

# 1 Perspective on bilingualism and bilingual education

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## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

English has become a global language not just in business, but in education. In education, it is a major medium of instruction and assessment for the programmes of international awarding bodies such as Cambridge International Examinations, who develop and provide programmes of learning and assessments worldwide in a wide range of subjects. These programmes of learning are delivered by schools all over the world in a variety of multilingual and educational contexts, and increasingly in bilingual education contexts. One key function of these programmes is to prepare students whose first language (L1) is not necessarily English as candidates for international high-stakes assessments. The focus of the book is on learning and assessment through a second language (L2), often referred to as an additional language, as well as approaches to support the L1. English is the example of the L2 used in this book.

This international context poses both a potential threat to, and an opportunity for, language development. The international quest for English and for an English-medium education can cause anxieties about achievement through the L2, as well as about the maintenance of L1s. An alternative to wholly English-medium education is bilingual education, in which two languages are used within the curriculum as media of instruction for non-language content subjects. Learning some content subjects (such as science and history) through an L2, and other content subjects through an L1, can create authentic language environments as students are immersed in and have to use both languages for communication about meaningful content. Bilingual education is a fast-developing practice that is becoming an

increasingly widespread direction of language learning in schools (Mehisto & Genesee, 2015).

In order to explore related concerns and opportunities, and to better understand and support bilingualism and bilingual education, Cambridge International Examinations has undertaken a programme of research designed to reveal the hidden richness of bilingualism in schools using Cambridge curricula as well as the emerging practices of bilingual education in these schools. Apart from anecdotal feedback, little was known about these schools' perceptions of the needs of students learning through an additional language, or of the pattern of bilingual education in schools. However, the research reported in this book has enhanced understanding of the extent to which bilingual education is operating in Cambridge International Examinations' global school community and, more broadly, how these schools are supporting – and can best support – students who are learning through a language that is not their L1. Attention is also given to the role of the L1 in teaching and learning.

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## FOCUS OF THE BOOK

The book presents findings that have emerged from the following Cambridge research studies:

- insights from two online questionnaires to international schools where the Cambridge international curriculum is known to be delivered and assessed, aimed at scoping the extent of bilingual education and the role of the L2 and L1 in teaching and learning
- studies into the language demands of external summative assessments in Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)<sup>1</sup> non-language subjects (Imam, 2010; Shaw, 2011, 2012; Shaw &

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1 Cambridge offers the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), which is a 2-year qualification aimed at 14–16 year-olds. The Cambridge IGCSE encourages learner-centred and inquiry-based approaches to learning. It has been designed to develop learners' skills in creative thinking, inquiry and problem-solving, giving learners a sound preparatory basis for the next stage in their education. More than 70 subjects are available for study, and schools may offer any combination of these subjects. In some IGCSE subjects there are two course levels, known as the Core Curriculum and the Extended Curriculum. The Extended Curriculum includes the material from the Core Curriculum, as well as additional, more advanced material.

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Imam, 2013), as well as similar internal research undertaken on the International Advanced Subsidiary (AS) / Advanced (A) level,<sup>2</sup> aimed at contributing to ‘language awareness’ guidance for teachers and examiners (although the A level research is not reported here).

- alignment studies (as part of the Shaw & Imam research, 2013) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001a) with the linguistic input (question papers, syllabuses and mark schemes that guide the examiners on marking) of, and productive demands made on candidates by, certain (non-language) content IGCSE assessments. The main aim here was to identify the language levels of these assessments.

Apart from the publication of this book, the research has led to a number of other key initiatives, as outlined in chapters 6 and 7.

