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“Trilingual education in the Basque Country.  
A case study: San José – Jesuítas  
Ikastetxea. Durango (Bizkaia)”

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Mónica Elexpe Itoiz  
monicaelexpe@yahoo.com  
Centro asociado: Bergara

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Profesora: Pilar Rodríguez Arancón  
Línea 4: Lingüística Inglesa: El Lenguaje  
como Comunicación (Sociolingüística)  
Grado en Estudios Ingleses  
Departamento: Filologías Extranjeras y sus  
Lingüísticas.  
Facultad de Filología

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For this final paper I have focused my research on the implementation of trilingual education in the Basque Country and more accurately, I have developed a “case study” based at San José Ikastetxea (Durango-Bizkaia). At the same time and in order to present a more personal piece of work, I have interviewed European citizens who are either bilingual or trilingual and have had access to more than one education system. They have provided me with their points of view regarding the learning of second/third languages, which have enriched my own personal conclusions.

## **“Trilingual education in the Basque Country.**

### **A case study: San José – Jesuítas Ikastetxea. Durango (Bizkaia)”**

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## **1. Introduction. Personal motivation to choose the topic: “Trilingual education in the Basque Country”**

Ever since I was a child and started learning English at Primary School I became fascinated by the chance I was given to get to know the world “just” by speaking a language. As soon as I was told about “pen friends” I managed to have a few (in Finland, Burundi, etc.). Then, I started travelling and this just reinforced my desire of learning more. The English language has given me some of the best moments in my life while sharing a beer with backpackers from anywhere in the world in Varanasi, Quito or Timbuktu.

I am 45 and currently working as a part time teacher of English at different companies in my area as well as at a School of English. The first question I ask my students on the first day of class is the reason why they come. When the answer is “because I need a certificate in order to get a job” I get really sad. My aim during the course is both to teach them the language and to make them aware of the wide range of communicative situations they will not miss any longer once they reach a certain level. Hopefully, once they start seeing the results of their effort, they will also start loving the language.

As you can see, my perception used to be both naïve and romantic, so when I came across the Sociolinguistics subject and saw that scholars actually research “speech communities”, “bilingual education”, “minority languages”, “language and gender”, etc. I just wanted to know more.

Having mentioned the study of minority languages, I happen to be Basque but my mother tongue is Spanish. I have learnt both Basque and English at school and this is where I have to mention my other concern: the implementation of a successful education system where three languages can be used at the same working level.

Regarding this issue, our Government has been making a huge effort (investments, teachers training, policies, etc.) so that the Basque language does not disappear. These factors have created various conflicts and yet, the situation is not a homogeneous one at all. Moreover, now we face the fact that English is a "sine qua non" requirement within our global world. How should we

adapt our system in order to finish Secondary School with a "decent" level of English, Spanish and Basque?

On the one hand, parents are "sold" trilingual education when looking for a school for their children. However, I have realized that a high percentage of students (right from nursery level up) also attend private English tuition in order to reach a higher level than the one provided by the school. This does not happen with other subjects. Does it mean we do not trust the system, the school and the teachers? Should our students not be playing rugby or the guitar after 8 hours at school?

Unfortunately, when facing the difficulties that learning a language involves, some people's attitude becomes pragmatic, so that the decision is to concentrate on the "useful" one, and this means English. However, what happens with the language that makes you the person you are, your ancestors' language, the one that has built the character and the culture of a community, no matter how small this is?

This is what I would like to concentrate my work on: the work which is being done so that these three languages are taught, learnt and used; the difficulties the schools are facing; the changes that this involves regarding teachers, budgets and so on; and the expectations for the near future.

As I consider myself a pragmatic person, I have decided to deal with the specific project of one particular school, being this "San José-Jesuítas Ikastetxea" Durango (Bizkaia). They have a "Trilingual model" running from nursery to the end of Secondary School (2-18 years old) which is going to become my "case study" for this final paper.

In addition, I have prepared a questionnaire myself so that people with a wide experience in both learning and teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language) can provide me with their viewpoints regarding the different systems around Europe and so, I have interviewed Spanish mothers with a high level of English who actually live in England and have children at British schools; EFL teachers living in Spain; a French lady, former teacher of French in Bilbao; and Danish parents leaving in Denmark. I wanted to know what their opinions are about the

different policies regarding “Language learning” and how effective they reckon they are. I find the topic relevant, interesting and of crucial importance now that our politicians do not seem to reach an agreement regarding the kind of education our young people should be offered.

## **2. Current situation in the Basque Country**

I will start this section by saying that whenever I mention our “speech community”, this will mean the “Basque Country” as somehow different to other communities in Spain regarding language policies. There are two official languages which mean that Linguistic Policies vary from the ones in Madrid, to mention one example.

Back in 1982 and with the approval of the “Ley Básica de Normalización del Uso del Euskera”, Basque language teaching and learning became compulsory within our community. That was a challenge at all levels as the Basque Country is not a homogeneous community, linguistically speaking. Due to this reason three different models were created so that parents could choose the one that suited them most:

- The “A” model meant that children would study in Spanish, being Basque a subject.
- The “B” model meant a partial immersion, both Spanish and Basque being used as “lingua franca” (50/50).
- And finally, the “D” model, where Basque would be the main language and Spanish would be studied as a subject.

After 25 years, families have mainly opted for the “D” model whereas the “A” model is becoming residual even in cities where people have Spanish as their mother tongue.

