EXPLORING FOUR TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN RELATION TO THE CONCEPT OF BILINGUALISM AT THE MARIA AUXILIADORA SCHOOL- SOGAMOSO, BOYACÁ-COLOMBIA

MAURICIO BARRERA CÁRDENAS
Mauros4@yahoo.com

Abstract

This explorative report documents four EFL teachers' perceptions concerning the concept of bilingualism development in a private school. Phenomenological interviews were conducted. Findings suggest that teachers have specific perceptions about how bilingualism is taking an important place in their professional development and community. Also the development of this concept is visible in this community. However, this aspect must be discussed in order to clarify misconceptions and include it in the real practice as a component of improvement in the educative field in that community.

Key words: Bilingualism, Perceptions, Domain, Bilingualism program.

Resumen

Este estudio de caso descriptivo estudia las percepciones de cuatro profesores de lengua extranjera en relación con el concepto de bilingüismo. Los participantes enseñan en una institución de carácter privado. Entrevistas fueron utilizadas como instrumento de investigación. Los resultados confirman que los profesores tienen percepciones específicas en relación con el concepto de Bilingüismo. Más aún este concepto, tiene un rol importante en sus profesiones y en la comunidad donde brindan la instrucción como lengua extranjera. Sin embargo, la implementación de este concepto debe ser explicada en aras de buscar el desarrollo educativo de esa comunidad.

Palabras clave: Bilinguismo, percepciones, domino, programa de bilinguismo.

Introduction

The evolution of English learning is an inevitable phenomenon that requires explanations especially in the education field. Kalantis& Cope (2005) explain a transformation of English Language Learning where modern concepts such as globalization and multiliteracies have achieved an important field as educative outcome. This reality makes us think about the prestige of this language and the relation with a pedagogical purpose. Then, this consideration must be reviewed because when a foreign language penetrates in an educational system there are many expectations to develop good curriculums and programs. Then teaching this foreign language requires a good analysis due to the fact that sometimes is out of control. Moreover, the implementation of English is absorbed without measures and serious considerations for national policies, institutions and the final instruction conducted by EFL teachers.

In the Colombian context the concept of bilingualism most of the times is generalized. This boom has arrived in the classrooms with a lot of adaptations and innovations. For instance, the Colombian National Bilingual Program is a policy that includes power from the government to implement changes in the EFL education but without taking regulations or needs (González, 2008). This reflection points to revise the access to the meaning of bilingualism by the repertoire of the perceptions about it some EFL teachers have. It would be the first step to document what the influence of EFL is at a specific institution in Sogamoso, Boyacá, Colombia. In order to characterize this research a qualitative case study was selected to implement and describe the perceptions of EFL teachers.

Considering the expansion of the English language as a component of globalization in the entire world (Pennycook, 1996), that school wants to involve changes, too. However, it is necessary to better illustrate public and private schools in that community on how to involve a better performance in the way of teaching and learning. At Maria Auxiliadora School, EFL is taught from kindergarten to 11th grade but the level of learning is still unsatisfactory. Despite different measures to improve the quality of education in this field, the English language has influenced all the members in that community. Moreover, the achievements of technology and the inevitable globalization require new strategies to improve this teaching practice (Pennycook, 1996).

The intention of this project is to conduct a needs analysis about the effect of bilingualism in a specific community in Sogamoso, Boyacá - Colombia. Foreign language teachers naturally represent a wide role with their particular convictions about the phenomenon of bilingualism. For that reason, the attention on four teachers at the Maria Auxiliadora School focuses on their perceptions. In the sense that perception is used by Hismanoglu (2010) like a real point of view from teachers to evidence knowledge of a pedagogic phenomenon, moreover, the research approach was based on a qualitative case study. Then, it requires a detailed explanation collecting data from a phenomenological point of view, constructing the data from the research

question and illustrating a real description of the effects in a community (Creswell, 2003).

Statement of the problem

My own experience as a student from a public school and later as an educator in that location teaching in private schools has allowed me to identify an awareness environment to learn from directors, teachers, parents and students. However, the teaching practice for a foreign language is generalized and it causes many misunderstandings among the participants of that community. Consequently, the first step is to document this phenomenon about the perceptions teachers at that institution have in relation to the concept of bilingualism.

