

Bilingual education is teaching and learning in two languages—one that a student already speaks and a new language. Students in bilingual programs learn their new language by using it in a broad range of subjects, including math, science, social studies, and language arts. In traditional foreign language study, students use their new language only in their foreign language class.

Bilingual education has existed in various forms throughout the world for many centuries. Approaches to bilingual education differ chiefly in the grade at which a new language is introduced or ended; the amount of teaching conducted in each language; and the degree to which students who are native speakers of the two languages mix with one another.

Two-way bilingual education programs, also called *dual language programs* or *developmental bilingual education*, teach subjects through two languages to all participating students. For example, a program in the United States might combine English-speaking students with native Spanish speakers. These students would progress together through all the grade levels in the program, with some subjects taught in Spanish and others in English. Because students who are fluent in each language work together, these programs provide many chances for participants to help one another learn the new language and master grade-level subjects.

Immersion education is a type of bilingual program that continues from kindergarten through grade 12. This approach was developed in Canada to help students become fluent in both French and English. Although English is Canada's *majority language* (the language spoken by most people), both English and French are officially recognized. As a result, many parents want their children to develop proficiency in both.

Transitional bilingual education provides support for students who speak a language other than the majority language. Transitional programs teach students some subjects in their native language while they learn the majority language through other subjects. In most such programs, students move into full-time instruction in the majority language after three or four years.

Issues in bilingual education. Bilingual education is increasing throughout the world as parents see value in their children's acquiring a second language for future work, travel, or personal relations. In many countries, such programs teach in English and the country's majority language. Many educators see academic value in bilingual education. Some studies show that students who spend at least six years in two-way programs score higher on school tests than those schooled in only one language. Some people oppose bilingual education because they fear it may lead to loss of national identity. In the United States, another concern is the shortage of bilingual teachers.

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See also **Education (Bilingual education); Hispanic Americans (Education); Multiculturalism.**

Additional resources

- Baker, Colin. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 2nd ed. Multilingual Matters, 1996.
- Dicker, Susan J. *Languages in America: A Pluralist View*. Multilingual Matters, 1996.
- Edwards, John R. *Multilingualism*. Routledge, 1994.
- Ehrman, Madeline E. *Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties*. Sage, 1996.