



A COUNTRY IN FOCUS

# Bilingual education in Spain: A critical review of stakeholders' perceptions

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## Abstract

During the past 20 years, the expansion of bilingual education programmes in Spain has generated a situation where the voices of stakeholders frequently go unheard. Accordingly, this paper is a critical review of bilingual programmes within the Spanish context. An analysis has been carried out on stakeholder perceptions, that is, of teachers, students, management teams, and families, as reflected in the literature published between 2014 and 2023. The corpus reviewed consists of 34 papers, ranging from pre-primary to higher education, with a particular focus on stakeholders' perceptions of the implementation of bilingual education in a foreign language (English). In terms of the characteristics of the studies analysed, the predominance of teachers' perceptions over other stakeholders and the scarcity of longitudinal studies and research based on national samples should be noted. The adoption of a more robust methodological design could provide a fuller assessment of the implementation of bilingual education in Spain. Nonetheless, this review highlights the need for specific improvements at each level of education if a more learner-centred approach to teaching is to be achieved. Such improvements could include additional training opportunities, collaboration among teachers, and measures to alleviate the additional workload associated with bilingual education.

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, foreign language programmes based on communicative teaching methods have been introduced at all stages of compulsory education in Spain. However, the effectiveness of these programmes has often been criticized for producing generations of non-communicators after years of learning English at school (Lorenzo et al., 2021). In response, many European institutions have embraced various approaches for implementing bilingual education, of which the most prevalent is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Eurydice, 2017). CLIL has been defined as 'a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language' (Coyle et al. 2010, p. 1). Authors such as Celce-Murcia et al. (2014), Coyle et al. (2010), and Richards and Rodgers (2014) view the adoption of CLIL as a natural progression from the use of communicative approaches because it is aimed at significantly enhancing foreign language competence among the European population.

In 1996, in Spain, a national initiative was launched between the Ministry of Education and the British Council (MEC-BC) that pioneered bilingual education in the country through an integrated Spanish–British curriculum. This joint venture was renewed in 2020 and is currently taking place in 10 autonomous communities across Spain. However, aside from this initiative, the explosive and swift introduction of non-MEC-BC programmes has led to a trend that prioritizes quantity over quality. As a consequence, there currently exists a wide medley of Spanish/English bilingual programmes within the different 17 Spanish autonomous communities (Martínez & Fielden, 2021). Moreover, the

unique characteristics of individual schools, as reflected by their educational projects, further shape the functioning of bilingual programmes. The diversity of bilingual education programmes has led Spain to be recognized as being ‘among the most hectic countries in bilingual implementation’ (Lorenzo & Granados, 2021, p. 79).

Despite the use of different models, the spread of bilingual education in compulsory education has notably enhanced the foreign language proficiency of Spanish students (Lorenzo & Granados, 2021; Martínez & Fielden, 2021; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas, 2016; Pavón Vázquez, 2018) and has made bilingual education and language learning accessible not only to the elite (Barrios Espinosa, 2019). In addition, to further improve how bilingual education is implemented, it is essential to grasp the perceptions of those involved in this process, that is, teachers, students, management teams, and families. Therefore, this overview aims to explore the perceptions of these main stakeholders. To do so, we have defined perception as the process by which an individual interprets, understands, and uses the information they receive to form a notion of reality. We acknowledge that perceptions are influenced by emotions, expectations, personal backgrounds, and previous experiences, among other factors.

### *1.1 Systematic review process*

The current review is intended to offer a critical panorama of the strengths and weaknesses of bilingual programmes in Spain according to research published from 2014–2023, where the voices of main stakeholders (i.e., teachers, students, management teams, and families) are examined. Our primary focus lies on the analysis of scholarly works published in Spanish regional and national journals.

Our systematic review aims to present a comprehensive and analytical overview of research on bilingual education within the Spanish context and to highlight those areas that have been given little consideration. We will attempt to contribute to the existing corpus of research on CLIL by addressing the following questions:

1. What does the literature tell us about the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the implementation of bilingual programmes in Spain?
2. What improvements have been proposed by stakeholders in the context of Spanish bilingual education based on the corpus under study?
3. What are potential future lines of research from the perspective of stakeholders for implementing bilingual education in Spain?

Our review adhered to the principles outlined by Macaro et al. (2018, p. 40), which included the following characteristics:

1. The review was carried out by both authors.
2. Our procedure was transparent from the beginning of the work to the drawing of the final conclusions. An initial protocol was established regarding how the review was to be conducted.
3. The review only included articles that were identified through an exhaustive and reliable search process.
4. Collaboration between the two reviewers sought to reduce bias as much as possible.
5. The final objective was to convey a clear message regarding the reliability of the review conducted.

### *1.2 Search strategies and review protocol*

Several search strategies were followed to compile the corpus used for this review. Our approach used an iterative process in which abstracts were assessed after including or removing different search terms.

A stepwise procedure was carried out where both authors meticulously scrutinized the titles and abstracts of each research paper. Then, the researchers identified the main topics included in the articles and reached a consensus about which were the most suitable using a content analysis approach.

Finally, the studies selected were comprehensively reviewed and their main findings were summarized. This iterative process was repeated until both reviewers agreed on their relevance to the aims of the study.

In total, five databases were searched: Web of Science, ERIC, Scopus, Dialnet, and Google Scholar. Our search focused on studies on bilingual education, including CLIL and English Medium Instruction (EMI), within the Spanish context. The key terms employed were ‘CLIL in Spain’, ‘Content and Language Integrated Learning in Spain’, ‘bilingual education in Spain’, ‘English Medium Instruction in Spain’, ‘EMI in Spain’, ‘bilingual sections in Spain’, ‘bilingual programmes/programs in Spain’, ‘English-taught programmes in Spain’, ‘bilingual primary education in Spain’, and ‘bilingual secondary education in Spain’.

The purpose of this research was to critically assess the implementation of bilingual education in Spain by examining studies published over the last decade. Additionally, we aimed to give visibility to more local studies conducted in Spain, meaning that research published in non-high-impact journals was given priority (see inclusion and exclusion criteria below).

Initially, we identified 220 relevant items, of which 150 were studies devoted to CLIL and 70 to EMI, which is usually associated with higher education. This initial number was subsequently reduced to 63 items after excluding books, conference proceedings, and studies published before 2014. Following the initial selection, studies that did not specifically focus on stakeholders’ views on CLIL or bilingual education in Spain were eliminated. The demographic details of the 34 studies included in the review are presented in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#).

### 1.3 Inclusion criteria

Our review aimed to provide a critical analysis of stakeholders’ perspectives by examining works published in the last decade. Therefore, the period was set between 2014–2023 (both included). Only studies indexed in the five databases searched were included in the review process. The corpus comprises articles involving quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-research experimental designs written in English (32 papers) and Spanish (two papers). Scientific articles were included, while books, book chapters, Ph.D. theses, and conference proceedings were discarded. The vast number of doctoral theses defended in Spain on bilingualism and bilingual teaching led us to exclude them from the study. A

**Table 1.** Number of papers pertaining to a particular region

Autonomous community	Papers
Andalusia	8
Madrid	4
Murcia	3
Castile and Leon	3
Castile-La Mancha	2
Catalonia	2
Basque Country	2
Extremadura	1
Galicia	1
Cantabria	1
Canary Islands	1
Studies analysing several regions	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

**Table 2.** Number of papers analysed according to the educational stage

Educational stage	Papers
Pre-primary and Primary	8
Primary and Secondary	12
Secondary	4
Higher education	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

search in Dialnet Plus with the keyword ‘bilingual’ and the time filter 2014/2023 yielded 467 results. By eliminating those that were not related to Spanish–English bilingual education, we obtained 103 doctoral theses, which we considered to be an unacceptable number to be analysed with any rigour. The 26 books, book chapters, and conference proceedings identified were not included in our analysis as we did not find any that presented rigorous data-based information on stakeholders’ perceptions of bilingual education in Spain.