The implementation of this “new” bilingual system has meant a whole revision of the system. To start with, the workforce had to achieve the language level themselves, school materials did not exist and re-arrangement of classroom management was needed so that the population could be offered three different models at each school. The budget had to be increased so that teachers could prepare themselves to succeed in their new challenges.

However, not only minority languages but also universal ones must be taken into account when trying to educate the new generations. That is the reason why, in 1996, the DEUI (Departamento de Educación, Universidades e Investigación) launched the initiative of “Multilingual Education”, first by

introducing both English and French at an earlier age and then, through the “Multilingual Experiences” at Secondary School.

Nowadays, the Basque Education System wagers that both the knowledge and use of Basque and Spanish languages should be strengthened while a third foreign language is introduced as a lingua franca within the classroom. At the same time, the education system has a main responsibility which is guaranteeing equal opportunities when accessing the resources and the success at learning, especially in compulsory education.

All these concepts are included within the “Plan Heziberri 2020” designed by the Education Department. It has been written within the framework of the strategic lines established by the European Council for 2020 regarding education and training.

Following the recommendations stated in the report “Bases para la política lingüística de principios del siglo XXI”, the Basque Government proposed the MET (Marco de Educación Trilingüe) which, in turn, assumes the following principles appearing on the report “Euskara 21”:

- The importance of the voluntary and free adhesion to the language; convincing is more effective than imposing regarding language learning.
- Linguistic policies must be guided by both progressiveness and adaptability to the different sociolinguistic realities.

In this sense, the European Union Council at their meeting on May 12th, 2009 insisted on the importance of reaching the objective Barcelona 2002 which means learning two foreign languages from an early age. In order to reach this target we should concentrate on two directions:

- An early start in language learning (before the age of 12).
- The use of languages as tool and object of study.

As we have seen so far, there are common policies for the whole European Union as, on the one hand, there are more languages than countries and, on the other, countries are concerned about maintaining their cultural richness and diversity. Moreover, we must find a meeting point where we can understand each other and having a “lingua franca” helps to a great extent. As mentioned



above, it was back in 1996 when the “Departamento de Educación, Universidades e Investigación” launched a new “Multilingual experience” at 20 schools. Three different methods were proposed: a) Early introduction of English at 4. Up to then, it was compulsory at 8; b) A timetable extension of the English Language learning from 3rd to 6th course of Primary School in 2 hours (up to 5 hours a week) plus a proposal to teach part of the contents of other subjects in English; and c) A timetable extension of the English Language learning at Secondary School in order to work contents of other subjects in English.

After examining the results obtained from those experiences, a “Programme of Linguistic Processes” was established for the period 2000-2003 based upon three key ideas:

- a. Languages are objects of knowledge.
- b. Languages are essential tools for social relationships.
- c. Languages are indispensable tools for learning.

The “Programme of Linguistic Processes” included the following programmes: “Normalization of the use of the Basque language”, “Multilingualism”, “Integrated language approach” and “Linguistic project”. Both “Linguistic normalization” and “Multilingualism” had consultants at the supporting centres called “Berritzegune”. The objective of the “Multilingualism programme” was to increase the communicative competence of the students in one or more foreign languages, from a “communicative approach”, which defends language teaching based on the use of the language itself and the reflection on this use together with the bilingual competence of the student.

In order to get the project started, the “Multilingualism programme” developed the following initiatives:

- Creation of instructional materials so as to work on the foreign language through contents.
- Theoretical and practical training for the teachers of English.
- Advice work and help with daily problems at each school.

- Analysis and critical reflection on the process in order to develop improvement proposals.

After having mentioned what the situation was like in the Basque Country, I would like to point out that the **main change** when dealing with “Language Learning” was the “**communicative approach**”. The goal of the experimental MET proposal is that the Basque student body substantially improves the competence of linguistic communication in all languages and so, it promotes their teaching through curricular contents based on a communicative methodology, far from the traditional, grammatical one. Thus, instead of focusing on explaining verb tenses, for instance, the communicative approach provides situations such as “answering the phone” and “giving advice”, where grammatical structures are introduced in a more practical and natural way. In the case of the examples mentioned, students would learn modal verbs (May I help you?, Could I talk to Mr. Smith?, You should give up smoking) while recognizing the situations where they may be able to use them.

This approach is known as **CLIL** (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and is applied in any context where the teaching-language is not the student’s mother tongue. Its main characteristic is the inclusion of a **dual approach content-language** where both aspects are learnt in a unified way focusing the attention on either the curricular content or the language depending on the established target of the task.

It is due to the social changes which demand the knowledge and effective use of foreign languages that the reflection about language learning has been motivated. In this sense, the need for a methodological change was obvious. The progress of sciences which deal with the processes of teaching and learning states that “**learning by doing**” and “**learn as you use and use as you learn**” are more effective. Therefore, **fluency** is more important than **accuracy**. This is what we know as the CLIL approach. Scholars state that CLIL is based on 4 main principles: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture (4Cs of the Curriculum by Coyle, 1999). Apart from the development of the linguistic knowledge, there are some other aspects which are also encouraged such as: learning and showing respect for other cultures; interest and positive

attitude towards multilingualism; the use of the language in relevant contexts; the development of cognitive and linguistic abilities at a high level; the use of diverse teaching techniques at teaching-learning languages; student's motivation and self-confidence.