Setting and participants

This small-scale research was developed in a private school in Sogamoso, Colombia, a small city in Boyacá. Four English foreign language teachers, 2 female and 2 male were the participants. Originally, they were born at that location and studied to officially become state teachers in an EFL undergraduate program 1 hour away from the place where this research was developed. The participants teach English from kindergarten to 11th grade at the Maria Auxiliadora School. This is a private institution with around 700 students and the instruction of three hours per week in the primary section and four hours in the high school of English language. Also primary students receive instruction in science 1 hour per week using the foreign language as a medium of instruction.

Objective

The purpose of this study is to document how these teachers at this institution understand the meaning of bilingualism.

Research Question

What kind of perceptions do teachers at the Maria Auxiliadora School have in relation to the meaning of bilingualism?

Theoretical Framework

Language is a linguistic universal system as a product of the interpretation of the human brain. This final product can mean a huge relationship between man and society. Fromkin (2003) argues that this relation is based on a human linguistic ability to produce and hear sounds in a specific context. It could be a clear explanation of the nature of language. However, there must be a clear explanation about the phenomenon when a foreign language is incorporated into a community. There should be a field of specialization to postulate interests about this process. For that reason, the beginning of enquiry about how, what, where, when to study focuses on the field of sociolinguistics (Widdowson, 1998). The learning and instructional style of another language different from the mother tongue can condense an approximation to explain this phenomenon (Cortés, 1995). The field of sociolinguistics characterizes this process. In fact, the researcher needs to understand the relation between language and people. For instance, this study has to explain the event of bilingualism in a community where English is used as a tool

for teaching and learning. Here the role of language illustrates a transactional social situation. Then the social interaction among the participants is not explained through a performance. It is considered like a set of perceptions about bilingualism analyzed in an educational setting.

Regarding some background about perceptions, Ajayi (2009) explores the field of teachers' perceptions giving an explanation about how teachers contextualize their experiences and needs. Then this study connects the participants to present the reality of their professional field components in order to give the first advance to report and improve the quality of the teaching instruction at that location. Besides, looking to report what is happening at that location the support to go beyond the perceptions is reflected on the applied linguistics field. For instance, Grabe& Kaplan (1997) argue that in order to conduct research about language, there must be a problem and look for and report a notable change. Moreover, Pennycook (2003) suggests that critical applied linguistics is a mix of different areas such as critical linguistics, critical discourse analysis, critical sociolinguistics and critical literacy. Analyzing these points of view, this approach of the applied linguistics is mandatory.

Then the researcher needs to analyze the perceptions of the participants in a special dimension exploring their reality. In other words, the study must address the discourse of the participants about the meaning of bilingualism.

From the general meaning of bilingualism (Joining the educational domain and the natural phenomenon of bilingualism there are different issues for review: Developmental bilingual education, immersion programs, bilingual education goals, transitional bilingual programs, and especially when a person performs or she/he is in the process of becoming bilingual). De Mejia (2002) makes a clear explanation of the ability, use, distinctions, development in a context and the political or instructional recognition. And in the field of education, Cortés (1996) adds, that an understanding of bilingual education is when there is a historical examination where the teaching practice is demanded. Vélez (2003) offers a background explanation of bilingual education generalizing Latin-American countries including the Colombian context. It is very important to analyze the sequence of this phenomenon until it became an attractive outcome for educative institutions. For that reason, it is impossible to ignore the development of bilingualism in the Colombian context especially with the projection of "Colombia bilingüe" the strongest initiative of the Colombian government to promote English foreign language education (González, 2008, p. 187). As bilingualism became a popular word in this context, the word started to have a special status. An importance of knowing English or another language is a good opportunity to open doors locally and internationally. Hismanoglu (2010) and Ajayi (2010) explain the concept of bilingualism under perceptions of teachers. Moreover, this literature explains how this process is developed including professional growth, the opportunity to improve the bilingual programs, and project professional grown factors about the instructional bilingual program. Consequently, a qualitative case

study was selected as an approach to conduct this research. This function is very well explained by Tellis (1997) describing the different exploratory, explanatory and descriptive functions. Distinguishing from these options, the exploratory function will work in that context.