No geographical restrictions were applied because this research intended to include studies investigating different settings in Spain. Those studies that did not adequately contribute to the review were eliminated.

As previously mentioned, the objective of this work was to analyse papers published in local or national journals. Therefore, this empirical data would reflect the perceptions of stakeholders on the implementation of bilingual education in Spain. To exclusively cover local research in our analysis, non-Spanish journals or publishers were directly discarded.

Table 3 shows the journal title, its publisher, the number of papers included from each journal, the quartile of each journal in the Scimago Journal Rank in the latest available year (2023), and the category to which the quartile refers. All journals have either the Quality Seal for Spanish Scientific Journals granted by the Ministry of Science and Innovation or are indexed in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC.

1.4 Previous studies

Most of the studies published prior to our corpus on stakeholders’ perceptions of bilingual programmes in Spain examine teachers’ perceptions, emphasizing both their commitment to the programme and the manifold learning, teaching, and organizational challenges faced to implement CLIL in the bilingual classroom. In these initial stages of bilingual education, research highlights two main issues. The first is the teachers’ lack of command of English and the second is their difficulty in implementing the CLIL approach in the classroom, which results in the reproduction of teaching practices used in the subjects taught in the first language in bilingual education (Pena & Porto, 2008).

After highlighting the favourable attitudes of teachers towards bilingual programmes (Fernández et al., 2005; Pena & Porto, 2008), the following recurrent difficulties have been noted in research conducted prior to our study. More training is needed to improve teachers’ linguistic and methodological competence (Fernández et al., 2005; Fernández & Halbach, 2011; Lova Mellado et al., 2013); there is a lack of CLIL materials (Fernández et al., 2005; Fernández & Halbach, 2011; Pérez-Márquez, 2008); there is a need for more coordination to work collaboratively, particularly among non-specialists and assistant teachers (Fernández et al., 2005; Laorden & Peñafiel 2010; Lova Mellado et al., 2013); and there is a lack of guidance from educational authorities (Fernández et al., 2005).

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the assessment of bilingual programmes in these early stages by teachers was positive, because CLIL ‘is mainly conceived of as a promising course of action to improve current foreign language skills in the country’ (Manzano Vázquez, 2015, p. 137).

**Table 3.** Spanish journals used to compile our corpus, number of papers, and Scimago journal rank and category

Journal	Publisher	Number of papers	Journal rank and category (2023)
<i>Porta Linguarum. An International and Interuniversity Journal of Foreign Language Didactics.</i>	University of Granada	14	Scimago Q1 (Linguistics and Language)
<i>ELIA. Studies of Applied English Linguistics</i>	National University of Distant Education and University of Seville	3	Scimago Q2 (Linguistics and Language)
<i>Alicante Journal of English Studies</i>	Universidad de Alicante	3	Scimago Q2 (Linguistics and Language)
<i>Ibérica. Journal of the European Association for Languages for Specific Purposes</i>	European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes	3	Scimago Q2 (Linguistics and Language)
<i>Journal of Education</i>	Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports	2	Scimago Q2 (Education)
<i>Tejuelo. Language and Literature Didactics. Education.</i>	University of Extremadura	2	Scimago Q1 (Linguistics and Language)
<i>Bellaterra Journal of Teaching and Learning</i>	Autonomous University of Barcelona	1	Scimago Q2 (Linguistics and Language)
<i>Complutense Journal of Education</i>	Complutense University of Madrid	1	Scimago Q3 (Education)
<i>Culture and Education</i>	Foundation Childhood and Learning	1	Scimago Q3 (Education)
<i>Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research</i>	University of Alicante	1	Scimago Q1 (Education)
<i>Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management</i>	Polytechnical University of Valencia	1	Scimago Q3 (Strategy and Management)
<i>Bordón. Journal of Pedagogy</i>	Spanish Society of Pedagogy	1	Scimago Q3 (Education)
<i>Didáctica: Language and Literature</i>	Complutense University of Madrid	1	Emerging Sources Citation Index

## 2. Findings

The most significant findings of our analysis are presented below. The studies were categorized according to the educational stage being investigated – namely, pre-primary and primary, primary and secondary, secondary, and higher education. Combined studies examining several educational stages will also be discussed. Table 4 lists the frequency of topics covered by the papers in our corpus.

### 2.1 Pre-primary and primary education

This section is dedicated to the review of studies examining bilingual programmes in the early stages of education. Seven papers investigate the perceptions of teachers involved in these programmes (one in pre-primary education, one in pre-primary and primary, and five in primary), while one paper examines the views of primary school management teams.

Segura (2023) conducts a study involving 129 pre-service and in-service pre-primary teachers from Catalonia that analyses teachers' familiarity with the CLIL approach, the expected benefits and

**Table 4.** Frequency of specific topics

Topic	Papers
Teachers' beliefs and perceptions of CLIL	15
Student performance in CLIL programmes	4
Research on students' profile, motivation, and satisfaction	4
Assessment in CLIL	3
Teacher accreditation and training programmes	3
Management and implementation of CLIL programmes	2
Language assistants' perceptions	2
Families' perceptions	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

challenges of CLIL for both teachers and students, teachers' level of preparation to implement CLIL, and the training needs identified for implementing CLIL in pre-primary education. The results reveal several challenges, although the main issue is that teachers generally have a low level of English proficiency, which is a recurring concern in studies on bilingual education in Spain (Halbach, 2012; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010). Teachers also highlight that the implementation of CLIL adds additional work to their workload such as programming, creating materials, and assessment adaptation. While the study shows that teachers feel positive about the potential effects of CLIL, the study also identifies a long list of needs, a finding that is consistent with previous studies (i.e., Alcaraz-Mármol, 2018; Campillo et al., 2019; Pena & Porto, 2008; San Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2019). Teachers assert the need for more CLIL materials and guidelines on how to adapt them, opportunities for teacher collaboration, and support from other teachers at the school. They also express the need for an updated teacher training programme to equip them with greater depth of knowledge on how to implement CLIL.

Lozano-Martínez (2017) also addresses pre-primary education. Drawing data from 80 questionnaires and eight semi-structured interviews, the author analyses the perceptions of pre-primary and primary school teachers regarding bilingual teaching programmes in Cantabria. These perceptions were categorized as four variables: 'material resources and spaces', 'timing', 'teaching group', and 'organisation and coordination'. Although the analysis reveals interesting differences among the perceptions of teachers with different profiles (pre-primary versus primary, or teachers qualified to teach non-linguistic subjects in English versus non-qualified), the greatest contribution of this article lies in the proposals for improving bilingual programmes. The study also shows an in-depth understanding of how schools operate and offers ideas on how to maximize resources, improve ratios, enhance inter-school coordination, and refine the criteria used for selecting a bilingual coordinator.