The CLIL methodology requires the acquisition of concepts, skills and attitudes, a wider range of audiovisual stimulus is used, cooperative learning (pair and team work) and a new conceptual framework (a more intense support from the teacher).

Due to all these reasons, the CLIL approach offers an opportunity to update the methods both for the teachers of languages and other subjects as every teacher becomes a language teacher. This is a demanding process and requires methodological competence from the teaching staff.

The "Orden de 18 de mayo de 2010" convened schools which are financed by public funds the development of Experimental Projects of MET. In order to evaluate the development of the experiment the students were assessed both before starting and at the end of the course, not only on the linguistic areas but also on the curricular contents taught in languages which differed from their mother tongue. ISEI-IVEI (Instituto Vasco de Evaluación e Investigación Educativa) settled the evaluation method and the results were given following the PISA standards.

The results were published in the report "Alumnado trilingüe en secundaria: una nueva realidad" (ISEI-IVEI, April 2007) with the following conclusions:

Multilingual Education increases the learning rhythm of the lingua franca used, together with the fact that both linguistic and communicative competences profit seems substantial. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that other variables might have had their influence as well, such as the students' previous selection, their early approach to English or the extra activities out of the school which they did in order to improve their English.

As for the assimilation of contents, the level in the subjects taught in English is similar, if not higher. So it might be concluded that Multilingual Education is not an obstacle for learning.

On the other hand, the generalization of the experience is conditioned by some requirements:

- The structural and normative framework. The number, distribution and typology of the multilingual schools should be taken into account as well as the teaching languages, subjects taught and objectives regarding linguistic competence.
- The context; that is, the schools. Flexible itineraries according to the students' needs and curricula objectives are essential.
- The group of people that implement it all: teachers, consultants and researchers. It is compulsory to have enough qualified professionally teachers both from a linguistic and a methodological point of view. At the same time, a consulting net to support and validate the whole process is required.

As far as **Education Management** is concerned and taking into account that so far there are no established objectives regarding the level to acquire, B1 is established as the level to reach at 16 and B2 at 18 (following the European framework). At the same time, students are not supposed to reach the same level in the different competences, being the comprehensive ones easier to reach than the productive ones.

The selection of students based on their linguistic competence seems reasonable for certain subjects taught in L3 at non-compulsory education whereas in compulsory education the possibility should be offered without a previous selection. An increase of resources should be taken into consideration: economic resources, specific training, timetable reduction for multilingual teachers, a number of stand- in teachers with enough qualification, etc.

As for the **schools**, they should be given the chance to increase this offer to other stages. They should be aware of the fact that, sometimes, these projects depend on very few qualified teachers, which is a weakness in order to become solid. The lack of coordination among different linguistic areas suggests the need to implement a "Language Treatment approach". It also seems advisable for the schools to establish the criteria which dealt with the order and priority of areas and subjects to be taught in the L3.

Thirdly, **students**. They have a good perception of their own work and the results obtained. Their attitude is extremely positive. A determining factor is the amount of work, the tenacity and the personal responsibility when doing homework and preparing for lessons. All these characteristics define a type of student who is particularly motivated towards studying, with a higher than average level. Apart from that, research shows that the learning strategies are essential tools for the students to become autonomous and independent learners. Last but not least, the **teachers**. After 25 years of reflection and practice in different immersion projects, teachers from the Basque Country have an excellent starting point for the introduction of an L3 within the system. Their main concern deals with how to sort out the problems and difficulties that teaching a foreign language implies. This requires an extra effort which should be appreciated by the Administration. One of the main difficulties they face is the lack of teaching materials in English. They are also aware of the fact that depending on the subject taught the linguistic competence needed varies. For example, subjects such as Maths or Chemistry can be taught once you become familiar with the vocabulary, whereas in order to teach either History or Philosophy your command of the language must be higher. Having said that, they claim flexibility, at least at a starting point, when demanding language qualifications from the teachers who want to take part in the projects. It would be of great help if Universities kept in mind these needs when preparing the teachers-to-be.

### 3. A case study: San José – Jesuítas Ikastetxea. Durango (Bizkaia)

#### a. Hizkuntza Proiektua Jesuitak 2020 / Language Programme

##### “English Project SJJJ 2008-2015”

From now onwards, I will concentrate on the experiences that have taken place in the Basque Country and more precisely, at San José Jesuítas Ikastetxea.

Society is changing. This is how the leading team at “San José-Jesuítas” school starts justifying the “Language Programme” they have designed for the next few years. On the one hand, they mention the “job market” as language demanding. On the other hand, children coming from different areas and countries need to get to know our two official languages. In order to be successful in achieving these targets, you need the right tool: the “Language Programme”.

As we have mentioned in the first part of this paper, and following the Basque Education Department policies, over the last decades, language teaching has been approached from various perspectives. First of all, in order to achieve a bilingual command of Spanish and Basque, the A, B and D models were offered. The results were of different nature and because one of the main targets of the school is the achievement of fluency in Basque, a global plan was developed, including the school services, pedagogical area, extra-curricular activities, and so on.

In 2008, the **LOE statutory order** (article 18) established that each school should develop its own language project and this had to be accurately described within the educational project. One of the main characteristics of the order is the introduction of “**competences**”. They make a difference between “general competences” and “essential competences” and in both of them “**communication**” appears.

It clearly states that students should not only become fluent in both official languages but also in, at least, a foreign language. Together with this, the levels to be achieved are mentioned (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2).

