Bor, 2007; Pippa, 2005), religion (Mitchell, 2015), and technology (Shapley, Sheehan, Maloney & Caranikas-Walker, 2010) among others. Moreover, immersion programs have also included teachers' education and pedagogy (Cammarata, 2016). This to show the influence of this initial linguistic practice on other professional fields.

In the same token, language immersion programs have been replicated under various contexts (Clark, 1995; Chesterfield, Hayes-Latimer, Chesterfield & Chávez, 1983, Hewlett-Gómez & Solís, 1995) and circumstances (Giauque, 1975; Zucker, 1995). The topic of language immersion has been extensively studied and assessed in the United States in relation to immigration, education, and inclusion in policies like No Child Left behind (NCLB). Also, studies on the inclusion of native languages as part of these regulations have been considered (García, 2012; Lopez & Chacón, 2012). This goes to show the relevance of immersion programs in these contexts, as well as the need for language and culture co-existence.

My search for language immersion programs yielded no academic articles or studies done in Colombia. However, I am aware of language immersion programs, or at least named as such, implemented in Colombia. The first of these programs has been part of the National Bilingualism Program (NBP). One of its programs, Colombian Teachers of English, offered teachers the possibility to go abroad to English speaking countries, such as Canada, USA, UK, or India for a certain period of time (no longer than 6 weeks). The goal was to strengthen the teachers' language

skills, so that he or she could in turn help his or her students' English competences. Second, the English Immersion Programs sought "the permanent search of professional development" ⁱ, as mentioned on the Colombian Ministry of Education webpage. For this program, candidates had to comply to certain requirements like making a video explaining how the program would benefit his or her students. Although the program had an open call policy, many teachers were not selected based on language proficiency and other factors. As a result, certain populations were excluded, and many were unable to participate.

A third attempt to implement language immersion programs was through *Immersion Camps*. The program benefited students who were enrolled in governmentally sponsored schools. According to the Colombian Ministry of Education (2015), the goal of the *Immersion Camps* was "to create new settings and innovative situations where English teaching and learning are performed playful and meaningful by means of activities that enhance comprehensive training grounded upon fundamental aspects such as autonomy, assertive communication, problem solving and decision making"ⁱⁱ." Other national and international immersion camps emerged, in which students went to English speaking countries or to local facilities where English was spoken. These programs usually lasted between two to three weeks.

As a result of *Immersion Camps*, many other types of immersion programs launched all over the country, as was the case reported by Mihyon (2012) in South Korea. In Colombia, various institutions (private and public) led by the Ministry of Education have reproduced and re-created their own immersion programs. As Valentino and Reardon suggested (2012), the concept of immersion has not been clearly defined. Nevertheless, the market reflects a notion that immersion classes, programs, camps, course, and the like as a solution to learn a language (especially English) quickly and easily. For the most part, immersion programs are targeted toward participants who want to learn English, but there are cases where the programs have been used to learn Spanish in Colombia. Mejia and Agray (2014) reported on a group of Austrians that participated in a two-week Spanish immersion course (as defined by the authors). The objective was not only to linguistically offer the possibility to improve the participants' communicative competence, but mainly to answer to their willingness to live a cultural experience.

In the previous paragraphs, various reports related to language immersion programs were described to illustrate scenarios where this practice has been implemented. It is important to mention that each represents a position based on the context and time these programs were

developed. Additionally, it is relevant to say that all the concepts of immersion (or even the lack of conceptualization) represents how the initial concept and its core features have been shaped and re-shaped based on those same contexts and needs. For the current study, the aim was to understand the concept of English Immersion Programs and how they have been used and carried in Colombia, as well as to describe them from a decolonial perspective.

Despite the fact that the concepts and articles have enlightened the information we have on immersion programs and geopolitical scenarios, the concept of immersion programs remains unclear in Colombia. Even a description of the objectives, teachers, and students is unavailable. It would be relevant for the academic community to learn from the myriad of experiences to design and develop a local and localized concept and, consequently, a program that accounts for the realities of our socio-cultural context.

In the next part of this paper, I will present a decolonial perspective in relation to English Immersion Programs that have been conducted in the last five years in Colombia.

English Immersion Programs from a Decolonial Perspective

I would like to connect the language immersion programs discussed previously with those implemented in Colombia by the National Bilingual Program (NBP). The NBP programs can be traced back to 15 years ago up until recently (2019).

Díaz (2010) referred to decolonial pedagogy in Colombia as the quests, openings, and possibilities that support the colonial turn. In this sense, pre-installed practices and meanings are questioned and demystified based on the four domains of human experience: economic, social and epistemological, political and personal (Mignolo, 2005). Thereby, a decolonial perspective deals with education and its related concepts as society and subject.

