

ECDA 7005 –Models of Bilingual Teaching

Michaela Bekaan

Submitted 12.05.2026.

Final Assignment #1: What evidence is there to show that certain models of bilingual education and methodological/pedagogical practices achieve higher levels of bilingualism and biliteracy in students, and are these the only criteria by which effective bilingual education should be evaluated?

Introduction

Bilingual education refers to forms of instruction that involve two languages. At first glance, this appears to be a clear, straightforward definition, yet in reality it is a “simple label for a complex phenomenon” (Cazden & Snow, 1990; quoted in Lewis, 2026, p. 7). It is no surprise then that Mackey (1970; quoted in Lewis, 2026, p. 10) identifies a total of ninety variations of bilingual education and more may even be found in real-life contexts. The existence of such a wide range of varieties reflects the diversity of purposes, goals, target groups, outcomes, and methodologies found in bilingual education.

Although differences in approaches and target groups are to be expected, one may assume that a common outcome—namely, bilingualism—underlies all forms. This then can be the benchmark for evaluating the success and effectiveness of a bilingual program. However, as will be demonstrated, certain forms of bilingual education lead to higher levels of bilingual proficiency than others. This paper will present the associated evidence by examining the most common models of bilingual education individually.

It has already been mentioned that some forms do not result in bilingualism and therefore the question arises if these programs are simply not successful or if there are other criteria that need to be taken into consideration. This paper will therefore also examine non-linguistic outcomes of bilingual education.

For the purpose of this discussion, the simplified categorizations of Baker will be used (Wright & Baker, 2025; Baker, 2001). Baker originally identified eleven distinct types of programs that were divided into weak and strong forms of bilingual education. The latest edition (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 221), introduces a third category, namely ‘monolingual

forms of education', which reflects a shift in thinking and research. This threefold classification will be adopted for the purposes of the present discussion.

Linguistic outcomes of monolingual forms

All types of education, including mainstreaming/submersion education with or without pull-out/push-in classes and sheltered immersion classes, which fall under the category of 'monolingual forms' have several elements in common. First of all, they are usually designed for minority language students and employ only the majority language in the classroom. Furthermore, the goal is monolingualism in the majority language and therefore coincides with the aim of societal and linguistic assimilation (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 221).

Since maintenance or development of the minority language is not attempted, the above forms are unlikely to lead to bilingualism (Wright & Baker, 2025). Despite this, some students may maintain their home language, particularly where the use of a minority language is supported in the classroom (Cummins, 2017). This may occur through bilingual teachers, translanguaging practices, or group work in the minority language (Wright & Baker, 2025). In addition, older learners, e.g. refugees who immigrated in their teenage years, as well as individuals who use their L1 frequently outside of school, are less in danger of language loss. It should be noted, however, that this is not due to the type of bilingual education, but rather their individual contexts. In conclusion, if students in mainstream educational settings are found to be bilingual, this does not constitute reliable evidence of the effectiveness of the educational model.

Turning to the development of the majority language (L2), studies in the U.S. suggest that students can attain a high level of language and even attain near native-like proficiency (Collier, 1995; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 316). Individual outcomes will vary and

are influenced by factors such as age of the student, prior language and literacy skills, exposure to English and the school context (e.g. trained teachers, provision of additional support). Due to highly heterogeneous situations and learners, there is no consensus on how long it takes to reach certain levels of proficiency. However, evidence points towards five to seven years to achieve working proficiency sufficient for a school context and between seven and ten years to reach native-like proficiency (Takanish & Le Menestrel, 2017; Collier, 1995; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 316). While students in sheltered immersion classes and mainstream classes with pull-out/push-in elements fare better, “it is unreasonable that children will quickly and effortlessly acquire the majority language” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 224). This is also in line with Valdés findings who identified numerous factors that “work against a student’s English language development” (2001; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 229).

