

Strengthening Teachers' Native Language Proficiency: A Pedagogical Intervention in U.S. Bilingual Education

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Abstract:

Despite the numerous benefits of bilingualism, English-only ideologies continue to perpetuate in the United States, and the minimal academic access to other languages due to unfavorable educational policies has led to low levels of foreign language acquisition and bilingualism. Consequently, there is a shortage of competent teachers, as many graduates do not meet the certification requirements. Solutions are elusive, and the literature lacks pedagogical approaches. Drawing on the theoretical framework of subtractive bilingualism, and implementing a convergent parallel mixed-method design, this study explored the educational histories of Spanish-English bilingual teachers. Subtractive bilingualism is a zero-sum process of second language acquisition at the expense of a person's first language, whereby the brain allocates cognitive space to the second language by deleting parts of the first language. The results revealed that the teachers, who had been speaking Spanish since childhood, experienced subtractive bilingualism due to a pattern of very little Spanish education. Their native language writing proficiency was assessed using all their written responses to the survey, revealing ten categories of pervasive errors, including phoneme-grapheme correspondence inaccuracies, missing diacritical marks, grammatical discordance, and lack of awareness of pro-drops. Based on the conclusions, strategic pedagogical interventions were recommended for bilingual teacher preparation curricula.

Keywords:

Bilingualism in the U.S., native language development, pedagogical interventions, second language acquisition, subtractive bilingualism.