

**BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR
RETURN MIGRANT STUDENTS IN PUERTO
RICO: PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS,
PARENTS AND TEACHERS**

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Introduction

This study was designed to explore how two bilingual education programs in Puerto Rico provide for return migrant students' linguistic, cultural adjustment and social interaction needs as perceived by program participants, their parents and teachers. Questions for the study were derived from the return migrant students' established needs as described in the literature (Arbona & García (1980), Ashton (1980), Brown (1973), Cafferty & Rivera-Martínez (1981), Ekstrand (1977), Irizarry (1981), Kavetsky (1978), Paulston (1980), Prewitt-Díaz (1981), Ramos-Perea (1972), Tilley (1982), and Zamora (1983).

Subjects were 41 male and 61 female students, their 102 migrant parents and 32 bilingual teachers. The mean age of the students was 16 years within a range of 14 to 19 years old. They were in public high school and receiving bilingual education services as a result of their identified educational needs in terms of their Spanish language difficulties, lack of knowledge about Puerto Rican culture, and social interaction conflicts. The parents were of low to middle socioeconomic status.

Perceptions of respondents were measured by questionnaires consisting of quantitative rating scales, closed and qualitative open-ended ones. Students and teachers answered the questionnaires in a classroom setting. Questionnaires were sent to the parents who answered them individually. Questions concerned perceptions based on how the programs were meeting returnees' established needs, suggestions to help them meet those needs, and returnees' problems in adapting to the island's cultural and social environment.

The Chi-square test was used to determine whether there were significant differences ($p < .05$) of opinion among respondents' perceptions. Results showed that students and parents felt returnees were making progress in their linguistic development, whereas teachers felt the programs provided for linguistic needs, but returnees were not gaining skills. Students and parents expressed contentment with the way teachers were helping returnees adapt culturally. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with how the programs were helping returnees' overall cultural adjustment. Returnees felt that the programs' social activities were helping them make friends. Less than half of the parents felt likewise. A moderate number of teachers perceived that returnees were responding positively to the programs' social adaptation efforts.

Review of literature

The review of literature which has been made on the existing research shows that the crucial issues affecting the Puerto Rican migrant returnee students are language difficulties, cultural adjustment problems and social interaction needs. Studies made by Vidal (1975), Kavetsky (1978), Ashton (1980), Arbona and García (1980), Cafferty and Rivera-

Martínez (1981), as well as Irizarry (1981) feel that the linguistic difficulties encountered by migrant students upon returning to the island indicate a grave need in terms of helping them overcome this barrier. Ramos-Perea (1972), Carrero (1978) and Prewitt-Díaz (1981) have studied the cultural adjustment problems of returnees and have emphasized the need to design programs for these students which takes these aspects into consideration. Maldonado-Denis (1976), Ekstrand (1977), Pacheco-Maldonado, Wapner and Lucca (1979), Robles, Martínez and Moscoso (1980) as well as Noguerras and Prewitt-Díaz (1981) stress the social interaction needs of returned migrant students which have become an educational issue and presents a challenge to bilingual education programs.

A. Linguistic Needs

Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez (1981) describe the linguistic plight of the Puerto Rican migrant child who moves back and forth between two linguistic cultures. He questions the way in which they are more able to learn and the linguistic medium through which they learn best. Since the typical Puerto Rican migrant is a cyclical migrant, this fact represents a distinctive problem for these children. Children caught up in this cyclical movement cannot learn only Spanish nor only English. Whatever their first language and whatever the dominant language in their school, these children "must learn both (languages), they must become more able than most of us, because they must survive in two monolingual cultures: Puerto Rico and mainland United States" (p. xi).

B. Cultural Adjustment Needs

Ramos-Perea (1972) viewed the concept of adjustment from the students' own perspectives and conceptions of school and self. It was operationally defined in terms of the students' agreement or disagreement, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with specific aspects of the school environment. The latter relate to the school goals, the reward and punishment system, the norms relating to the students' role, and the students' participation in the formal and informal social groups in the school.