Overall, the evidence univocally shows that mainstreaming/submersion education with and without pull-out/push-in classes as well as sheltered immersion education models are not conducive to achieving bilingualism or biliteracy. In fact, they provide a subtractive environment, which may ultimately lead to language loss. It is therefore only logical that Wright and Baker have revised their terminology and categorization to “monolingual forms of education for bilingual students” (Wright & Baker, 2025).

Linguistic outcomes of weak forms of bilingual education

Next, Wright and Baker include three models under the umbrella term “weak forms of bilingual education” (2025). As there are significant differences between those forms, they will be evaluated individually. First of all, the transitional bilingual education model, which is designed for minority language students, makes allowance for the use of two languages. However, the intention is to move from the first language (a minority

language) to a second language (a majority language) and therefore follows an assimilationist ideology. Again, bilingualism and biliteracy are not aimed for and it is not surprising that such a subtractive environment usually leads to monolingualism or limited bilingualism. Although there are limited reliable studies that solely evaluate the transitional model, several expert reviews on language development for English language learners, provide constructive insights. For example, the CREDE and NLP reports (Genesee et al., 2006; August & Shanahan, 2006; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 277–278) conclude that strong language skills in a home language support the development of English language skills. A more recent study by the National Academics of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine is more cautious in its conclusion and simply states that “there is no difference in outcomes measured in English or that ELs in bilingual programs outperform ELs instructed only in English” (Takanishi and Le Menestrel, 2017; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 278). As there is a gradual transition from instruction in the mother tongue to instruction in the majority language only, and bilingual teachers are employed, it is reasonable to apply the findings of the above-mentioned reports to transitional bilingual programs. It appears then that students in such programs can develop a high level of proficiency in the majority language.

Returning to the development of bilingualism, Menken and Kleyn’s study on long-term effects of subtractive schooling, confirm that home languages “have not been fully developed in school and instead have been largely replaced by English” (2009, p. 400). Students tend to retain oral skills in their L1, especially if used frequently outside of school, although it is often limited to the domains of social and home life (Menken & Kleyn, 2009, p. 400). In summary, the inclusion of this model under ‘weak forms’ by

Wright and Baker is surely warranted, as full bilingualism is neither aimed for nor commonly attained.

The second model, mainstream education with world language teaching, is the first model that is designed for majority language groups. The purpose is enrichment and, in most countries, this consists of teaching a world language as a subject with limited hours per week. Research has shown that this type of education “rarely produces functionally bilingual children” (Baker, 2021, p. 200). Muller also notes that “bilingualism in the US has seldom been a learned achievement” (1980, quoted in Casanova, 1991, p. 21). This statement was made in response to the Presidential Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies’ Report on the “scandalous” foreign language competence in the U.S. Since mainstreaming is the most common model for teaching foreign languages in the U.S., Muller is indirectly pointing towards the ineffectiveness of such teaching. On the other side of the Atlantic, this method, which has become known as ‘drip-feed,’ has similarly been heavily criticized e.g. by academics in Wales and by the Welsh school inspectorate (Lewis, 2026, p. 24).

However, there are notable exceptions, especially in Scandinavia and numerous countries in Asia and Africa (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 232). The high levels of English language competence in Nordic countries have even ignited a debate among academics who are concerned about domain loss of national languages (Hultgren, 2016). There are at least two caveats that must be considered in this context. First of all, a variety of foreign language teaching models are used in Scandinavia, with Bakers’ ‘mainstream education with world language teaching’ just being one of them. Secondly, exposure to English outside of school, or as Sundqvist terms it “extramural English” (2009) is remarkably high. Therefore, attributing bilingualism exclusively to this specific bilingual

educational model is overly simplistic. Furthermore, since English currently is the dominant lingua franca, the above is also applicable to many African and Asian nations, where instrumental factors provide further motivation to succeed (Lewis, 2026, p. 25). In summary, mainstream education for world language “rarely produces functionally bilingual children” (Baker, 2001, p. 200), especially for world languages other than English. In societies where bilingualism is achieved nonetheless, external factors play a significant role.