## **San José - Jesuítas Background.**

The school was founded back in 1880 and it is a “direct-grant school”. It offers education from nursery (0), Primary, Secondary and up to A levels (18 years). Nowadays it has around 1300 students.

As a main course of action, they promote the knowledge, maintenance and use of both Basque language and culture. That is why in 1985-86, the B model was included following the guidelines of the Education Department. At A levels, the A model is also offered.

Since 1997-98 the school has followed the “Language Standardization Programme” and from 2003-04 it has also joined the Education Department’s “Ulizarri Programme”.

In 2002-03 they started designing the Language Programme for Primary School and it was in 2006-07 when the implementation started. At the same time, in 2002 an immersion project started at pre-school education. It was then when English was introduced at this stage and the “Multilingual Programme” was presented. In 2003-04, 4 year-old children were taught 1.5 hours of English a week. The method used was **“Promoting Autonomous Learning and Content Based Instruction Through English” by Mondragón Lingua**, where the main aim is the acquisition of basic communicative skills in English. In 2005-06 a first evaluation was done with positive results.

Apart from this, two Benchmark actions were carried out, at the schools of Zarautz and Beasain (Gipuzkoa) where the language projects had different degrees of implementation and helped San José to take decisions:

- The number of hours of English tuition at 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Primary School was increased.
- “Science” was chosen as the subject to be taught in English.
- More than one teacher was present in a class so that they could support each other when training and implementing the project.
- The idea that English was taught in a specific room, as the place where the language was used, with all the materials together. Although this was taken into account, it did not take place.

In 2007-08 an external evaluation was done regarding the linguistic competence of students at 6<sup>th</sup> level of Primary Education and 4<sup>th</sup> level of Secondary. By 2008-09, the economic situation allowed the possibility of investing in further resources so that a coherent project was designed from pre-school up to 4<sup>th</sup> of ESO together with a training plan for the teaching body which would last for 7 years at the end of which a total implementation would have taken place. This project was checked by Saro Manrique, from Mondragón Lingua, who gave her approval.

Regarding the introduction of English, three milestones were agreed upon (following MET initiatives): an increase in the number of hours taught which was allowed by LOE; the introduction of English as a lingua franca for other subjects; and the progressive training of the teaching body, both getting the qualifications required and learning new methodology.

In order to know the real situation of the language use within the school, in 2009-10 there was a diagnosis done and results showed that students that followed studies in the D model used the three languages in these percentages: 77% Basque, 8.5% Spanish and 12.75% English whereas students following the B model did 53.2% Basque, 32% Spanish and 12.75% English.

As for the levels to reach, the European Framework becomes the reference and so, **by the age of 16** students should reach B2 in Basque and Spanish, B1 in English, and A1 in French. **By the age of 18**, they should achieve a C1 in Basque and Spanish, and a B2 in English.

## **Draft of the Project 2008-2015**

### **2008-09:**

Regarding the **4-5 year old students** they increased the English tuition by 1 hour so that they received up to 2.5 hours per week. The objective was to have a 30 minutes session per day so that they have daily contact with the language. Students at Primary School First cycle started receiving 3 hours of tuition per week while Second cycle students had 4.



In this case, a unit of Inguru/Science would be taught in English each term. That implied the coordination of the teachers of Science as this subject would be evaluated according to Science criteria and not English.

The Third cycle would also receive 3 hours of tuition per week.

As for the Human resources needed, one more teacher of English was needed. Teachers of pre-school and Primary education had to start getting qualified in order to fulfill the needs of the project. From then onwards, any new teacher hired had to be qualified in English.

Lastly, the Method used would be Santillana's "Up to do".

#### **2009-10:**

There were two points to be added to the previous school year decisions. First, at 5<sup>th</sup> year of Primary education Inguru/Science would be taught by English qualified teachers so that at least 4 units were taught in this language.

Secondly, at A level a subject in English should be offered. Economy would be easy as the teacher was qualified. However, there were two disadvantages: students of the Science area could not apply for it and on the other hand, they were evaluated at the "Selectivity" test. At the end, CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) was chosen, a common subject of 2 hours per week.

#### **2010-11:**

As for the coming years, the only difference was that the method would be implemented in upper courses gradually. In this case, students at Year 6 of Primary would be taught 4 or 5 Inguru/Science units of the subject by qualified English teachers.

#### **2011-12:**

1<sup>st</sup> course of Secondary would receive 3 hours per week of English plus Social Studies in English (except for the units related to History of the Basque Country).

#### **2012-5:**

Years 2, 3 and 4 of Secondary will have 3 hours per week of English plus Social Studies in English. The changes would be implemented one year at a time.

## **External evaluation and results.**

In 2015 the Kristau Eskola (Association of 136 Catholic schools in the Basque Country) carried out the yearly and voluntary evaluation of the English Language competence at their schools. This test consists of two parts: a first on-line one, where *Use of English* and *Listening comprehension* are evaluated, and a second one, where students are interviewed for around 10 minutes in order to test their speaking skills.

One of the aims of this project is to evaluate the students' level of English to check their adaptation within the linguistic targets set by both the school and Kristau Eskola. Bearing in mind these objectives, by the end of the Year 6<sup>of</sup> Primary school, students should reach a B1 level both in Spanish and Basque, together with A2 in English. By the end of Secondary education, the targets are B2 for Basque and Spanish and B1 for English.