Bolarín et al. (2019), who have been publishing research on bilingual teaching in primary education in the region of Murcia for many years, present a qualitative analysis of the teaching strategies and forms of assessment used for bilingual teaching. For this purpose, they conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions with a sample of 78 in-service teachers, accounting for 21% of the schools with a bilingual programme in the region. After classifying the information obtained into different categories, the study was performed using the MAXQDA (version 10) qualitative data analysis programme. Some of the data highlighted in the study are as follows: 88% of the teachers consider their participation in a bilingual programme has implied a change in the strategies used to enhance understanding and comprehension of academic content; 69% claim to use visual resources for the above purpose; and 60% declare that they place more value on oral communication skills when carrying out assessments. Sixty-six percent of teachers declare they use the students' mother tongue to ensure discipline in the classroom, 59% use the first language (L1) to facilitate the

understanding of complex concepts, and less than 20% use the L1 to solve conflicts, to convey affection, or with students with special needs. In their research, the authors reached an encouraging conclusion: ‘Teachers perceive that affiliation with the bilingual programme has entailed a change in their teaching methodology, from a more traditional approach to a more active and participative one. This is reflected in the increasing involvement of children [...]’ (2019, p. 228).

Different studies highlight teaching experience as a key factor related to positive perceptions of bilingual teaching programmes. García Abellán (2022) analyses the opinions of 70 in-service teachers on how they perceive bilingual programmes implemented in the region of Murcia in terms of learning outcomes, learning strategies, and student motivation. For this purpose, a Likert questionnaire of 53 items was used and the results were analysed descriptively and inferentially using the free statistical software R (version 3.2.2.). The author concludes that the most experienced teachers are those who best value the issues analysed in the study (particularly learning outcomes and student motivation). This conclusion is similar to that of other studies that link factors such as teaching experience or the level of English with a more positive appreciation of bilingual programmes (Durán-Martínez et al., 2016; Milla Lara & Casas Pedrosa, 2018; Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Szczesniak & Muñoz Luna, 2022).

However, there are needs analysis studies, such as that carried out by Szczesniak and Muñoz Luna (2022) with 203 teachers in Andalusia, which show that teachers participating in bilingual programmes are generally dissatisfied with issues such as coordination, attention to diversity, textbooks and materials adaptation, and the vast increase in their workload. Using a 1–6 Likert Scale (1 = ‘totally agree’ and 6 = ‘totally disagree’), teachers feel that high student–teacher ratios seriously impede their teaching practice (5.2), that bilingual education increases their workload (5.0), that collaboration needs to be fostered (4.6), that there is not enough time allocated to coordination (3.3), that textbooks have not been designed according to the principles of bilingual education (3.0), and that bilingual materials do not cater for the needs of every student (2.3). This discontent is heightened by a sense of a lack of measures to improve the functioning of the programme in general. However, this dissatisfaction is more pronounced among teachers with a lower proficiency level of English and less teaching experience. Quantitative data for this research were obtained from an ad hoc questionnaire of 22 items and the results were analysed descriptively (mean and standard deviation or percentage) and inferentially (ANOVA and one-way ANCOVA).

One of the most controversial aspects of bilingual education is undoubtedly assessment (Otto & Estrada, 2019), including both the information collected in the classroom measuring student performance as well as information on teacher and school performance. In our corpus, we found one example of each. The first study by Muszynska and Gómez-Parra (2015) highlights one of the main shortcomings that is often detected in bilingual programmes: the absence of reliable assessment procedures that can help to improve teaching practices in bilingual schools. In an analysis of schools in different European countries (Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, and Poland), these authors highlight the benefits of implementing external assessment processes that provide frameworks for improvement.

Often, if there is no clear institutional assessment procedure for a bilingual programme, there is also no clear criteria for individual student assessment. Martín-Macho Harrison and Falla Cerqueiro (2020) present the results of a pilot study involving 31 in-service primary school teachers working in Castile-La Mancha in which student assessment is analysed. In this work, particular attention is placed on the percentage of exam sections dedicated to language and content and the use of the students’ maternal language (L1) and the foreign language (L2). The conclusions drawn highlight that more than 70% of teachers prioritize content over linguistic aspects when assessing students. Also, on the rare occasions when percentages are established, linguistic aspects constitute between 20% and 30% of the grade. The new regulatory framework in this region recommends the use of L1 as a pedagogical strategy that can be used in the bilingual classroom even for assessment purposes. By doing so, content acquisition and cognitive development are promoted. This approach endorses a common educational practice in the classroom and monitors the progress from an L2-only policy to a more global vision in which translanguaging (the use of both L1 and L2) plays a fundamental role. Although English-only was a standard approach in many regions in Spain in the early stages of CLIL



implementation, translanguaging and the use of multiple languages have become more prominent in recent years.

In general, most of the articles in our corpus that are dedicated to pre-primary and primary education analyse teachers' perceptions. However, Romo Escudero and Durán-Martínez (2019) analyse, through an ad hoc questionnaire, the views of 70 members of bilingual school management teams regarding the impact of human resources on the design, implementation, and supervision of bilingual programmes in Castile and Leon. The findings highlight that management teams are often dissatisfied with the assessment models employed, with almost one in three respondents (31%) rating them as medium or low. The authors state that this may be explained 'by the fact that the report schools have to produce at the end of the school year is a highly bureaucratic document with hardly any room for qualitative assessment items in them' (p. 141). Two of the main conclusions presented in this paper refer to the need for schools to have permanent teaching staff to facilitate coordination among teachers (50.2% of management teams evaluate their school turnover rate as mid-level or high) and the need to support students with difficulties learning the subjects taught in a foreign language: 62.3% of the schools highlight the need to have more specialist teachers to support students with difficulties. In particular, Special Educational Needs (SEN) students are at risk of falling behind and eventually dropping out of the bilingual programmes.

## 2.2 Primary and secondary education

Next, we examine 12 studies on the implementation of bilingual programmes through a pooled sample of two educational stages: primary and secondary education. As in the previous section, many of the papers, specifically five, reflect the views of teachers. In addition, three are devoted to student perceptions, two to language assistants, one to families, and one to three key stakeholders: teachers, students, and families.

As part of the MONolingual CLIL (MON-CLIL) project, which conducted a large-scale assessment of bilingual education programmes in three monolingual communities in Spain, Martínez Agudo and Fielden Burns (2021) critically discuss some of the most pressing issues regarding these programmes. They focus on knowledge about what CLIL entails, the need for more L2 exposure and its use in the bilingual classroom, CLIL's potential to enhance L2 competence, its impact on learning non-linguistic subjects, the balance between content and language in assessment, and the degree of stakeholder motivation regarding the CLIL experience.

Using a mixed-method research design, the authors analyse the commonalities and differences of perspectives among key stakeholders, including primary and secondary education teachers, learners, and parents in Andalusia, Extremadura, and the Canary Islands. They employed various data-gathering tools such as Likert-scale questionnaires and semi-structured group interviews with both CLIL learners and teachers. Despite the diverse realities of some CLIL programmes, the study concludes that all stakeholders fully agree that CLIL offers potential benefits that enhance language competence: 95.2% of teachers, 89.4% of learners, and 92.8% of parents.

One surprising finding is that not all teachers agree on the need to increase the students' exposure to L2 by reducing the use of L1. This finding, supported by the work of Lorenzo and Granados (2021), indicates that in most CLIL classes both L1 and L2 are used to varying degrees. While there is no consensus about the use of L1 versus L2, comments from teachers suggest that content acquisition is not negatively affected by CLIL. However, learners point out that more effort is required to learn subject material through a foreign language. Overall, all stakeholders are positive about the benefits of CLIL, provided that the bilingual programme is well-coordinated and effectively implemented. However, teachers indicate there is a need for more teacher training.