C. Social Interaction Needs

Brown (1973) has stated that the human being is socially orientated and the chief mechanism for maintaining the bonds of society is language. Thus, the process of second language acquisition must involve an interaction with the new society and a linguistic understanding of that speech community.

When Puerto Rican migrant students go to live in the mainland United States for the first time, they must strive to interact socially with their new environment in order to learn the second language well. Later, when they return to Puerto Rico, they must once more endeavor to interact socially in order to communicate in their own native language, which seems more like a second language for those who have lived numerous years on the mainland and have not used their first language to a great extent while living there.

Ekstrand (1977) feels that the total adjustment process of the migrant comprises much more than the acquisition of a new language, although this is an important part of the process. The migrant must also acquire new concepts, new behavior patterns and new emotional ties.

D. Bilingual Education

It is not a farce to state that the plethora of literature concerning return migrant students often implies a need for bilingual educational programs geared towards returnees' linguistic difficulties, cultural adjustment problems, and social interaction needs. However, it is important to determine what bilingual education per se is supposed to do. According to Zamora (1983) the goals of bilingual education are meant to help language-minority students to:

- * learn English;
- * learn subject matter skills and content;
- * develop a positive self-concept; and
complete schooling. (p. 5)

Carrillo (1983) purports that bilingualism has not functioned as a positive factor for many Spanish-speaking students in the United States because the schools have not capitalized on the linguistic skills already possessed by the students. In other words, the students have not been given the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential in their mother tongue. Consequently, their home language has been a liability rather than an asset. As a result, native speakers of the language have felt frustration and some have turned against their own language.

In terms of a broader point of view, Rugsaken (1983) has stated that

"bilingual education (if it is what it says it is) is a vehicle for the achievement of the United States' multi-language capabilities which are necessary in securing this country's international political and economic influence" (p.10).

How this is done is an issue of great debate among professional educators and lay people. There is much confusion and controversy between those who advocate transfer-oriented (transitional) programs which stress the goals of assimilation to mainstream society, and those who advocate maintenance-oriented programs, which stress the goals of preservation of ethnic language and culture (Baratz, 1973).

Tilley (1982) has observed that English as a Second Language (ESL) and the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) are transfer-oriented programs, whereas bilingual education programs tend to be maintenance-oriented with assimilationist features. These program names, however, are often used synonymously. Von Maltitz (1975) has noted that transfer-oriented programs such as ESL and TESOL are aimed at helping students over the difficult language hurdle, making it possible for them to keep up in their academic work while they are learning enough English to function successfully in regular English classes. In contrast, bilingual education programs encourage pupils from various ethnic groups to develop and maintain their knowledge of the mother tongue while also mastering English. Thus, such programs aim to develop truly and competently literate bilingual individuals.

In case of temporary migrants, mother tongue maintenance by the children takes on extreme importance as the basis for successful reintegration into their country of origin. In this vein, Paulston (1980)

recalls the language policy of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education in 1974:

Migrants' children should be assured of a good knowledge of their mother tongue and indigenous culture, for the mother tongue is one of the foundations of their development and is likely to facilitate the learning of other languages.

In terms of positive outcomes, Sánchez (1981) states that bilingualism will develop better educated, more acculturated individuals who will help to build "a more culturally rich, linguistically sympathetic society" (p. 86). Moreover, in another article, Blonstedt, Thomas and Teyna (1983) philosophize that through the bilingual approach to education,

each child is led to understand that his life is his own to lead, and that no one else can lead it for him. He comes to understand that it is pointless to blame failure on environment, family temperament, or the influence of others, when ultimately the individual is free to choose for himself. The effective bilingual teacher incorporates fully into the program of pedagogy those ingredients which enable each student to conclude that for him the future is his to make. (p. 28)

Similarly, Castellanos (1985) has reported that advocates of the bilingual methodology feel that it is both philosophical and practical: it is at once sound in theory as well as workable in fact. Consequently, Castellanos claims that it has yielded positive learning results in the cognitive as well as affective domain. In essence, it provides a means toward the development of a harmonious and positive self- image.