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**IMPETUS FOR THE BOOK**

The original impetus for the research was to provide Cambridge International Examinations and its community of schools with a clear idea of the number of types of schools (for example, bilingual, monolingual English-medium and monolingual non-English-medium schools) offering Cambridge curricula and to draw out the schools’ support needs. By sharing insights from this Cambridge research more widely, through this book, Cambridge International Examinations hopes to help to:

- provide new information to schools on supporting bilingual learners and on bilingual education
- clarify terminology

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2 Cambridge also offers the International Advanced Subsidiary (AS)/Advanced (A) level which is a 2-year international qualification aimed at the 16–18 age range and is intended to follow on from the IGCSE. The AS/A level is used as an entry qualification for universities worldwide. A-level courses are designed to be flexible and can be structured in a variety of ways. In Option 1 Candidates can take all papers of the Cambridge International A-level course in the same examination session, usually at the end of the second year of study. Option 2: candidates can opt for a ‘staged’ assessment route, taking the Cambridge International AS level in one examination session and completing the final Cambridge International A level at a subsequent session. Option 3: candidates take only the Cambridge International AS level at the end of either a 1-year or 2-year course. The Cambridge International AS level syllabus content is half a Cambridge International A-level programme.

- identify perceived challenges as well as benefits of bilingual education
- identify the professional development needs of educators working with students studying through an L2
- raise language awareness in the assessment process.

It is also hoped that the book can help schools internationally to turn the potential demand for English into an opportunity for bilingualism.

Finally, the findings and outcomes of the research (reported in chapters 4, 5 and 6) stress the importance of stakeholders making a strong commitment of fairness towards bilingual learners who are learning through an L2. In a reader-friendly style, the book explores whether approaches in the literature are being implemented on the ground, and, in a bottom-up approach, exposes new approaches that are being made in practice for further consideration by other schools and by academics. As well as sharing the concerns and benefits of bilingual education, the book gives a voice to schools. To our knowledge, detailed reporting of the rich questionnaire data collected from such schools has not featured in the literature.

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## AUDIENCE FOR THE BOOK

The overwhelming majority of books in this area tend to be academic in their focus. This book, by contrast, is grounded in practicalities and offers substantial guidance to school managers and teaching staff who are currently implementing (or thinking of implementing) bilingual education programmes.

The book is aimed primarily at those working in the field of bilingual education in bilingual schools and in English-medium schools with multilingual student groups. However, some parts of the book may also be of interest and relevance to anyone who is directly involved in curriculum planning and materials development, and to key practitioners in assessment and examination bodies and those with an academic interest in language teaching and assessment.

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## CONVENTIONS USED IN THE BOOK

For many international students, English is an additional language – their second language (L2), or perhaps even their third language (L3). Such students have traditionally been referred to as ‘English as a second language

learners' (ESL or E2L), or 'additional language learners' (EAL) or, increasingly, 'bilingual learners', acknowledging their L1s. This book uses *L2* (to distinguish from L1) while recognising that the L2 may actually be an L3. There are different understandings of what characterises L1 and L2, which can cause confusion. For example, is the L1 the language a student learned first? The language the student knows best? Uses the most? Identifies with? Or that others identify the student with?

*L1* as a medium of instruction in a bilingual education programme is used here to mean an official L1 identified by the school, that is not necessarily an individual's mother tongue. The maintenance or development of the L1 refers here to the language learned first by individuals.

The terms 'bilingual' and 'bilingualism' are used here to refer to individuals or groups who routinely use two or more languages for intercultural communication in varying contexts.<sup>3</sup> However, there are many definitions and understandings of the term 'bilingual'. The Council of Europe, for example, allows for range in its definition: 'An individual is designated as "bilingual" if they have a degree of competence in two languages or varieties of language' (Council of Europe, 2007, p. 30).

We use the term 'bilingual learner' in its broad sense for a student in an international school context who typically uses their L1 at home or in the community and is learning primarily through an L2 – for example, English – at school. Their learning may take place in a variety of educational contexts. They may be learning all subjects through the L2, or if they are on a bilingual education programme, they may be learning only some subjects through the L2. Many people therefore use the term 'bilingual learner' instead of 'second' or 'additional language learner' to highlight the value of two languages. This is the approach adopted by this book. However, others use 'bilingual learner' to refer only to students on bilingual education programmes.

'Bilingual education' is used here to refer to a programme of teaching and learning in which students study some non-language content subjects, such as maths or geography, mainly through the L2 or L3, and some subjects mainly through the L1.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, they may study the same subject

3 If the emphasis is on multiple languages, then terms such as trilingual (education) or multilingual (contexts) or plurilingual (competence, with different degrees of proficiency) are used.