The results offer a global idea and provide information about the skills that must be strengthened. As for the students of Year 6 , the results show that they have reached a B1 level at *Language Use* and *listening comprehension* whereas they have an A2 level at *Speaking*. This changes when we check the results obtained by students at Year 4 of Secondary education which show a B1 level for all tasks.

A curious detail is the number of students who attend English private tuition lessons. While at Primary education the percentage is balanced, the number of students that attend these lessons at Secondary education increases substantially and so do the results they obtain in the tests. The difference in the results at the speaking task is remarkable.

These results lead us to a reflection that I would like to include in the next section.

#### **4. Further studies and personal conclusions**

In order to check what people actually reckon about the various systems for language learning in different European countries, I have prepared a questionnaire which I have used with people that are related to both language learning and teaching. The answers come from Great Britain, France, Denmark and Spain and are included in these pages as anexes. These people happen to be teachers, parents and learners of second and third languages with a critical point of view regarding the subject that we are dealing with. Here are some of the conclusions:

As far as I can see, nowadays our children start learning a second language when they are younger than other European citizens. None of the people interviewed mention pre-school as the stage when they start with a new language. This makes me mention Ruiz Bikandi (1998) who considers that the early introduction of English is more a marketing question and could seriously harm the development of the Basque language among Spanish-speaking students. Therefore, and due to the various points of view, we should briefly mention some of the results of several investigations.

Bearing in mind that early multilingualism is a rather recent and not widely spread phenomenon, results will have to be confirmed by a greater number of studies in a wider range of contexts. As for the students' age, in most of the studies it has been observed that there is not a remarkable gap among children who have started learning a second language at different ages. That is, children with less years of instruction soon reach the level of the rest of the students who began earlier on.

Regarding immersion studies, the most relevant ones dealing with early multilingualism are the Canadians which can be summarized by saying that an extensive exposure in time could be less effective than a more intensive exposure, concentrated in a few years. They also conclude that learning means an easier task for Secondary education students than for younger ones.

There are also studies on multilingualism which show that the acquisition of more than two languages is possible and does not present problems for either

the cognitive or linguistic development (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998). On the contrary, most of the studies on the influence of bilingualism when learning other languages point out that this has a positive influence (Cenoz, 2009).

Multilingualism might be positive at a cognitive level. However, evidences are still not enough to prove that the introduction of a third language at a pre-school level will imply a higher competence at this language. Therefore, learning English from a young age is possible within bilingual education and means more hours of exposure but does not necessarily imply a higher level of performance.

What are the **conditions** for an **early introduction** of English in the classroom?

First of all, **methodology**. It has to be motivating. There is not a miraculous and unique way. The teachers' own experience, their daily work and the results obtained will guide the adaptation of the methodological proposal.

Secondly, the **teachers**. The early introduction of English demands a huge effort both linguistically and methodologically. Their command of English is the key factor in order to guarantee the success of the project. This does not mean teachers should speak as a native but they need to be fluent in communicative activities.

Thirdly, the **linguistic objectives**. They are essential for each of the languages taught at the school. Besides, depending on the sociolinguistic context, the school characteristics and the teaching hours, each language will have its own specific objectives. Regarding English, it would be better to be realistic and not create false expectations. Another essential aspect is the **coordination among the linguistic areas**. The programming of the three languages should be coordinated.

Last but not least, the **implication of the school community**, meaning both teachers and parents is essential. We have to bear in mind that it is a long term project.

As we can see, early multilingualism is a widely extended formula but not the only one. It might be easier to implement than others but not the most effective.

Other possibilities include the use of English as a lingua franca which is much more intense or even a combination of both of these approaches.

Going back to our interviewees and their reflections, it seems that the policies in England depend more on the school than on the Government's regulations. Each school is free to choose the language, the time invested in its teaching and so on. The impression is that there is not a real need but learning a foreign language and it sounds as something fashionable and "chic". However, the way they learn seems to be from a "communicative approach" as comments reflect, which turns it into an efficient approach.

On the other hand, it is curious to see how "foreigners" with knowledge of the Spanish/Basque system point out the fact that it is less "practical" than the ones in their homeland (being these either Great Britain, France, etc.). Nevertheless, according to the research we have done and the people we have interviewed, this is changing. We are more and more concerned about communicative skills and *learning while doing* as we have commented in our case study.

In my personal opinion, I fully agree with one of the teachers. While it is true that nowadays our students have become more fluent and are able to understand the second language much better than before, I am worried about their command of reading and writing skills. I do not find they are able to produce coherent pieces of writing and when dealing with multiple choice tasks they do hesitate as they cannot distinguish the nuances in meaning.

For example, future tenses. They understand, they express future but cannot make a difference when using the different tenses. I understand a degree of maturity is needed in order to fully understand this, however, with the CLIL approach, grammatical explanations tend to be avoided and students go through an internalization process where they work out the use of structures themselves. I reckon this is an ideal situation but, on the other hand, we must admit that it is a slower understanding process.

Here is the point with which I become critical. After spending years *learning while doing*, using real materials and so on, once they have to face the final exams, these are still mostly based on grammatical points. That is,

transformations, word building activities, etc. Moreover, in order to prepare for these tests, at high levels (Bachiller) the exams go back to a traditional way: relative clauses, indirect speech, passive voice, which means that the teachers have to explain all the grammar points that could have been explained throughout earlier education stages.

Students find themselves lost and confused and turn to private tuition so that they can make up for the lack of exam techniques. This leads us to a further reflection: none of the people interviewed mentioned private tuition as a possibility to improve their English and according to the data from San José, a high percentage of our students attend these lessons especially once they reach Secondary school.