During this past August, Martínez (1992) reported in a local newspaper that return migrant parents and their children confront serious problems concerning adequate living conditions, unemployment, bilingual schools to meet the linguistic needs of their children, and lack of health facilities such as the ones that they were accustomed to on the mainland. Moreover, rejection by their native island peers increases their difficulties of establishing meaningful inter-cultural relationships.

When considering what has been presented thus far, it would be wise to inform policy makers, teachers and all those concerned with the education of our children, to consider the precarious return migrant students' needs. Therefore, it is important to carry out inter-cultural research aimed at finding ways of ameliorating the linguistic, cultural and social hardships encountered by both return migrant parents and their children.

Methodology

Setting

The development of bilingual programs throughout selected districts of the island's educational system prompted this researcher to be concerned about the programs' efficacy in dealing with returnees' linguistic, cultural adjustment and social interaction needs. In order to gain a greater insight into the quality of services rendered to the returnees, it was decided in this study to examine the programs developed at two Junior and Senior High Schools in the greater San Juan metropolitan area of the island.

Sample

The research sample consisted of three groups: return migrant students, their migrant parents and their bilingual teachers. Each of the first two groups contained 102 subjects and the latter group contained 32 subjects. Data concerning demographic characteristics were collected from all three groups. Frequency counts and percentage distribution were used to analyze all of this data.

Instruments

Three instruments were specially designed for this exploratory study which consisted of a return migrant students' questionnaire, a return migrant parents' questionnaire and another for bilingual education teachers. In keeping with the curricula of the bilingual schools of this study, the research instruments covered the gamut of academic, cultural and social activities available to return migrant students.

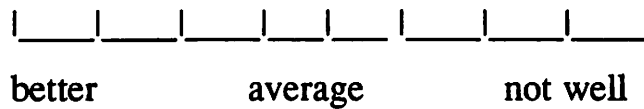
The questionnaires for this study were developed with a particular form by following the guidelines of Thorndike and Hagen (1969) who recommend the rating scale format in order "to get appraisals on a common set of attributes for all raters and to have these expressed on a common quantitative scale" (p. 422).

Consequently, for this particular study, rating scales were designed with a range of adjectives representing respondents' degree of perceptions indicated by a check mark at some appropriate point on a line. To illustrate, an item concerning social interaction needs that was originally expressed in a negative manner ("I feel that students who are not in the bilingual program do not like me"), was then expressed in positive terms

by using the rating scale format to help students specify more clearly the extent of their perceptions on a quantitative scale ranging from 1 ("not well" or unfavorable) to 9 ("better" or favorable).

For example,

I feel that students who are not in the bilingual program like me.



The rating scale format was discussed with colleagues, administrators and school teachers who gave their approval to the research instrument. Thus, face validity was determined by these educators who expressed their positive judgment on the data gathering instrument as being a reflection of the perceptions it intends to measure.

The questionnaires also consisted of various open-ended questions as suggested by Patton (1980) because they allow "the person being interviewed to select from among that person's full repertoire of possible responses" (p. 212). Moreover, Patton thinks that such qualitative questions help determine the dimensions, themes, images and words that respondents who are familiar with a particular education program use among themselves to describe their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Procedure

To interpret the data, a descriptive analysis based on frequency counts and percentage distribution for each rating scale was made. For the purpose of presentation, the 9 divisions of the rating scale format were

collapsed to 3 ordinal categories. Next, a reliability coefficient was made of the items measuring linguistic perceptions among the students' and parents' group. The reliability test was made to determine which items were related to the general scale. A correlation coefficient of .71 between the students' scale and .85 for the parents' scale was found. The teachers' scale has a .81 correlation coefficient. The reliability coefficients ranged from .71 to mid .80's. Therefore, the three scales were found adequate for the purpose of this study.