4 'Content subjects and language are inextricably linked. Learners cannot develop academic knowledge and skills without access to the language in which that knowledge is embedded, discussed, constructed or evaluated. Nor can they acquire academic language skills in a context devoid of academic content. Content subject classes can provide rich opportunities for language development' (Crandall, 1994, p. 256).

through two languages. Cambridge international programmes and qualifications are often used for the English-medium strand of a bilingual education programme.

This understanding of bilingual education is linked to other educational concepts such as ‘immersion’ or ‘content and language integrated learning’ (CLIL). When bilingual education is delivered in content classes, students develop subject knowledge and new language skills at the same time. The content teacher has a responsibility not just for supporting content learning but also to support students’ language development in order to master content. The content teacher is encouraged to liaise with the English language department in the school, who may also be adopting a CLIL approach while supporting learning in content classes. Even in monolingual (English-medium) schools, students may not be native speakers of English and so some of the bilingual approaches (such as CLIL) might be used in these schools, too, to help facilitate learning. Moreover, CLIL can be used to make a foreign language programme more motivating by teaching real content (for example, using historical sources) through the target language.

Confusion, however, is caused when some people (for example, in their desire to learn or teach English) use the term ‘bilingual education’ to refer to either L1 and L2 language classes or even to English-medium education where all subjects are taught through the L2.

We use the term ‘international schools’ to refer broadly to schools that deliver a curriculum that is predominantly international in its orientation and is separate from the national curriculum taught in the country. Such schools are found more in the private and independent sector than in the state sector. International schools aim to develop an international perspective. However, the international curriculum may also be taught in addition to parts of the national curriculum. Some international schools offer an international curriculum to a largely expatriate student body, thereby serving multilingual groups. Some schools offer an international curriculum to a mainly local student body who are bilingual learners learning content subjects through an L2. The term can also apply to independent schools offering the national curriculum with elements of an international curriculum, or to state-maintained schools offering the national curriculum with elements of an international curriculum. Some countries prefer to use the terms ‘intercultural’, ‘global’ or ‘independent’ schools. Because international schools are serving multilingual or bilingual student groups, in this book we also sometimes refer to international schools as ‘multilingual schools’ to emphasise their language richness.

Finally, we use the term ‘schools’ in our research to refer to international schools that are using Cambridge International Examinations programmes and qualifications.

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## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The remainder of this chapter explains the structure of the book. The book consists of seven chapters. In this introductory chapter we have highlighted the notions that the potential threat (anxieties about achievement through English as an L2 and about maintenance of L1s) and the potential opportunity (for bilingual education) are the triggers for a bilingual education research agenda for Cambridge International Examinations. The definitions of bilingualism and bilingual education offered in this chapter have their genesis in the research literature and reflect our institutional understanding of, and conceptual approach to, bilingualism and bilingual education.

Chapter 2 offers a broad commentary on the concepts of bilingualism and bilingual education. We highlight the difficulties in defining the two terms. We also demonstrate how the trajectory of the evolution of the definition of bilingualism has been characterised by a shift from complete fluency in more than one language to the everyday use of more than one language. We also present a number of models of bilingual education that we consider to be relevant to schools. The models are first described and then their respective characteristics discussed.

In chapter 3 we provide an overview of the research context that takes as its focus key issues in bilingualism as relevant to schools following Cambridge international programmes and qualifications.

Chapter 4 reports on the main findings garnered from the research into students’ and teachers’ language use in the schools researched and the different models of bilingual pedagogic practice evident in these schools.

In chapter 5 we discuss our research results, which not only align with previously reported findings in the professional literature but offer new insights.

In chapter 6 we demonstrate how insights from other recent Cambridge language awareness research have led to guidance for schools with bilingual learners (for example, senior staff, content teachers and students) and for assessment agencies (for example, test constructors, question paper setters and examiners). This guidance is partly shared with the reader for potential use in their own context.

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Excerpt

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In chapter 7 we offer initiatives to help schools to support bilingual learners and to implement bilingual education. The chapter culminates in the presentation of a bilingual survey tool for schools to consider using in their own context as a means of self-analysis. The self-service survey can be used by managers in international, national or regional contexts, or at individual school level, to help determine which schools are bilingual schools, their model of bilingual education and their support needs.