In another extensive study, Lorenzo and Granados (2021) conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of bilingual programmes, as perceived by teachers. The study involved 58 schools in Andalusia (29 primary and 29 secondary) with a total of 1,101 participants. In this work, aspects such as teacher linguistic competence and language training, compliance with



task-based learning and communicative teaching, use of self-created materials and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the percentage of the use of L2 in the classroom, and coordination procedures are analysed. The following data are noteworthy: 70.1% of teachers comply with Task-based Learning and Communicative Teaching, 84.3% frequently use self-designed materials and ICT, 59.4% adhere to their school content and language integrated plan, and although 58.2% of teachers are satisfied with the bilingual programme, more than one-third are not enthusiastic about it.

The perceptions of teachers were analysed in a SWOT-like content analysis. The study revealed common themes such as a reduction in teaching hours owing to the complexity of planning bilingual lessons and developing adapted materials. Teachers also expressed the need for more language assistants to provide additional exposure to and interaction with native English speakers, additional teaching resources, user-friendly banks with pre-prepared lessons, more plans for teacher training, diversification of the curriculum through the incorporation of several bilingual tracks and strands, scheduled time for coordination and teamwork, and additional teaching hours for content courses. Overall, despite the challenges associated with these programmes, the study also reveals that teachers acknowledge the benefits of bilingual education.

In other works, such as that by Brady and García-Pinar (2019), the perspectives of subject teachers (i.e., non-linguistic) are examined regarding the advantages and disadvantages of implementing bilingual education programmes. These authors specifically analyse the teaching strategies and linguistic training needs of teachers, the impact that bilingual education has on the students' L2 competence and content acquisition, and the areas in which teachers feel policymakers could provide more support. Their sample was comprised of 23 primary and secondary subject teachers in state-run schools in the region of Murcia. The instrument employed to conduct the research was semi-structured qualitative interviews. Teachers agreed that the most significant benefit of bilingual education is the development of students' L2 competence. This finding is in line with most studies on bilingual education, as the improvement of communicative competence in a foreign language is precisely the main aim of bilingual programmes (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2008; Lorenzo & Granados, 2021; Martínez & Fielden, 2021; Mehisto et al., 2008; Nieto Moreno de Diezmas, 2016; Pavón Vázquez, 2018). Regarding content, this study revealed that teachers sometimes feel overwhelmed by the syllabus and believe content should be adapted to the slower pace required for student-centred teaching.

The most contentious finding among the opinions of secondary school teachers is related to the policy of dividing students into two groups based on their foreign language skills. Most teachers report that they feel more motivated when working with a group of 'good students', as more attention is paid to learning rather than discipline. The authors also contend that teachers highlight the need for practical, hands-on teaching instruction, as well as classroom strategies adapted to teaching different subjects. This study concludes by highlighting one of the recurrent shortcomings, which is the need for more coordination among teachers and other schools. Bilingual schools develop their programmes in isolation and would greatly benefit from working collaboratively with neighbouring schools. Such practices would foster teaching communities and the sharing of advice, techniques, materials, and resources through online spaces or inter-school visits and events.

The work by Durán-Martínez et al. (2016) focuses on the socio-demographic variable of teaching experience and compares the perceptions of novice, experienced, and expert bilingual education teachers in four different areas: competencies required for bilingual programmes, published course materials, school organization, and overall assessment of the project. Through an adaptation of a previous questionnaire created by Fernández and Halbach (2011), these authors analyse the perceptions of 151 primary and secondary teachers from the Spanish region of Castile and Leon. Their data validate that teaching experience is a determining variable in the perception of bilingual education programmes. Thus, expert CLIL teachers prioritise methodological competence over subject knowledge and language proficiency. They also exhibit a more critical perspective on published course materials, place greater importance on cooperation and innovation as essential components of CLIL compared with novice teachers, and have a heightened awareness of the benefits of bilingual programmes.

Reporting on a case study in a primary and a secondary school in a monolingual context – Andalusia – Méndez García (2014) substantiates the assertion that language and cognition are key dimensions within CLIL. The paper aimed to understand teachers' perspectives on the impact of Andalusian CLIL programmes on the overall education of learners. Individual interviews were conducted with a total of 15 teachers comprising four language assistants, four language teachers, and seven non-linguistic subject teachers (representing all the departments involved in CLIL instruction at the 15 participating schools). The findings indicate that Andalusian CLIL enhances language skills in the foreign language – and potentially any other language – including the L1, as the coexistence of diverse linguistic codes cultivates language and metalinguistic awareness. The results suggest that exposure to diverse cultural and linguistic patterns promotes cognitive flexibility and higher-order skills. This outcome is particularly interesting, especially when considering that the study was conducted in an officially monolingual context.

Another study addressing teachers' perspectives is that by Durán-Martínez (2018), who conducted a contrastive analysis between the perceptions of primary and secondary school teachers involved in a bilingual programme. The analysis specifically examines three key dimensions of their teaching practices: training, available teaching resources, and the organization of the bilingual school. Sixty primary and 60 secondary school teachers from Castile and Leon participated in the study, completing a Likert-scale questionnaire. The results of this study identified considerable differences between both educational stages. While secondary school teachers exhibit higher communicative competence in English, primary school teachers possess broader didactic training and more experience with bilingual programmes. Both groups agree on considering international links as the most valuable investment, express a lack of enthusiasm towards published CLIL materials, and emphasize the importance of opportunities for further training. Statistically significant differences emerge for aspects such as the importance placed on knowledge of the subject material, training priorities, and the need for additional teachers. The results of this study present two significant findings. The first one refers to the differences between the perceptions of primary and secondary school teachers. It has been revealed that primary teachers show greater methodological awareness, aligning their teaching approach more closely with CLIL practices, whereas secondary teachers prioritize aspects related to teaching subject content in English. The second indicates that teachers specialized in CLIL and with more years of teaching experience tend to be more positive about bilingual programmes, a finding that is consistent with that of later studies (Durán-Martínez et al., 2024; García Abellán, 2022; Milla Lara & Casas Pedrosa, 2018; Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Szczesniak & Muñoz Luna, 2022) and that is associated with the use of more collaborative, innovative, and learner-centred teaching practices.

Adequate human resources for properly developing a bilingual programme is one of the most frequent factors highlighted by academic literature on the subject. In addition to having experienced and specialized CLIL teachers, with an advanced level of linguistic competence in English, the role of language assistants has been identified as a key element for the success of bilingual education. Of the 34 articles in our corpus, two examine this role. For instance, López-Medina and Otto (2020) analyse the perceptions of language assistants in Madrid, comparing the extent to which their expectations regarding their work in the classroom correspond to the tasks described in the guide issued by the Regional Ministry of Education where their responsibilities are specified. One hundred and six primary and secondary school language assistants completed a questionnaire adapted from Buckingham (2016). The results indicate that their functions and responsibilities are not clear. They perceive their role in the classroom 'as cultural and linguistic models, with an emphasis on pronunciation' (p. 105). However, they are not as concerned about issues related to teacher support (classroom management, discipline, etc.) or student learning, a role that is also reflected in the official guidelines. Recommendations on how to improve their involvement in bilingual programmes are also provided in this study. The authors emphasize that the coordinator of the bilingual programme is a key figure who should remind language assistants about their responsibilities and act as a mediator between teachers and the assistants.