Why could this be? Why do satisfied parents enroll their kids for extra academic sessions after eight hours at school when they could be playing sports, music or just enjoying themselves with their friends? As far as the area I know is concerned, this has become a popular habit among students even at pre-school. We realize that it is socially considered acceptable and while students attending other subjects are seen as help seekers so as to pass an exam, students of English or more accurately, parents, are seen as highly concerned about their children's education. To my surprise, this appears within the documents published by the Basque Government. The report "Bases para la política lingüística de principios del siglo XXI. Hacia un pacto renovado" states:

due to the clear limitations of the education system, it is obvious that further efforts have to be made at the same time in different social fields (family, leisure, companies and so on). The education system, despite the exceptions, does not-and cannot-solve the problem of a correct language learning (2009:20-21).

I might be wrong when saying this, but reading this in an official paper gives me the impression that part of the responsibility is being avoided from the beginning. This perception clashes with the statements received from the Danish man who has answered our questions. He does not mention private tuition at all; he sounds proud of a public system which provides students with opportunities to study and travel abroad (our French and English interviewees also mention these opportunities of visiting foreign countries).

Due to this extra effort families “must” make, we must face that they can either being able to afford it or not. Private tuition is not cheap at all and it would not be fair to create these differences when the knowledge of languages has become a “sine qua non” requirement for the job market nowadays. Jasone Cenoz (Ikastaria.11, 1999, 185-192) also mentions this fact as problematic and therefore claims that “it is preferable that within the school and during school hours appropriate conditions should be created in order to reach a higher command of English”.

From my humble opinion, and being aware of the huge effort which is being made by all social actors, I would seriously consider a decrease in the ratio of students per class. Why do I say this? One of the main advantages of the Schools of Languages is personal attention. Groups vary from 2 to 15 students on average which allow the use of “communicative methods” efficiently. What I mean by this is that you can have debates, pair work activities, and each student has the chance to speak, take part, read aloud and receive a straight feedback from partners and teacher. When you are trying to use this method within a group of 27 students, that turns into something nearly impossible. We cannot pretend to maintain the interest and attention of over 20 students repeating a “how to make a phone call” conversation so that the teacher tests them on how they interact with each other.

I am fully aware of what I am saying and the consequences that it would involve regarding human and material resources. Having mentioned this, I reckon the other half missing to make this classes successful is teachers’ qualification. However, I am actually seeing the steps which are being taken and the measures at all levels. On the contrary, as far as I know, I am afraid that nobody has considered the possibility of making groups smaller as part of the innovation practice.

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## **ANEX 1 Questionnaires**

### QUESTIONNAIRE 1

NAME: Amaia Fernandez Barturen

NATIONALITY: Basque/Spanish

OCCUPATION: teacher

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: England\*

How many languages do you speak?

3 and a bit of a 4th

\*Did you learn them at school?

Part of it

\*What kind of school did you attend? (state, public, private) Where?

State, Larramendi ikastola in Mungia, Bizkaia, Spain

\*How old were you when you started learning a second/third language?

Basque and Spanish at the same time, native

English at the age of 11

French at the age of 28

\*Can you describe how you learnt it/them? (as a subject, immersion programme, etc.)

As extra-curricular activity first, twice a week, then in school and finally at university

\*Did you attend extra-curricular lessons? If so, what was the purpose (pass an exam, improve the language, etc.)?

Improve the language

\*If you happen to live in a country different to yours and you know about the education system, how would you describe the differences between both? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?

I feel the system in England allows student to think more and to assess the way they learn and their own work more. Lessons are based around skills not around theory to memorize. My knowledge of the Basque/Spanish educational system is based on my experience as a student and supply teacher many years

ago (15), so it may be a bit dated but from what I remember, it involves the teacher talking and telling students facts that the students then learn and are tested on.

In England students will get a chance to practice a theory in a science lab for example, and in languages they are offered the chance to practice it orally and in writing in almost every lesson; authentic materials are part of the curriculum and in a sixth form exam (Bachillerato) students are in charge of the CD they are listening to so that they can fast forward and rewind as often as they want within a time limit.

The other big difference is that students are only tested nationally so there are no big exams done by the teachers. Students in England haven't got the discipline to work and to study that they learn in Spain and they feel the teachers have to do the work for them. In Spain the pressure is all in the students and in England is mainly on the teacher.

In England the students are put into sets depending on their ability, 1 to 5, 1 being a top set, 5 a bottom set. It is easier to teach and learn and students tend to progress quicker. Bottom sets become very difficult to teach sometimes plus it affects students' confidence on themselves.

## QUESTIONNAIRE 2

NAME: HELEN TODD

NATIONALITY: BRITISH

OCCUPATION: ENGLISH TEACHER

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: SPAIN

\*How many languages do you speak?

3

\*Did you learn them at school?

Yes

\*What kind of school did you attend? (state, public, private) Where?

Local R.C. Primary (State)

Convent High School (Private)

\*How old were you when you started learning a second/third language?

French at 10

Spanish at 12

\*Can you describe how you learnt it/them? (as a subject, immersion programme, etc.)

French: As a subject at school till "O" level.

Spanish: As a subject

"O"level, "A"level at school BA(HONS) Degree at T.A.S.C.(University of Leeds

.Degree course included a term in Madrid during the first year and then the third year of the four year degree was spent entirely in Bilbao.