Data collection procedures

The need to include an instrument was based on phenomenological interviews including the design of Seidman (2006). This procedure explains that in order to collect data there is a procedure to construct questions linking the literature review, context and the profile of the participants. After examining the interviews which impact the role of bilingualism at that community, the first set of descriptions relied on the teachers. In order to bring details of this report the next graphic summarizes the research design:
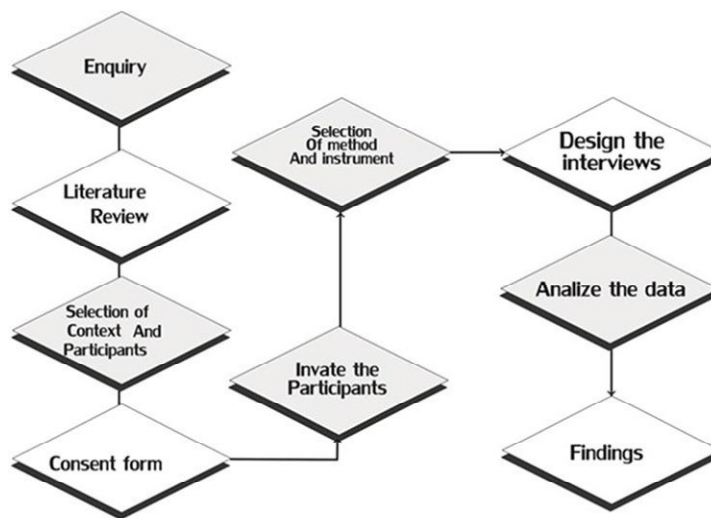
In this study, the validity of the instrument was to consider through the narrative style. Also, multiple evidences of the discourse focused on the main purpose of this study, hierarchical structures were constructed when the interviews were combined. For this study eight open ended questions were designed based on the kind of interview and after conducting the interviews, these were transcribed, compared and contrasted with the literature review and some stages rose: Open, axial and selective coding Creswell (2003)

Questions for interview N-1

1. What is bilingualism?

2. What is a bilingual person?

3. How does a person become bilingual?

**Questions for interview N-2**

4. What is the purpose of your institution teaching EFL?

5. What is the condition of your institution

facing the National Bilingual Program?

6. Do you have appropriate materials to develop a good teaching practice?

7. What are the parents' opinions about the bilingual program at your institution?

8. Can your students become bilingual with the program of your institution?

Holstein & Curium (2003) point out the way in which the role of theory, the research questions the management of data and the notion of the researcher can be integrated to give a final appreciation of the categories. According to the variety of concepts and reducing the data to the main information, five categories were classified.

Categories
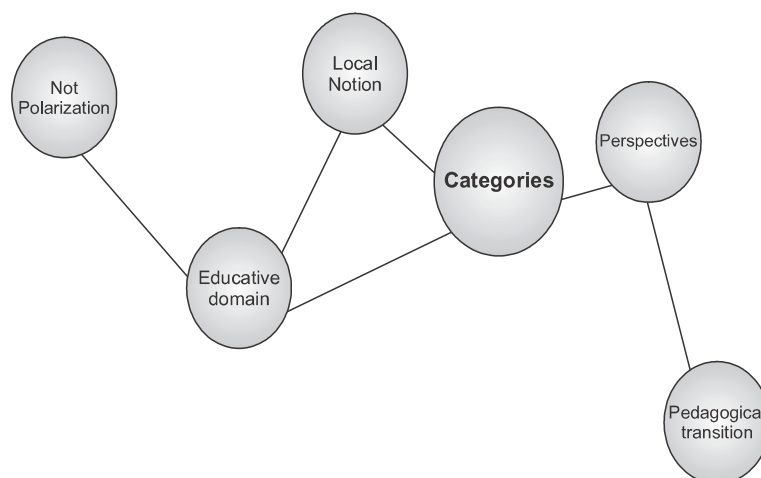
Local notion: The examination of this community in relation to the meaning of bilingualism pointed that there is a functional interpretation for the participants. The participants interpret and transform the discourse (Usma, 2008, p. 129). The practice of teaching English has accommodated a conventional discourse by the participants (Steven, 2002). It has been the action of applied linguistics explaining the effects of bilingualism giving the meaning for the participants. In other words, the participants explain their own perceptions. They generalize the concept of the bilingualism as the capability that a person has to speak two languages. However, there is a misconception because one of the participants said that bilingualism is a

science. For that reason this category cannot be joined as a set of mutual understanding. Moreover, Mejia (2002) clarifies that bilingualism is a competence demonstrated for different circumstances. Also, the sequence and the structure of the discourse of the participants demonstrated a particular fact. It was that bilingualism is not a meaning beyond the concept. It is a purpose to achieve in their institution.