The analysis of the difficulties and problems that native English-speaking language assistants report when working with teachers is precisely the objective of the paper by Litzler (2020). Forty language assistants working in the region of Madrid participated in this study. Information was gathered from 187 written comments taken from the assistants' teaching portfolios, a document required for obtaining their master's degree. Through a qualitative analysis, this study highlights three main issues: (1) the difficulty that both teachers and language assistants experience in following the English-only policy enforced at the school (the author argues that the English-only policy should be flexible in some situations; for example, when language assistants are leading an activity and need to discipline their students); (2) the excessive responsibility assigned to language assistants in some schools when assessing students; and (3) the lack of guidance on how to assist students with SEN.

Through semi-structured interviews with a sample of 15 families with children in public bilingual schools in the Community of Madrid, Martínez-Garrido et al. (2022) analyse parents' perceptions. The main conclusion drawn from their analysis is that there are conflicting views among the 15 families. Some parents believe that students obtain a higher level of English, earn a prestigious qualification, and are better prepared for the labour market. However, other families highlight that learning content through English leads to a reduction in the amount of curricular content taught. They also believe that too much weight is given to learning vocabulary and that bilingual programmes foster the segregation of low-income families and SEN children. The authors call for bilingual programmes to be reformulated to make them more inclusive.

Concerning students' perspectives, Pavón Vázquez (2018) explores the learning outcomes in rural and urban settings in schools in Andalusia. As in previously reviewed studies (Bolarín et al., 2019; Martínez & Fielden, 2021), the conclusions highlight the overall satisfaction of students with the level of English they acquire in the bilingual programme and assess their teachers positively. Despite general optimism about CLIL being a method that enhances foreign language learning, closer examination reveals different outcomes based on individual school contexts. For example, students in schools in urban areas have quite different views of their experiences compared to those in rural areas: urban students show statistically significant higher scores than rural students in terms of their general level of English and in most of the aspects analysed (use of English, listening, reading, speaking, lexical range, fluency and task fulfilment).

Additionally, Oxbrow (2018) presents the results of an extensive assessment of CLIL programmes in the Canary Islands, which again focuses on the viewpoints of students. Two hundred and twenty-one students in primary and secondary education filled in a questionnaire (adapted from Pérez-Cañado, 2016a), providing information about the current status of CLIL implementation. The study presents key findings across 10 areas of interest, including the use of L2, discursive functions, competence development, methodology, materials, coordination, assessment, motivation, workload, and assessment of bilingual programmes. Variables such as teaching methodology, materials, and resources, along with the number of years studying English, significantly impact students' perceptions. In line with the conclusions drawn in previous studies (Lorenzo & Granados 2021; Lozano-Martínez, 2017; Romo Escudero & Durán-Martínez, 2019; Segura, 2023), these findings also underscore the need for increased attention to methodological aspects, teacher training, and coordination between content and language teachers in CLIL programmes.

Pires and Gallego (2022) analyse bilingual programmes in the Community of Madrid, where CLIL provisions have been offered in primary and secondary schools since 2010. Using data available from the Evaluation of Competences of the Community of Madrid in 2017 and 2019, Pires and Gallego found that students in 6th Grade had slightly lower results in acquiring non-linguistic subject content taught in English. However, by 10th Grade, the results were much better. Their analysis also reveals a new finding: students' improvement in linguistic competence in English mostly occurs in primary education. This is an interesting aspect that deserves to be highlighted for its novelty, as it could indicate that CLIL has a more notable effect on the development of linguistic competence in primary education, or that this impact is somewhat diminished in secondary education.

### 2.3 Secondary education

We will now summarize the main findings of four papers investigating the perceptions of stakeholders in secondary education, two of which deal with student perceptions, one with the perceptions of teachers participating in CLIL programmes, and one study analyses the combined insights provided by students and teachers.

Concerning students, Gómez-Parra (2020) examines how intercultural learning (IL) through CLIL is perceived. The research analyses the perspectives of 76 high school students (4th year) regarding the use of IL to teach curricular content in their bilingual programme. The study uses a mixed-research approach with a questionnaire and structured interviews. The students' opinions reveal that IL primarily stems from two key sources: native English-speaking language assistants and exchange programmes.

A significant majority of students found that interacting with peers from abroad was the most enjoyable aspect of their IL experience through the CLIL programme, with 72.3% highlighting this preference. Furthermore, 90.7% of students credited their native language assistant as the primary source of their IL, with 85.52% noting the assistants' strong cultural and intercultural knowledge. Additionally, 84.2% expressed a desire to join an exchange programme, attributing their improved intercultural awareness to direct interactions with international students (72%) and stays with foreign families (12%).

These findings were compared with the viewpoints of school principals and bilingual coordinators, who noted that both of these valuable IL resources are limited due to administrative challenges and budget constraints. The study highlights the critical role of international exchange schemes and language assistants in fostering IL in bilingual education, as identified by school principals, bilingual programme coordinators, and high school students. However, the scarcity of resources is an ongoing problem that should be addressed by national and regional administrations.

In the case of teachers, Azparren Legarre (2022) analyses the perceptions of six in-service secondary school teachers after participating in a training programme specifically designed for CLIL teachers. The research explores their opinions about CLIL and the use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction. The study collects data through questionnaires and interviews before and after the programme. The results indicate that the training programme had a significant positive impact on the teachers' beliefs by enhancing their understanding of CLIL and its benefits. The programme empowered teachers by fostering their confidence and knowledge about CLIL and how to apply it to their teaching practices. Notably, the study highlights the stress and challenges CLIL teachers may face due to unfamiliarity with the approach and language issues. The author also advocates for mandatory CLIL teacher training to alleviate possible negative feelings about CLIL and to enhance its implementation. Additionally, the study underscores the role of teachers as key decision-makers in the classroom, which ultimately influences the success of CLIL, and the benefits provided to learners, teachers, and society as a whole.

Bobadilla-Pérez and Galán-Rodríguez (2020) analyse a multilingual setting in the region of Galicia, where Spanish and Galician coexist. This study explores the practice of code-switching between L1 (Spanish-Galician) and L2 (English) in a CLIL secondary education context and its relationship with Bloom's taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS). The study focuses on a group of 28 high school students (2nd year) and their Physics and Chemistry teacher within the context of a CLIL classroom. This self-perception is significant as it influences their willingness to use the language. Bobadilla-Pérez and Galán-Rodríguez conclude that during the initial stages of implementing CLIL, the teacher's use of the students' L1, and giving the students the option to use their L1, helped them to feel less overwhelmed and enhanced the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.

Madrid and Roa (2018) focus their work on the analysis of the variables that have the most influence on the quality of bilingual programmes both in secondary and higher education. Using a questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.93), they analysed the opinions of 409 high school students (4th year), 201 students in a bilingual programme at the School of Education at the University of Granada, as well

as 29 teachers and 44 university professors. The results show a series of similarities between secondary school and university students. As indicators of the quality of the bilingual programmes, both groups highly valued aspects such as their teachers' level of foreign language proficiency, the existence of linguistic exchanges with other schools, opportunities to live in English-speaking countries, the learner-centred methodologies used by teachers, and being around students who were both interested and motivated to learn. In the case of university students, they mention receiving feedback about their progress as being important, as well as being given opportunities to speak and interact in the classroom, the ability to motivate students, being taught by native English-speaking teachers, and achieving a B2 level of English. Regarding the teaching staff, the authors point out that the above-mentioned issues are similar to those mentioned by the teachers. However, aspects such as teaching responsibilities, adequate training in CLIL, availability of human and teaching resources, having suitable knowledge about the subject being taught, and class preparation are also mentioned.