The last type of bilingual education that Baker includes under ‘weak models’ is separatist education. Few contexts exist where separatist education is adopted, as it is a deliberate choice of minority communities, who desire to isolate themselves from majority society. Functionally, many individuals in Amish communities are bilingual, yet there is a strong separation of domains (Fischer, 2023). It would therefore be more accurate to describe it as a diglossic context. Nonetheless, it is understandable that Baker mentions the Amish community as example, since they do not explicitly aim for bilingualism. Instead, external circumstances, particularly the pragmatic need to function as a member of the majority society, contribute significantly to high levels of English proficiency.

Further examples are transnational Arabic-medium religious institutions in South Asia, such as Jamia Saifiyah in Karachi. They may be illustrative of separatist education, since Arabic functions as the principal medium of instruction within a deliberately self-contained educational environment characterised by limited integration into the surrounding society. Based on professional teaching experience in this context, there is evidence that Arabic-speaking entrants (e.g. from Yemen or the United Arab Emirates)

develop restricted proficiency in Urdu, as opportunities for sustained engagement with the wider linguistic environment are intentionally limited.

In summary, separatist education's goal is not bilingualism and therefore cannot be considered an effective model for achieving bilingualism. However, due to the infrequent occurrence and the resulting limited research base, any conclusions must be drawn with caution to avoid overgeneralization.

Linguistic outcomes of strong forms of bilingual education

The third category in Baker's typology is named 'strong forms of bilingual education', which includes all models that aim for bilingualism and biliteracy. They will be examined in greater depth, as – unlike the previous categories – bilingualism is indeed expected as an outcome.

The most well-known bilingual educational program is perhaps the immersion program that spread world-wide after a successful educational experiment in Canada (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 255). Immersion programs aim for full bilingualism and biliteracy and are usually designed for majority language groups. This is closely connected with the goals of pluralism and enrichment. Immersion schooling is a well-researched bilingual model with over one thousand studies around the world, which all point to a “track record of unusual success and growth” (Johnstone, 2002; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 259).

In Europe, two regions where immersion education has been especially effective are Finland, where up to four languages are included (de Mejía, 2002; Laurén, 1994; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 259), and Catalonia (Artigal, 1993; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 260).

Despite the overwhelming body of positive evidence, a number of limitations warrant consideration. Firstly, in the original experiment in St Lambert, Genesee (1988)

emphasized that students all came from the socio-economic middle-class and enrolled voluntarily in the program. In addition, there was substantial support from parents. Also, immersion programs tend to select languages that either have official status (e.g. French in Canada; Catalan, or Basque in Spain) or carry sociocultural or economic significance in the community (e.g. Hebrew or Ukrainian for minorities in Canada). These factors may contribute to considerable motivation as well as positive attitudes towards immersion education in general as well as towards learning a particular language. These considerations suggest that caution is warranted in attributing the positive outcomes exclusively to the immersion approach, as they may also reflect the influence of these contextual and motivational variables.

Another consideration is that high levels of language proficiency tend to be limited to receptive, but not necessarily productive skills (Swain and Johnson, 1997; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 286). Also, success is often defined in comparison to traditional programs of foreign or second language learning (Tucker & d'Anglejan, 1972; quoted in Wright & Baker, p.257). It is neither surprising nor difficult to predict that immersion students "will surpass those in mainstream (core) programs" (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 286). Finally, evidence from Canada suggests that students may not actively use the additional language they have learnt (Genessee, 1988, p. 128).

Ultimately, there is indeed a strong body of evidence that supports the claim that immersion programs help students achieve high levels of bilingualism and even multilingualism, especially in contexts where favourable conditions exist. Research in more diverse sociolinguistic settings is increasing, but still limited, and therefore a degree of caution remains regarding the transferability of findings.