The degree was 50% Business Studies and 50% Spanish.

\*Did you attend extra-curricular lessons? If so, what was the purpose (pass an exam, improve the language, etc.)?

No, never.

\*If you happen to live in a country different to yours and you know about the education system, how would you describe the differences between both? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?

At school I was blessed with a wonderful Spanish teacher who transmitted passion. Thanks to Mrs. Koch I became intrigued by the subject.

At “A” Level we had a Language paper with all the skills (writing, listening, speaking and reading) and a Literature paper in which we studied a play from the “Siglo de Oro” (El médico de su honra, Calderón de la Barca), A book based on the Spanish Civil War (El árbol de Guernica , Luis Castresana) and I am not sure if any more .The advantages I see are that I was given an insight into Spanish culture. I didn’t just focus on grammar. I don’t appreciate any passion for English in our “Batxi” students.

My degree was incredibly dynamic and practical with a taste of all kinds of culture from Spanish speaking countries. We studied Latin American cinema, Basque cinema, Spanish cinema, mystics, 19th & 20th century literature, language for business, Spanish current affairs, language laboratory... If I compare it with what English students at Deusto University or UNED, I get the impression that they have to study a lot of historical facts, phonetics, the roots of languages, etc, and really I don’t see the point. If you’re so interested in History, do a History degree. If you are so interested in Linguistics, choose a more appropriate degree. Over the years I’ve met qualified English students who are not confident speaking in English. I think at degree level students must go to the country where the language they are studying is spoken.

My experience in Madrid (3rd term of my first year) gave me the chance to fend for myself abroad. We had to attend classes but I think we learnt a lot more outside the classroom. We had to rent our own accommodation, deal with telephoning, banks, daily shopping and then of course socially, at 18/19 years of age, we had plenty of contact with the local people to learn the language and to appreciate their culture first hand.

Likewise in my third year, my months spent in Bilbao meant that I could cope with all kinds of situations in Spanish. In my opinion, there are words that I learnt during that period that I will never forget, something that cannot be achieved by learning long lists of vocabulary in a classroom (e.g. one day we had a problem in our rented flat with the plumbing, so my flat-mate sent me to the neighbour’s house for a LLAVE INGLESA, I thought she was pulling my leg of course!!!!!!!!!!!!)

More importantly, I fell in love with Bilbao and the Basque Country. This motivated me for my final year assignments and was always keen to research further into the Basque people, the history and their culture and how that all fitted into Spain. Had I not been abroad the studies may have interested me but I would never have been so passionate. For me one of the key aspects of learning is PASSION.

### QUESTIONNAIRE 3

NAME: Mogens Lund Soerensen

NATIONALITY: Danish

OCCUPATION: Self employed

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: Denmark

\*How many languages do you speak? Danish-English-German

\*Did you learn them at school? Yes

\*What kind of school did you attend? (state, public, private) Where? Where I lived with my parents and big brother. Public school. We don't have state schools in Denmark. But public and private. Not a lot of people have used private schools. But in the last 5 years it has been more normal, but the parents have to pay for that. Public school is offered to everybody and is free of charge. But they only pay the difference between them. Private schools in Denmark are often used by kids where they might be ahead of classes or have social problems. But it's still most common with public school.

\*How old were you when you started learning a second/third language?

I was born in 1971. And started school when I was 6. In 5th grade. About 11 years old. We learnt English for the first time.

In 7th grade when I was about 13. We had German.

In 8th grade you can choose French if you like that together with the others.

\*Can you describe how you learnt it/them? (as a subject, immersion programme, etc.).

You learn the language at a normal level. But you also had an opportunity if you were better than normal to take a more advanced classes. When we were kids, we had German and English tv- channels. So we learn a lot that way. We borrowed books in both languages. Germany is our neighbour country so a lot of people go there often.

\*Did you attend extra-curricular lessons? If so, what was the purpose (pass an exam, improve the language, etc.)?

I had the chance to go England for one year. Where I worked and spoke English 9 hours each day. Took classes at night after work to speak and write English better. That was in 1992-1993.

Today I work in a place where it's normal to talk those languages. But mostly English.

\*If you happen to live in a country different to yours and you know about the education system, how would you describe the differences between both? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?

Can't answer this one. Sorry.

But Today 2016. We have 2 boys. And the big one just started before school 0-grade in 2015.

Nowadays kids learn English at 1st grade when they are 6-7 years old and then all the way until they finish school and they will end it with exams. We did the same.

When the kids are 10-11 years they will have German classes as well. And then they can choose another language at the end of the school time. Spanish-French-Chinese have become international, so if the young ones know they want they can choose that.

All this I have written down here is for the public school. And then people have to decide if they want further education or want to find a job after school. In Denmark schools are for free even further education. But you pay for your materials.

Hope this can help.

Best regards from

Mogens Soerensen

Copenhagen Denmark.

## QUESTIONNAIRE 4

NAME: Stéphanie Grené

NATIONALITY: francesa

OCCUPATION: traductora

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: España

\*How many languages do you speak?

3: francés (materna), español e inglés

\*Did you learn them at school?

Aprendí español e inglés en el colegio.

\*What kind of school did you attend? (state, public, private) Where?