## 2.4 Higher education

In this section, we report on 10 studies that examine the implementation of bilingual programmes in higher education institutions (HEIs) through EMI. Despite the clear connections between CLIL and EMI, research has consistently demonstrated that university lecturers in EMI often fail to integrate language and content effectively. As a result, most researchers in the field have opted to abandon the CLIL acronym in favour of using the term EMI at the tertiary level (Macaro et al., 2018).

First, we present the results of research investigating the perspectives of EMI lecturers (seven papers) and then those of students (three articles).

Barrios Espinosa and López Gutiérrez (2019) explore the perceptions of EMI teachers regarding the implementation of a bilingual programme at the University of Malaga. The study employs semi-structured interviews and the qualitative analysis of data (thematic approach) gathered from eight lecturers teaching in English on a Primary Education degree course. The authors report there is an overall positive perception of the EMI programme and that learning content is not affected when taught in the L2. However, some challenges were identified according to these lecturers. Specifically, their workload is greater and insufficient competence in the L2 (students and lecturers) makes the use of more complex academic language difficult. Another interesting finding of the study is that the participants believe there are no differences between EMI and monolingual teaching, and many think there is no need to adapt their teaching when lecturing through an L2.

Alfaro-Tanco et al. (2020) analyse the effect on lecturers transitioning to EMI to teach the subject 'Operations Management'. The authors use an online questionnaire (with closed-ended questions using a scale from 1–10, and open items) and descriptive and content analyses to scrutinize a sample of 20 EMI lecturers teaching in business degree programmes in 13 Spanish universities. The authors report that most teachers were initially reluctant when invited to teach their subject in English ( $M = 5.45$ ) but that they became more optimistic once they began teaching ( $M = 8.35$ ). However, the participants in the study emphasized the need for additional training and the opportunity to exchange experiences. The lecturers also highlighted the lack of incentives to teach subjects in English, the need to use teaching tools and techniques that improve their interaction with students, and the considerable amount of time required for class preparation.

Nieto Moreno de Diezmas and Fernández Barrera (2021) examine the key challenges and difficulties faced by EMI lecturers at the University of Castile-La Mancha in two separate stages: before joining the bilingual programme and after commencing their course taught in English. The study is qualitative and uses semi-structured interviews to gather information from 20 participants. Consequently, data were collected from three separate groups of lecturers: (1) EMI lecturers; (2) lecturers potentially interested in EMI; and (3) teachers from the Department of Modern Languages who are specialists in second language acquisition and bilingual education. The study concludes that EMI at the University of Castile-La Mancha is in its infancy. Also, various factors need to be improved such as the design and implementation of a multilingual linguistic policy with a staunch and legally binding



procedure for recruiting lecturers. The authors also highlight the need for developing suitable teacher training programmes that lead to accreditation for participating in EMI initiatives. This would in turn help to ensure that EMI is effectively implemented through in-service courses. However, the main obstacles faced by teaching staff are the lack of incentives for participating in a bilingual programme, their concerns about language proficiency, inadequate opportunities for teacher training, and teacher recruitment and dedication.

Piquer-Píriz and Castellano-Risco (2021) analyse the training needs of teachers using EMI at the University of Extremadura and focus on the following dimensions: linguistic competence, methodology, materials and resources, continuous professional development, and teachers' perceptions about the EMI programme. The study gathered information using a 26-item questionnaire adapted from Pérez-Cañado (2020b) and a semi-structured written survey created ad hoc. A sample of 27 EMI lecturers participated in the study, coming from different academic fields such as Engineering, Social Sciences, Health Sciences, and Sciences. The findings indicate that EMI teachers believe their linguistic competence is appropriate for teaching in the L2. Nevertheless, they are less confident about their teaching methods and emphasize the need for specialized training. The participants also claim there is a need for additional training in specific language skills for effectively managing an EMI classroom, as well as in the theory of bilingual education. Although the teachers are positive about the experience and feel it is rewarding, they also stress how demanding and time-consuming EMI can be, issues that have caused them to seek greater support and recognition from their university.

Rubio-Cuenca and Perea-Barberá (2021) report on the results of monitoring sessions taught by 38 EMI lecturers participating in a bilingual programme at the University of Cadiz. The study analysed quantitative (descriptive) information on the lecturers' profiles (number of courses/sessions in English, L2 competence, etc.). In addition, the researchers examined qualitative data obtained from the monitoring process. This information involved language biography questionnaires and interviews between teachers and a language assistant. The purpose of this work was to encourage teachers to share their perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of their role as EMI teachers, as well as the attitudes of their students towards learning in English. The primary concerns highlighted by teachers were the students' low proficiency level of English and the teachers' insecurities about that level of English. Additional drawbacks were the greater amount of time required for task preparation and implementation, that teaching occurred at a slower pace, and the lack of recognition of EMI teachers by their university. The study concludes that when addressing these challenges, it is essential to create effective teacher training programmes tailored to each academic setting. The specific training programme would be based on the information gathered through a needs analysis and supported by a structured framework for internationalization, as outlined in Bazo et al. (2017).

Macaro et al. (2019) investigate the accreditation programmes currently available to EMI lecturers in Spain, as well as the attitudes of teachers and university administrators about professional development and certification in Spanish HEIs. The paper addresses the following research questions: (1) Do Spanish universities already have a system in place to accredit the language and methodological competence of EMI teachers? If so, how is this accreditation obtained? (2) What do EMI teachers think about being accredited and how long should a training programme last? (3) What attributes should an EMI teacher have? (4) Who should accredit EMI teachers? (5) To what extent do the beliefs of managers match those of teachers? This study was carried out using an online questionnaire, which was developed using a grounded approach (Charmaz, 2008), a survey sent to university managers (policymakers, programme coordinators, and internationalization managers), and semi-structured interviews with EMI lecturers. In total, 151 lecturers completed the questionnaire, nine policymakers completed the survey, and seven teachers volunteered for an interview. In addition, the participants belonged to several universities offering EMI programmes in Spain. The paper concludes that delivering academic content in English as a second language requires a significant re-evaluation of pedagogical approaches. Therefore, EMI teachers at universities should not be expected to transition from their L1 as the medium of instruction without adequate internal planning and support, as this approach is more complex and demands careful consideration. The shortcomings pointed out

by EMI teachers range from the overemphasis on linguistic competence, which practical classroom experience reveals to be insufficient, to the lack of prerequisites other than a willingness to instruct in English. To address these issues, additional training would include promoting cognitive and academic language proficiency, advanced supra-segmental language skills, stylistic elements, classroom preparation and management, fostering student interaction, and various pedagogical micro-skills, all of which are essential for avoiding scenarios of communication breakdown. Regarding policymakers, the significance of EMI was recognized, especially for institutions and their involvement in internationalization programmes. They also acknowledged that EMI presents many challenges to both teaching and learning. However, policymakers were uncertain about the best approach to training and pointed out that budget limitations made managers more cautious about allocating the necessary funds.