The further model according to Baker's typology is maintenance or heritage language education. Certain elements are comparable to immersion education, since pluralism and enrichment, or at times maintenance is aimed for. A crucial difference is that the target group is language minority students and therefore emphasis is placed on their first language. Interestingly, it is the only bilingual model that occurs both in formal school and out-of-school contexts. Although the aim of heritage language education is bilingualism, it may be accurate to say that it is not the primary goal. It is intrinsically intertwined with issues of language rights and even language revitalization, especially for immigrant and indigenous communities (Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 248–249). One prominent example is found in New Zealand among the Māori, where heritage language education helped “legitimize the minoritized language” and transform “its power and status” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 249). Another one is a program in Arizona that played a vital role in maintaining a particular language of the Navajo tribe. Lee and McCarty (2025; quoted in Wright & Baker, p. 254) go so far to state that “the goals of Navajo education have increasingly turned to revitalization”.

Ultimately, ‘heritage language education’ is used as an umbrella term that includes weak models, where language is taught a few hours per week as a subject as well as strong models, which are remarkably similar to immersion schooling. Therefore, effectiveness of such programs varies widely. For example, Wright and Baker emphasize that “bilingual education programs do not guarantee language maintenance for American Indians” (2025, p. 255). It is striking that despite a well-established research base, including evaluative and review studies in multiple countries, the stated goal of bilingualism is not systematically evaluated. This is reflected in the fact that Wright and Baker do not comment on the issue of language achievement in a section titled ‘The

Effectiveness of Heritage Language Education' (2025, pp. 290–291). Given this relative lack of explicit attention to this aspect, it is not possible to draw a definite conclusion regarding the achievement of bilingualism.

Another model that is believed to provide effective bilingual education, is two-way or dual language bilingual education, which is used both for majority and minority language students. Depending on the background of the students, the purpose may be either language maintenance or enrichment. In either case, the desire is to create an additive, rather than a subtractive environment (Wright & Baker, 2025).

Substantial research has been done on dual language bilingual education, especially in the context of the U.S. The majority of findings show that such programs are relatively effective in achieving bilingualism and biliteracy (Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 278–279).

The level of language proficiency, though, tends to depend on a range of factors, such as context, the composition of the classes, the specific variation of the model and the status of the languages involved. For example, according to the comprehensive study by Lindholm-Leary (2001; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 279) 90:10 dual language programs led to “higher levels of bilingual proficiency” than the 50:50 DL programs.

Regarding the composition, Henderson and Palmer discovered in their study of a Spanish-English dual language program in Texas (2020; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 240) that English was dominant in and outside of the classroom. Although the original study did not measure Spanish language proficiency levels, it is reasonable to believe that such a composition resulted in lower levels of bilingualism, especially among the native English-speakers. Additionally, if one of the languages used has a higher status than the other, the instrumental motivation to attain a high level of language skills in a lower-status language may decrease. This is further confounded by the fact that often

school language policies assign different status values to languages. For example, the higher-status language may be assigned to core academic subjects, which solidifies its prestige, while lower-status languages are reserved for less cognitively demanding domains (Lewis, 2026, pp. 43–44). Perhaps because this compartmentalization and language segregation is a core element of dual language programs, it has only recently attracted academic criticism (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 243).

Finally, two specific limitations need to be noted. Firstly, as the majority of evaluative studies was conducted among dual language programs in the U.S., transferability to other contexts, may be restricted. Secondly, “research typically compares DLBE to other forms of education and *to monolingual forms of education for language minoritized students*” (emphasis added; Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 279). The direct or indirect purpose behind most research in the U.S. is to either justify a certain bilingual program or to identify the most effective program for teaching English to minority students. As a result, language proficiency in the minority language may be insufficiently addressed and thereby constraining the extent to which claims about the attainment of bilingualism can be generalized.

In summary, Baker’s statement that dual language bilingual education programs are relatively successful (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 278) is a valid conclusion, although it would be more accurate to add that this is mainly the case in the United States.

Attention now shifts to a final model of bilingual education, namely mainstream bilingual education. Perhaps to avoid confusion with the monolingual form of mainstreaming, Wright and Baker have revised their terminology to “bilingual education in majority languages” (2025, p. 260). Similarly to heritage language it is an umbrella term and describes schooling that jointly uses two or more majority languages with the

aim of high level of bilingual/multilingual competencies. The European Schools movement, international schools, and the methodology known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are examples of mainstream bilingual education. Due to the focus on several majority languages, they are mainly found in bilingual societies or regions, where a considerable number of the population desires to become bilingual for the purpose of enrichment and language maintenance.