Pedagogical transition: The transition that participants explain attends a revision in the way their bilingual program is moving only through their own creation or based on the principles of Colombian bilingual regulations (González, 2008). Also, it is important to emphasize the role of the materials that the

teacher used in order to accomplish the goal of the bilingual initiative at that institution. This category represents the implementation of two perceptions joining the national policy with the role of the materials. The teachers enhanced how the school is going in the process of becoming bilingual with the help of the materials. This is a good point to reflect based on the efforts reported by teachers. The evidence shows that for many years the Colombian government has been aware about the EFL development (Vélez, 2003). Then the good reflection teachers said that in the process of becoming bilingual they are trying to increase a good reputation for the school. Their curriculum is very well oriented and the materials they use predominate significantly.

Educative Domain: This category arises from this study because there is a particular interest by the members of this community in order to improve the quality of the students. Mejía (2002) emphasizes the process of bilingualism as the special importance that a particular community can give to future generations. According to this analysis participants think that they want to have an efficient instruction in their school's process. And they are working with the process to accomplish with the demands of globalization (Pennycook, 2003). Then, the role of bilingualism takes in this research a good reflection especially with the need and mission in order to improve the quality of the bilingual education (Asher &Simpsom, 1994). This choice of education causes a special empathy between the context and the educative trend. Also the participants give relevance, motivation and group knowledge.

Perspectives: Comparing the interviews all the participants have many expectations with the program they teach at that institution. They perceive they have goals to increase the English language level at their institution. Mejía (2002) explains that bilingual education provides access to literature and technological information. In that way these teachers are looking to engage their curriculum in the competitive world. Additionally, they illustrate that the goal is to project the students to enroll in a university program with a good English level. Also, they have positive statements about the implementation of science conducted along with EFL instruction because this is a good step to continue with the chances of their curriculum.

Not Polarization: The phenomenon of English language education generates controversy in some countries. However, there are positive perceptions by which teachers feel motivated to engage this language in the educational curriculums. Coleman (1996) argues that this alternative of education approximates an important vision and preparation for the students without taking into account the cultural norms. On the other hand, Poausada (1996, p, 1) says that bilingualism can cause a problematic situation in terms of educative legislation and affecting the cultural and political principles in a community. This reflection is composed by two examinations taking into account the benefits to incorporate an international language and the not suitable setting of the practice of this language. Moreover, this study does not have any controversy in terms of points against in relation to the influence of a foreign language. The researcher could perceive a good environment without

restrictions to develop EFL teaching practice.

Discussion

The description of the concept of bilingualism is a good experience in order to understand the effect at that location. Considering the growth of globalization (Pennycook, 2003) clarifies the implementation of the bilingualism in fields like economics, technology and education. The achievement of this research is to illustrate the perceptions of the teachers. Each teacher accepts the important role of bilingualism in their professions (Brindley, 1995). The idea of bilingualism in this context is the evidence that teachers have an important outcome. The scopes of their program are supported by the influence of their final results. However, it will be visible when their students finish the high school program.

The need of bilingualism requires clarifications; moreover, special training for the teachers. González (2008) supports this point of view forsaking for attention to the policy of the Implementation of Colombia bilingual program. The growth of globalization (Pennycook, 2003) contributes to the implementation of the bilingualism in fields like economy, technology and education.

The target areas of a general curriculum in an educative institution must be studied in order to document the impact of the implementation of EFL instruction. Mejía (1998, p11) argues that the displacement of the mother tongue is not considered at the time of modifying the curriculum. For that reason, this is an opportunity to reflect about the importance of clarifying this instruction.

Conclusion

As this report documented, the implementation of the concept of bilingualism in that institution is achieving evident changes. The national policy of ¨Colombia Bilingüe¨ and the effect of globalization are pushing this process. Here, the findings are meaningful since they have a continuation in order to contribute with the projection of the program at this institution. The concept of bilingualism has positive values in this community. However, there must be a strategy to explain to directors, teachers, parents and students all the concepts of bilingualism. Additionally, the influence of bilingualism can improve the quality of education but this community must enroll all the members in order to adjust policies and expectations. The teachers will become conductors of real effects and knowledge. The impact of bilingualism in this community could have positive consequences in terms of reputation of teachers and curriculum development. However, further studies will clarify the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of English as a foreign language in that community.

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THE AUTHOR
MAURICIO BARRERA CARDENAS is a full time teacher at Rosario School in Sogamoso, part time teacher at UPTC. Also he is the director of Horizons educative corporation. He is M.A language teaching candidate at UPTC .