To analyze respondents' perceptions as expressed on the rating scales, a Chi-square frequency distribution appropriate to the comparison of the three responding groups was used based on Kerlinger's (1973, p. 166-173) guidelines. Moreover, the Chi-square statistic was employed to find the significance of differences between proportions of respondents' perceptions by comparing observed frequencies and expected ones. The .05 level of significance was used to test the observed relationships between respondents' perceptions. These appraisals, expressed on the quantitative rating scale, were processed following the guidelines of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Descriptive statistics were made to analyze the open-ended questions in terms of their content matter. These questions were first tabulated using frequency counts. Each open-ended question was rewritten at the top of a draft sheet and this researcher checked each respondents' questionnaire to see what each one wrote concerning the particular question. Thus, a tally was made of the number of respondents giving a particular answer as well

as those who gave the same or similar answer. The findings of the open-ended questions have been integrated with the rest of the research findings.

Research findings

Demographic Characteristics of the Student Group

The analyses based on the returnees' demographic characteristics revealed that although the majority (59.8%) of returnees (N=61) were born in Puerto Rico, they have lived more than half their lives (11 years; 52%) on the mainland. Hence, this indicates that at least 9 out of every 10 returnees have been socialized in mainland schools.

It is also important to note that close to seventy-eight percent of returnees (N=79) did not attend a bilingual program while living on the mainland. As a result, they did not develop Spanish language skills, and did not have an opportunity to become familiar with the island's culture.

Demographic Characteristic of the Parent Group

More than half of the return migrant parents (N=65) were unemployed even though the majority (N=77; 75.5%) have had high school education and have worked in sales or clerical occupations. Before migrating to the mainland, more than half of the parents (N=62) lived in an urban area. Sixty-five percent of these respondents (N=66) lived on the mainland for more than 11 years. Most of them had not been back for very long since the highest percentage (58.8%; N=60) have returned from 1 to 4 years prior to this study. Nevertheless, an interesting finding is that the majority of return migrant parents (N=70) live in urban areas inhabited by the growing middle class island residents.

Demographic Characteristics of the Teacher Group

Close to forty-one percent of the bilingual teachers (N=13) who participated in this study had 3 years or less experience working in bilingual programs. Similarly, forty-one percent of the teachers (N=13) had never lived on the mainland. It is important to note that in terms of academic preparation, the majority (N=24; 75%) of the bilingual teacher respondents only obtained a bachelor's degree and only twenty-two percent (N=7) held a master's degree in their respective fields.

In summary, the demographic data reveals a population of students who had lived most of their lives on the mainland and had not attended bilingual programs. Their parents had not been able to find work upon returning to the island, although they seemed to be living relatively well from their savings. The children are being taught by teachers with no life experience on the mainland and relatively new at teaching returnees.

Linguistic Area

The results show that in general, the students are enthusiastic about the programs' language aspects, particularly in terms of the English language. Likewise, parents also seemed content with returnees' language progress, especially in the oral, reading and written aspects of English. However, the teachers did not feel that returnees were working up to par. They also thought mistakenly that returnees are not proud of the Spanish language.

It seems that perhaps the returnees are judging themselves according to their own progress while teachers are judging returnees in terms of absolute expected performance and thus comparing them to what native students are capable of achieving. This is confirmed by the great number of teachers (65.6%) who felt that the programs' objectives were geared towards returnees' needs. Nevertheless, they answered rather negatively with respect to language skills which means they were not thinking of the program but of student performance. It would be more reasonable if teachers would evaluate returnees by using relative standards, and take into consideration how much progress they have accomplished in Spanish since they began in the program rather than how well they know the language as compared to island students their same age.

This finding is similar to Prewitt-Díaz (1981) who found that teachers on the mainland tended to show low teacher expectations of migrants' success in school. Some even considered migrants lazy and unruly. Hence, there seems to be parallelism towards the way some teachers feel about returnees on the mainland and the way teachers feel about them on the island. It is possible that part of the teachers' insensitivity towards returnees' language difficulties may be due to the fact that they are not familiar with the mainland situation, since the majority of them have never lived on the continent.

The qualitative information gleaned from interviewing teachers indicates that returnees could first benefit most from a functional language approach which would assess what they are actually capable of doing with the language. This means that the emphasis should be on students' command of communicative functions in the classroom, to be able to

comprehend what certain words and expressions mean when others say them, and to understand their meaning when they occur in reading materials.