Research on the European Schools movement shows that students tend to achieve L2 proficiency close to native speakers, as well as high levels in a third, and sometimes fourth, language (Housen, 2002; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 265). In a comparable way, trilingual education in the Basque Country has been “evaluated with positive outcomes in terms of multilingualism” (Jessner, 2008; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 265). In contrast, outcomes in international schools are more varied. Many international schools are English-medium schools, and although positive attitudes towards bilingualism may be present, language proficiency beyond English is not the goal. For students, whose first language is not English, international schooling may be closer to submersion education. The key difference, though, is that no subtractive or assimilationist ideology is being promoted. A thorough investigation commissioned by the International Baccalaureate Organization (2014) also confirms a wide range of language proficiencies across schools and countries. The report highlights that external factors, especially societal bilingualism, play a significant role in language development. Some schools expressed concern regarding students’ proficiency in the language of instruction and regarding mother tongue development (p. 124).

Overall, bilingual education in majority languages can lead to high levels of bilingualism and even multilingualism. However, credit cannot be given solely to particular

pedagogical practices, since such programs are usually implemented in contexts that are already highly favourable to bilingualism.

This overview demonstrates quite clearly that several educational models that are labelled ‘bilingual’ are not effective in producing bilingual or biliterate students. Despite this, they should not be dismissed immediately as inadequate forms of education. First of all, certain approaches, such as the transitional model, emphasize the development of the majority language without regard to maintaining the students’ first language. Furthermore, all bilingual programs have additional implicitly or explicitly stated purposes. The European Schools movement, for example, strives to promote a European identity (1993, Baetens-Beardsmore, p.122), whereas sheltered English immersion (SEI) programs focus on preparing students for academic success in mainstream education (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 229). In short, a model should not be evaluated against outcomes it was not designed to achieve.

Other criteria: Academic Achievement

At first glance, one may assume that the main objective of any bilingual program is to attain high proficiency in two languages. The discussion so far has already highlighted that in certain models, e.g. in submersion education, this is not accurate. Therefore, assessment of linguistic achievements in two (or more) languages cannot be the sole measure to evaluate a program. The following section discusses some additional criteria, including some illustrative examples, which need to be taken into consideration.

One key aspect is the evaluation of students’ overall academic achievement. Evidence suggests that most strong bilingual programs promote equal or higher academic performance in subject areas other than language, especially in dual-language

programs (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 280), in the European Schools movement (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 265) and strong heritage language programs (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 290). In contrast, students in immersion programs may experience negative effects if second language proficiency is not developed sufficiently to deal with the subject contents. Researchers, though, point out that this need not be the case, if programs are implemented well (Johnstone, 2002; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2020; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 288).

The challenges in immersion programs are similar to those found in monolingual forms of education. Even in sheltered/structured immersion schooling, students face the “constant pressure to think about the form of the language and less time to think about curriculum content” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 225). Although the reasons for underachievement of minority language students are complex, lack of English proficiency - or more broadly speaking, lack of proficiency in the medium of instruction – plays a significant role (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 213).

Other criteria: Emotional and Psychological effects

In addition to academic outcomes, students’ emotional and psychological well-being needs to be considered. It is widely accepted that students’ self-esteem and their sense of identity are integral to their academic achievements. Although bilingual programs rarely mention these aspects as explicit goals, psychosocial outcomes are frequently included in evaluative reports.

For example, Wright’s assessment of mainstreaming education provides evidence that learners may experience lack of self-confidence and issues of identity development (2004; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 224–225). Duquette (1999; quoted in Baker,

2001, pp. 238–239) contrasts this with heritage language programs, which value a learner’s cultural and linguistic background.