Fui a la escuela pública en Francia. La enseñanza de los idiomas en mi época empezaba con lo que llamamos el “collège”. Es el inicio de la enseñanza Secundaria, consta de 4 cursos (6º, 5º, 4º y 3º) y se empieza con 11 años. Le sigue el “lycée” que consta de 3 cursos (2º, 1º y terminal) y termina con el “baccalauréat”, el diploma que permite acceder a la enseñanza universitaria, entre otros.

En mi colegio, cuando empecé a estudiar, al estar en una ciudad pequeña, se ofrecían los idiomas siguientes: inglés, español y alemán.

\*How old were you when you started learning a second/third language?

Tenía 11 años cuando empecé a estudiar inglés (en 6º). Al cabo de dos años, empezamos con un segundo idioma –en mi caso, el español– y una lengua antigua (latín). Al haber optado por una rama Mixta en el instituto, mantuve los dos idiomas mientras que las personas que optaban por Ciencias podían dejar el segundo idioma. En cuanto a los que optaban por Lenguas, sumaban un 3er o 4º idioma a los que ya estudiaban.

\*Can you describe how you learnt it/them? (as a subject, immersion programme, etc.)

La enseñanza era clásica, de varias horas semanales (creo que 4 para el primer idioma y 3 para el segundo) mediante clases “magistrales” en las que se compaginaban actividades lúdicas tales como canciones, juegos de rol con lecciones gramaticales. Alguna vez intervenía un lector de lengua extranjera.

Se trabajaba por temas e íbamos profundizando en las culturas anglosajonas e hispánicas a través de críticas de textos, de imágenes, de cuadros...



Se solía hacer un viaje al año a un país extranjero para hacer una inmersión. En mi caso, estuve en Inglaterra y en España.

\*Did you attend extra curricular lessons? If so, what was the purpose (pass an exam, improve the language, etc.)?

No. Únicamente iba a las clases que se impartían en el colegio. Tampoco recuerdo que fuera lo normal ir a clases de idiomas después del colegio aunque sí que compañeros míos han ido a estudiar un año fuera (Estados Unidos normalmente).

\*If you happen to live in a country different to yours and you know about the education system, how would you describe the differences between both? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?

Respecto de mis vivencias, creo que es un acierto el empezar con un segundo e un tercer idioma tras el aprendizaje de un primero. No recuerdo que me supusiese un problema en su momento y, hoy en día, resulta ser una gran suerte poder hablar otros dos idiomas, además del mío.

Me consta que en Francia se está empezando antes con la enseñanza de los idiomas, haciendo una primera toma de contacto en la escuela Primaria. Ignoro cuáles son los medios de los que disponen las escuelas (materiales, humanos). Lo que sí es una realidad es que es mucho más fácil tener acceso a material en V.O. ya que las escuelas suelen estar equipadas de ordenadores con conexión a Internet.

No tengo elemento de comparación con los sistemas de enseñanza actuales en ninguno de los dos países.

## QUESTIONNAIRE 5

NAME: Catrina McDonald

NATIONALITY: Scottish

OCCUPATION: EFL teacher

COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: Spain

\*How many languages do you speak?

English my native language, Spanish intermediate, French beginner, Chinese beginner

\*Did you learn them at school? Only French

\*What kind of school did you attend? (state, public, private) Where? State

\*How old were you when you started learning a second/third language? 13

\*Can you describe how you learnt it/them? (as a subject, immersion programme...)

French as a subject with a non-native teacher. I had maybe 2 or 3 hours a week (sorry, it was a long time ago). We followed a book and I have little memory of doing much speaking, more concentration on doing exercises in the book.

Chinese I had a Chinese friend come to my house and we would more than often just talk. I tended to learn language chunks rather than look at grammar and rules.

Spanish in the street! Certainly an immersion experience just being around the language on a daily basis. I did go for a short time to the local language school however, I found myself in a class of 30 people, all with differing levels and the teacher flitting between the groups of varying abilities handing out exercises. Plus I was being taught, what I perceived as completely useless phrases, such as "my hair is curly" considering we were all adult students and all probably looking to learn the language to help in work situations.

\*Did you attend extra-curricular lessons? If so, what was the purpose (pass an exam, improve the language...)?

As above. I only learnt French at school and passed O level and Higher exams. The others I learnt to live in the appropriate country.

\*If you happen to live in a country different to yours and you know about the education system, how would you describe the differences between both? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one?

I would say that the way language is taught has changed in the UK since I personally was studying French at school. My only experience of actual teaching in the UK was as an EFL teacher at Oxford University summer programmes from 2005-2008.

In addition I did a voluntary course and work teaching illiterate British adults in 2008. In both of those cases there was a move away from taking a textbook and following it, to taking the information "out of" the pages and making language learning a more active activity than a passive one. In particular using a tailoring of the classes and the class content to the needs and interests of the students involved. In my opinion this was a positive move. Now, in my current position here in Spain, I am witnessing a similar move within the state/private education system. I do believe that the change is a positive one and that second language learning should involve a large chunk of actual speaking of the language and using the language to engage in different activities and projects. This way the learner is using the language to actually communicate. It is said that if you talk about what you are learning you are more likely to absorb up to 80% of it as opposed to only 20% if you do not. However, I also see a downside to this further down the line. The reason I say this is because I see the method being embraced fully and students taking on projects, using technology such as Ipads etc and using the language without the use of a textbook as such and learners are not being given a solid foundation in the grammar and structure that they will need to have if, for example, they wish to write academic papers or pass exams such as the *Selectividad*. In other words, there has to be a balance and not just the taking on of a "new, modern" method without the basics being taught also.