This also means that Spanish instruction has to be related to returnees' specific linguistic needs. Moreover, some teachers felt that the Spanish language program could benefit returnees by being integrated with the regular instructional program. In this way, the Spanish that is being taught to these students will be the language they will need in the classroom, on the school grounds, in their communities and throughout the island as they interact with peers, relatives and new acquaintances. Also, they will need to acquire a good command of writing and reading in Spanish so that they may be successful in their attempts to form part of the island's college bound students or qualify to enter vocational schools.

Cultural Area

The findings of the cultural area indicate that students and parents are satisfied with the way the programs are helping returnees to understand how native islanders live. Although the teachers showed overall dissatisfaction with the programs' cultural adjustment efforts, they indicated positive perceptions in the rest of the cultural questions. In addition, it is evident that all respondents expressed the need of helping returnees understand the island's culture by increasing communication with native residents and exposing students to more cultural activities.

Other information obtained from interviewing teachers shows that most of the returnees who participated in this study have assimilated the behavior patterns and values of the mainland culture. As a result, their

outlook on life is generally different from the one that their native peers have on the island. This supports Ramos-Perea's (1972) study which found that the longer students stayed on the mainland, the more assimilated they become in the cultural, social and linguistic patterns of that continent. Thus, students' extent of acculturation and assimilation in one particular culture may determine the extent of their maladjustment in another one.

Social Area

The data results of the social needs area indicate that one particular aspect that should be explored further is the teachers' negative attitude towards migration, which seems to be affecting their whole outlook on how to work with students caught in this plight. An area in need of improvement in order for returnees to develop their self-image are the school's social activities. All the respondents expressed concern regarding the need for a greater variety of social activities, and enhancing returnees' communication with native students. This would aid returnees in their social interaction and would make them feel a part of the rest of the student body.

Implications and Recommendations

One of the most important implications is that there is a need for more Bilingual/Bicultural Education Programs in order to provide for the linguistic, cultural and social interaction needs of students when they return to continue their education on the island. Moreover, there is a greater need to improve the programs that exist. However, policy makers, administrators and teachers must understand what the programs are doing

well in order to replicate them. Since the data results show that teachers do not seem completely knowledgeable about the returnee population, they should be involved in teacher preparation activities that will help them to develop better programs for returnees.

The particular findings under each area can be used by policy makers, administrators, school directors and teachers to ameliorate the quality of bilingual education programs on the island that are rendered to the often confused and despondent returnees. Once the current bilingual programs are improved by using some of this study's results as guidelines, then returnees will eventually be able to integrate easily into the island's linguistic, cultural and social mainstream.

It can also be implied from the research findings that parents' high level of unemployment is a critical situation that may be affecting their children's security and emotional stability in their academic progress, cultural and social adjustment. Hence, the public Government agencies should strive to provide the return migrant parents with reorientation to the island culture so that they will be motivated to look for job opportunities.

The return migrant students' adjustment process should be viewed as a total integration behavior comprising bilingual ability, cultural understanding and social interaction skills in order for acculturation to occur. Moreover, a humanistic approach toward methodology which gives importance to the affective and socio-psychological factors should have priority so that these rather dejected students can feel accepted and thus, be motivated to achieve success.

This implies that the island's educational system should not only improve the training of all persons who work directly with returnees throughout the island, but should also provide information to community members so that they can understand the problems affecting the migrant families. The local news media could also be influential in enhancing the image of these families by creating an awareness of their contribution to the island's economy and society.

A possible remedy for teachers to overcome their negative attitudes towards working with returnees would be for the University of Puerto Rico to offer intensive teacher-training exchange program in collaboration with other universities or agencies on the mainland. Consequently, when teachers return to the island, they can be better prepared to deal with the language difficulties that returnees need to ameliorate in order to integrate easily into the public school's linguistic, cultural and social ambiance.

Once the teachers are sensitized to returnees' urgent needs, the school directors will eventually be influenced by their concerns and probably administrators will also respond positively. This latter group could be highly instrumental in helping to pool together all the resources needed to provide a variety of services to these precarious students.

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