Other criteria: Cross-cultural competence

A third area that plays a role in analysing the effectiveness of schooling is socio-cultural and cross-cultural competence (Feinauer et al., 2024; Gonzalez et al., 2024; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 314). Although most strong forms mention some cultural element as expressed outcome, the European Schools movement is the most explicit. Interestingly, Baetens-Beardsmore (1993, p. 129) notes that it is challenging to determine how successful the ‘European hours’ are in promoting a European identity. It appears that younger students tend to develop friendships within their language sub-section, while older students expand their circle to include speakers of other languages. Still, observations and studies support the conclusion that students in the European Schools movement develop a certain level of cross-cultural skills due to the frequent natural and orchestrated cross-cultural interactions (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993). Dual-language programs also intentionally include components to strengthen relationships between different ethnic and linguistic groups. Research by Tankersley (2001; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 247) demonstrates that a Macedonian-Albanian dual language program was quite successful in increasing “students’ respect for different languages and cultures” and in helping “resolve ethnic conflict”. Similar findings were reported in Israel in an Arab-Hebrew program (Amara et al., 2009; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 248). The success may be attributed to the intentional set-up of the program, as well as the fact that bilingualism can enhance communicative sensitivities (Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 169–170). In contrast, monolingual and weak forms of bilingual education usually do not systematically target sociocultural

competence as an educational outcome. In fact, various educational forms, including pull-out, sheltered and transitional models, have been critiqued for their separation which limits the occasions for students to participate in everyday social and cultural life of the mainstream classroom (Wright & Baker, 2025). These constraints may reduce opportunities for the development of cross-cultural and sociocultural competences, an example that “it is possible to become bilingual and not develop cross-cultural or multicultural competence” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 314).

Other criteria: Language rights and access to education

In addition to academic, affective, and sociocultural outcomes, a further consideration is access to education and the strengthening of language rights. A notable example, where a bilingual program successfully enhanced the rights of a language group can be found in Cambodia. Perhaps surprisingly, the transitional model, which is usually considered a ‘weak’ model, has empowered indigenous ethnic minorities through increased access to education as well improved status and image of the minority language (Wright & Boun, 2015; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, pp. 230–231).

Comparable results were found in a multilingual, transitional program in Sindh, Pakistan, where children moved from diverse mother tongue languages to the regional language, and then to the national language before arriving at the international language, English. This well researched project confirms increased access to education for minority groups as well as overall improved academic achievement (The Citizens Foundation & Thar Foundation, 2021). The Cambodian and Pakistan examples demonstrate that improved access to education is a worth-while goal of bilingual programs.

Other criteria: Political and ideological goals

Finally, attention must also be given to political and ideological goals, since bilingual education, irrespective of its form, is intertwined with a nation's philosophy and politics (Baker, 2001, p. 367). Many bilingual programs were developed in a specific historical and political context, such as the Canadian immersion model, which began as a community-based pilot project in St. Lambert in the 1960s, with the aim to promote national unity between the Francophones and Anglophones (Genesee, 1988). Early evaluations cautiously pointed towards more positive intergroup attitudes and reduced linguistic prejudice. However, subsequent, in-depth research highlighted that the effect, especially on a societal level, is minimal and that contact to other linguistic groups outside the classroom remains limited (Genesee, 1983). Overall, it can be argued that although linguistic outcomes were generally met, broader societal and political goals such as improved mutual understanding between the main language groups, were only partially fulfilled.