By contrast, Pons Seguí (2020) investigates the competences of CLIL teachers and the training requirements for pre-service language educators in Catalonia. The research aimed to analyse stakeholders' perspectives on the relevance of language, self-reflection, methodology, and classroom management skills of CLIL teachers, and to identify the training needs of pre-service teachers for CLIL. The study carried out involved 44 pre-service foreign language teachers and 18 CLIL teacher trainers, inspectors, and coordinators. The questionnaire by Peacock (2009) was used to identify training needs and semi-structured interviews were used to gather information on the competences of CLIL teachers and their training requirements. The analysis of quantitative data indicated that stakeholders believe language competence, methodological skills, and classroom management are all essential factors for CLIL teachers. In addition, content knowledge, teamwork, inter-school collaboration, and the ability to develop materials were also pointed out as being essential skills and activities that required specific training, as well as training in CLIL methodology and foreign language competence.

The findings also highlight the importance of defining the profile of a CLIL teacher to align education with competencies, considering stakeholders' varying training needs in teacher education design, providing opportunities for developing CLIL-related competences, and conducting systematic evaluations of teacher education programmes to ensure their effectiveness. In summary, this paper underscores the multifaceted competences required for effective CLIL teaching and emphasizes the need for comprehensive pre-service teacher training that addresses the diverse and specific requirements identified by stakeholders.

Regarding the viewpoints of students, González Ardeo (2016) explores the attitudes of learners and their motivation towards learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in a trilingual context. The study surveyed 132 engineering students from the University of the Basque Country, where Spanish, Basque, and English are used as the medium of instruction. Data were collected using a 35-item questionnaire and descriptive statistical analyses were carried out. The results underline the positive attitude of students towards learning a foreign language, irrespective of their L1 (Basque or Spanish) and indicate a general positive attitude as compared with the outcome of a study carried out 10 years prior by the same author. The data also reveal that students were highly motivated to learn a foreign language, with a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation driving them to learn English. Since no experimental groups were considered, the research did not estimate the direct impact of EMI on the development of the students' attitudes.

In a recent study analysing the same context, the Basque Country, Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2023) investigate the reasons why university students opt for subjects taught in English over subjects taught in their own language, either Basque or Spanish Medium Instruction. The study is based on a quantitative research design, where 455 students enrolled in EMI subjects at the University of the Basque Country answered a 77 closed-ended survey. The students were asked about why they chose EMI subjects, using Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System as the theoretical basis. Overall, 77.3% of students gave high scores to the items related to the Ideal L2 Self, while 83.9% gave low scores to items related to the Ought-to Self and practical reasons for enrolling in EMI. This indicates that the reasons motivating students to enrol in EMI courses were more in line with the Ideal L2 Self rather than the Ought-to Self. Additionally, students were divided on their interest in EMI, with 46.3% giving low scores and 53.7% giving high scores for this factor. The



study concludes that students did not feel pressured by external agents (such as the university or their parents/guardians) to study in English. Instead, their motivations were more closely related to their personal preferences.

Madrid and Julius (2020) assess the academic performance of a group of students participating in a bilingual programme and a non-bilingual group studying for a degree in Primary Education at the University of Granada and their level of satisfaction with EMI. The bilingual group took 19 subjects in English while the non-bilingual group took the same subjects in their mother tongue (Spanish). Descriptive and quasi-experimental research was used to assess the academic achievement of both groups of students. To perform the study, a questionnaire was answered by 1,057 students from the Faculty of Education (427 bilingual students; 85 males and 342 females) and 630 non-bilingual students (202 males and 428 females), who were following the same curriculum and syllabuses (19 subjects in total). Despite the potential difficulty of pursuing a degree in a foreign language, the students in the bilingual programme performed better compared with their non-bilingual counterparts. However, it is worth noting that non-bilingual students expressed slightly higher satisfaction with the curriculum, with an average score of 3.81 compared with the average of 3.73 obtained by bilingual students.

### 3. Discussion

In this section, we aim to critically examine the insights derived from the analysis of CLIL programmes in Spain across various educational levels, spanning from pre-primary to higher education. Our focus will be on synthesizing the main findings of the studies included in this review, while also offering a critical perspective on the current state and future directions of bilingual education in Spain.

We would like to highlight, as a preliminary issue, that despite Spain being a European leader in the number of bilingual education programmes (Lorenzo et al., 2021), none of the research in this paper discusses the reasons why these programmes have become so popular. We presume this is because they are well known and relate to sociological issues, such as the aforementioned traditional deficit in foreign language proficiency among the Spanish population and the association of a command of the English language with success (educational, economic, and cultural), which every family seeks for their children. Despite some of the difficulties mentioned in this paper, most teachers, parents, and students still feel bilingual education prepares students for an increasingly competitive and global job market. Therefore, bilingual programmes are perceived as the gateway to a more successful professional landscape.

Limited research has been undertaken in the realm of pre-primary education (Guerrini, 2023). Although the number of bilingual programmes has traditionally been rather low in the early years, we consider it a pivotal stage for the cognitive and linguistic development of children. The role of teachers emerges as crucial for the success of CLIL programmes at this stage (Otto, 2024), necessitating methodological adaptations aligned with early years' characteristics: holistic learning, emphasis on oral communication, and dedicated attention to the emotional, social, and intellectual growth of the child (Ruiz de Zarobe, 2023). Incorporating the requirements of bilingual education programmes into these methodological changes is imperative. In this sense, Otto and Cortina-Pérez (2023) propose an innovative holistic approach, reconceptualizing the 4Cs model proposed by Coyle et al. (2010), to adapt CLIL to pre-primary levels. Content should be understood not as isolated blocks of knowledge but as areas of experience, Communication as mainly oral communication, including translanguaging and non-verbal communication, Cognition developed together with psychomotor, social, emotional, and creative development, and Culture mainly aimed at fostering intercultural awareness. This re-interpretation of the 4Cs is more in line with the holistic approach usually followed in Spanish pre-primary levels and may contribute to the implementation of CLIL at this stage.

Educators acknowledge, in both pre-primary and primary education, the need to improve their level of proficiency in English through language training programmes. They advocate for greater language competence, in combination with more methodological training in CLIL to deepen their understanding of this approach. Additionally, teachers demand that practical measures be taken to alleviate the additional workload associated with bilingual education, including more balanced student-teacher

ratios, readily available materials, enhanced opportunities for teacher collaboration, improved communication and coordination among schools, stable working conditions for teaching staff, and measures to address diversity in the classroom.

Teachers seem to be willing to take up the challenges of bilingual education, but they demand support from the educational authorities, which they consider to be lacking, to successfully implement a good quality programme. Institutions should provide targeted training programs that address both language competence and specific methodological expertise. Encouraging collaboration between language specialists and content instructors is crucial for creating a supportive teaching environment. Plans for continuous professional development and incentives for teachers could also help mitigate the increased workload associated with bilingual education. It is especially in the area of attention to diversity that most divergent perceptions of the effects of bilingual programmes on students are to be found. Some authors such as Bruton (2015), Gortázar and Taberner (2020), and Murillo et al. (2021) consider that bilingual programmes are responsible for the segregation of the most disadvantaged students. Alternatively, authors such as Barrios (2019), Lorenzo et al. (2021), and Pérez-Cañado (2016b, 2020a, 2023) believe that bilingual education programmes promote social cohesion by providing an educational model that was previously only accessible to the elite. There is, however, a significant difference between both viewpoints: the former is based mostly on perceptions whereas the latter relies mainly on empirical evidence.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt teachers feel that both bilingual education programmes and the growing trend towards more inclusive practices go hand in hand with more responsibility and workload, and that both require greater support if teachers are to carry out their jobs successfully.