In my case, I acknowledge the history and evolution that immersion programs have had, especially as a participant, leader, organizer and student for the past 15 years in the field of English Language Teaching in Colombia. Because of my own background, I understand such practices should be seen from a different view to construct and unveil other ways of conducting them. This decolonial perspective is based on critical reflection that should consider local realities as a means of avoiding exclusion, imposition, segregation, and control.

The history of immersion goes as far back at the early 1960s, as represented by the data profile. At the time, Canada developed the best possible program based on relevant knowledge to solve a social need (Cummins, 1998; Genesse, 1995). As mentioned before, models and types of **immersion programs** were developed with consideration to change, time, and different realities. I bolded the term immersion programs since the programs were designed to immerse students in the language, culture, and academic system.

Based on the success of these programs made for and by Canadian, immersion programs were copied all over the world, especially among similar linguistic contexts (bilingual and multilingual) as was the case in the United States and Spain. Though the programs were initially successful in Canada, its copies failed to consider fundamental aspects of time and space. Consequently, the results have been unexpected and unsuccessful in comparison.

The adoption and adaptation of immersion programs have transformed the concept itself. Two cases have emerged with the implementation of immersion programs. Either the same models have been implemented or the names are the same, but the strategies have been changed. In with both cases, a misconception and misinterpretation of immersion practices have occurred in different contexts, as pointed out by Valentino and Reardon (2014).

Adoption or adaptation are not always the best solution for implementing immersion programs. Several problematic facts exist for which I have grounded my reflection and interest to understand immersion programs, especially under the Colombian socio-political framework. First, a lack of understanding about immersion among the NBP and ELT scholar has promoted and permitted the proliferation of *immersions* as the “jack of all trades”. In other words, immersions have become the solution for issues like language proficiency, pedagogy, autonomy, professional development, and the like in the Colombian ELT community for the past five years. This exponential growth was triggered by the Ministry of Education toward international and national Colombian English teachers and their students.

Second, the Ministry of Education’s political agendas on implementing immersion programs in Colombia is not clearly stated. The programs have been conducted under specific characteristics and parameters, which tend to privilege other cultures over the Colombian one, promote others’ knowledge, and perpetuate and replicate models that may not correspond to Colombian realities. Additionally, an idea is created that once a participant has concluded his/her participation, they have already received enough professional development to positively

influence his/her teaching or learning context. It is necessary to know what the real impact of immersion programs is on Colombian communities beyond statistics and coverage. We need to understand why immersions are part of a program but not the national linguistic policy.

Third, the way these immersions are planned, conducted, and assessed (if there is any assessment) promotes exclusion among the members of the ELT community. To begin, a candidate for an immersion program must be part of focalized schools, or public schools that are economically sponsored to develop language programs based on standardized test results. Unfortunately, that means that less favorable schools will continue to be considered unfavorable. Furthermore, access to the information about these programs is only possible via internet. For people who are unable to access a computer or internet, immersion programs are not a possibility. Additionally, extra expenses are part of the immersion and are not sponsored by the program. The cost of documentation, video recordings, internet access, and legal documents restrict many from being able to participate.

In the same line of thought as the first issue, the fourth problem has to do with the lack of definition of immersion. Overgeneralization and misunderstanding of the concept has been normalized, which has result in the narrative that English native speakers are the experts and owners of the language. They are the example to follow, and participants must learn and repeat their culture as well. In Colombia, immersions are also promoted as monolingual (English) and monocultural (English culture, especially North American, from the United States). Also, more meaningful results are expected if the participants are physically isolated from their culture and realities. This is based on other immersion program's success, but it might not be the same in Colombia.

Fifth, there is scarce (not found) research reported in the ELT field related to immersion programs in Colombia. Therefore, we lack information on the social practices that surround, promote, or demote them. To add to the issue, no research exists that measures or assesses the true influence of these programs.

These five problems have helped approach a decolonial perspective that aims at constructing emancipatory practices to signify the execution of the immersion programs in Colombia for and by Colombians, to understand international immersion program objectives, and how they influence the ELT field in Colombia.

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ⁱ Translation by the author: “destacados por su excelente desempeño en el desarrollo de sus actividades, su compromiso por fortalecer las competencias en inglés de los estudiantes y la búsqueda constante del desarrollo profesional, participan en programas de Inmersión en Inglés, tanto en Colombia como en el exterior.”

ⁱⁱ Translation by the author: El proyecto de Campos de Inmersión en Inglés busca generar nuevos escenarios y situaciones innovadoras donde la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés se dan de forma lúdica y significativa por medio de actividades que promueven una formación integral que comprende aspectos fundamentales como la autonomía, comunicación asertiva, solución de problemas y toma de decisiones.