In primary education, teachers tend to assess bilingual programmes positively, with some studies highlighting a positive correlation between teaching experience, English proficiency, and how bilingual programmes are perceived (Milla Lara & Casas Pedrosa, 2018; Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Szczesniak & Muñoz Luna, 2022). The shift towards learner-centred, experiential, participative, and active teaching is considered one of the most positive consequences of the bilingual education model, particularly in a context where traditional teaching methods still hold significant sway (Bolarín et al., 2019).

At this educational stage, the role of L1 and L2 in the bilingual classroom, encompassing functions, percentage of use, and language policies, stands out as a differentiating element. The prevailing practice appears to be translanguaging, which maximizes communication through the combined use of different elements of the two languages (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016), in contrast to an unofficial policy promoting the exclusive use of English (Cenoz et al., 2014; Lorenzo et al., 2010).

Although many primary teachers in Spain have embraced CLIL initiatives, it must be noted that educators often lack the necessary linguistic proficiency and pedagogical training to effectively implement a CLIL programme.

Regarding secondary education, the perceptions of educators align with those of their counterparts in primary education regarding opportunities for further training and measures to alleviate the additional workload that bilingual education entails. Moreover, their insights reveal multifaceted challenges, with a recurring emphasis on the intricate nature of assessment practices. Teachers are often uncertain about how to evaluate both language and content, which highlights the need to develop appropriate tools and guidelines. Supporting factors such as in-service teacher education programmes, language assistants who are English native speakers, and international exchange schemes emerge as crucial contributors to the success of CLIL initiatives. Additionally, addressing disparities in language proficiency and the nuanced use of L1 within the CLIL framework is highlighted.

In this sense, developing and implementing robust external assessment frameworks can provide schools with clear criteria for evaluating both language and content knowledge. Additionally, promoting the use of students' L1 alongside L2 during assessments can aid in better content acquisition and cognitive development.

In secondary education, some concerns have been also raised regarding the possible selective nature of CLIL in Spain (e.g., see Bruton, 2013, 2015). It has been argued that the implementation of bilingual programmes can be connected to elitism, with students from lower socio-economic settings facing

more challenges in accessing CLIL education. Although there is no empirical evidence demonstrating this fact (Pérez-Cañado, 2016b), it must be acknowledged that socio-economic status (SES) may influence the deployment of CLIL provisions, an issue that deserves further attention. Furthermore, self-selective processes in CLIL (for example, see Brady and García-Pinar [2019] and Martínez-Garrido et al. [2022]) must be carefully examined to ascertain causality (and not only correlation) in bilingual programmes. Namely, does CLIL promote motivation (as suggested by several studies) or do bilingual programmes attract those learners who are more inclined towards L2 learning? What role do parents and SES play in promoting student performance? What is the impact of other individual variables (receiving private lessons, travelling to English-speaking countries, etc.)?

Based on the perspectives of families, concerns about the suitability of bilingual programmes also arise. Some parents express dissatisfaction with bilingual education; for instance, exams like the EBAU (Evaluación de Bachillerato para el Acceso a la Universidad), the Spanish national test for university admissions, continue to adhere to a traditional approach. These exams focus on tasks such as the use of English and basic reading comprehension activities, where competences acquired through CLIL are not adequately reflected. Hence, there appears to be a need to align the current forms of assessment with evolving teaching strategies and acquired skills.

From the information gathered from EMI lecturers, distinct proposals for improvement arise. Lecturers call for increased support from universities, particularly in terms of EMI methodology training, implementation of monitoring systems for programme implementation, and the formulation of professional development plans. Most educators highlight the lack of collaboration between content instructors and language specialists as a drawback of EMI. EMI lecturers assert that more effective interdepartmental cooperation is essential for implementing bilingual programmes. Teachers affirm that collaboration plays a crucial role in enhancing the reflective abilities of EMI educators and is essential if EMI is to be successful. Instructors, while generally holding positive views, often feel isolated, and have a sense of being left to navigate teaching in a foreign language individually, prompting them to seek more institutional support. Our analysis underscores the necessity for training initiatives that not only tackle obstacles related to language competence but also prepare instructors with specific methodological expertise.

Teachers also emphasize that the L2 proficiency of some students can be a significant hurdle as well as their own proficiency. Moreover, universities should address the lack of incentives for teaching in English and the increased workload resulting from preparing lectures in a foreign language, both of which are pivotal concerns for EMI lecturers.

Budgetary constraints, as acknowledged by policymakers, significantly influence the success and limitations of EMI programmes in Spain. Also, studies exploring the perspectives of students reveal a high level of motivation for studying in English, the presence of various types of motivation, and no evidence that indicates academic achievement is compromised through bilingual education.

In short, this critical review of CLIL programmes in Spain underscores the need for targeted improvements at different educational levels, with a call for nuanced changes in the methods employed, the enhanced language proficiency of educators, and comprehensive support systems for the successful implementation of bilingual programmes. The challenges identified and the solutions proposed offer valuable insight for future research and the continuous improvement of bilingual education in Spain.

#### 4. Conclusions

First, it is worth mentioning that research published before 2013 on the implementation of CLIL in Spain identified several shortcomings, such as the need for additional training to improve teachers' linguistic and methodological competence, the lack of CLIL materials, the need for more coordination to work collaboratively, and the lack of guidance from educational authorities. According to our review, these limitations still exist and are further complemented by the perceptions of other stakeholders (not just teachers) and new issues. This trend reveals that bilingual education in Spain still requires improvement, as many shortcomings have not been addressed.

It is also worth highlighting that teachers are now more critical of bilingual programs than when they first started. Initially, the difficulties were better understood, but after almost 20 years since their inception, it is evident that there has been little improvement in many aspects, as Szczesniak & Muñoz (2022) point out. The analysis of studies investigating the implementation of CLIL in primary and secondary education has revealed interesting results. Although satisfaction among teachers and students appears positive, certain key variables influence stakeholders' perceptions and the success of CLIL. Organizational issues such as coordination between content and language teachers in CLIL programmes play a pivotal role. Additionally, the support provided to teachers expressing a need for more specific training is crucial, especially considering the methodological aspects inherent to CLIL. The type of school, urban versus rural, and the educational stage clearly impact the implementation of CLIL and warrant further research.

The current review reveals that there are many unresolved issues in bilingual education in Spain, with a notable absence of reliable and standardized assessment procedures. In this sense, institutional support is critical: securing adequate funding and ensuring the availability of permanent teaching staff are essential. Also, employing more specialist teachers and language assistants can significantly enhance student support and programme effectiveness. Besides, we strongly believe engaging stakeholders in the development and evaluation of bilingual programs can foster a more inclusive and responsive educational environment. Aligning assessment practices with the evolving teaching strategies and competencies developed through CLIL can also address parental concerns and improve programme credibility.

The conclusions drawn from our systematic review must, however, be taken with caution as the main objective was to analyse stakeholders' perspectives on the implementation of CLIL. In doing so, we have not examined many academic articles addressing other types of topics.

Future research on the implementation of CLIL programmes in Spain may require obtaining more in-depth information on the perspectives of families to determine their degree of satisfaction. Additionally, there is a lack of cross-sectional studies examining inter-institutional, inter-regional, or national contexts. Longitudinal studies exploring the implementation and progress of EMI are also lacking, which is most likely due to the inherent challenges of conducting such research.

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