Another relevant example are programs that were created to cater to the increasing immigrant and refugee population, in particular during the last two decades in Western Europe. It is unsurprising, that such interventions are intended to not only facilitate language learning, but also societal integration and political education. This is particularly apparent in courses that are funded by national governments, as they are designed to align closely with official immigration policy and ideology. In Germany, the 'Integrationskurse' ("Integration courses") by the Ministry of Migration and Refugees states that successful integration requires not only German language skills, but education about German politics, history, culture, and values. Therefore, learners are required to take the 'Leben in Deutschland' test ("Living in Germany" test) in addition to

the German language test. These government-sponsored classes can be said to function as a civic integration instrument. Although official rhetoric promotes a tolerant society, a review of the curriculum reveals partial assimilationist tendencies (BAMF, 2024). Minority languages are de-emphasizing while the dominant language – German – is made mandatory to participate in society. Although these courses align with Baker’s transitional bilingual model, participants are rarely encouraged (or even allowed) to use their L1. As a result, this creates a subtractive environment for many participants. Over the years, evaluative studies have pointed out that these courses are only moderately successful in producing independent language proficiency skills (Mediendienst Integration, 2026). On a more positive note, there is evidence of improved labour-market integration, and increased contacts with Germans and emotional attachment to Germany (BAMF, 2024). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the broader objectives, such as societal integration and alignment with democratic and cultural norms, are not directly captured in current evaluative studies. Consequently, the extent to which these programmes achieve their more ambitious societal and political aims remains unclear.

Conclusion

Education that “uses and promotes two languages” is referred to as bilingual education (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 220). Yet, this label has also been used for schooling that serves minority language students, who may or may not be bilingual. It has been demonstrated that only few educational models achieve high levels of language proficiency in more than one language. Among them are immersion education, heritage language, and dual language programs as well as mainstream bilingual education, which Baker categorizes as “strong forms” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 221). Although the evidence is largely positive, it is important to note that they are contextually situated,

and shaped by the educational environment, including the quality implementation and methodological design. This is especially evident in heritage language programs, which often align with weak rather than strong models. This may explain why the expert panel of the US National Research Council concluded that “all programs could be effective, depending on the demographics, needs, interests, goals and resources of the school and local community” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 277).

Nevertheless, before drawing overly critical conclusions or dismissing models that do not achieve bilingualism, several points should be considered. First, not all programs aim for bilingualism or high levels of language proficiency in an additional language. Therefore, evaluations should be based only on the stated, rather than assumed language goals. For example, for world language teaching in Europe the required levels of A2 for lower secondary education) and B2 for upper secondary education (European Commission/Eurydice, 2023, p. 24) would be appropriate as baseline. Another example are educational programs that emphasize language proficiency in the majority language. When the goal is the ability to function in mainstream schooling, then this should be the benchmark, rather than native-like proficiency in two languages.

This line of reasoning extends to the next aspect. All forms of education serve a variety of purposes and therefore effectiveness needs to be measured against all stated goals, such as cross-cultural competence, achievement in other academic subjects, affective well-being of learners, employability, and promotion of a national or supra-national identity.

Finally, the label ‘bilingual education’ should be evaluated. It is laudable that Wright and Baker already refined their typology and now provide clearer distinctions. For example, the phrase “varieties of bilingual education” (Baker, 2001, p. 192) was changed to “a

typology of program models for bilingual students” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 221).

Additionally, in 2025 they included ‘monolingual forms of education’ as a third category, which makes it clear that bilingualism is not an intended goal. Still, the term ‘bilingual students’ can be misleading, as it implies that learners are bilingual at every stage. If Diebold’s definition of incipient bilingualism is applied (1964; quoted in Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 9) then this may be accurate, yet this is usually not the most widely accepted definition of bilingualism. Since it is inherently challenging to define who is bilingual, policy makers and educational program designers may benefit from using alternative terminology for educational programs that have been discussed in this essay.

Ultimately, assessments of effectiveness are contingent upon the underlying objectives. As has been shown, certain programs may be considered more successful in advancing bilingualism. Yet, when evaluating individual programs, Baker’s observation remains relevant: “Any effectiveness equation is complex, variable across regions and politics, multivariate, and often contested” (Wright & Baker, 2025, p. 273).

References

- Baetens-Beardsmore, H. (1993) 'The European school model', in Baetens-Beardsmore, H. (ed.) *European Models of Bilingual Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp.121–154.
- Baker, C. (2001) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 3rd edn. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) (2024) Evaluation of integration courses. Available at: <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/ProjekteReportagen/EN/Forschung/Integration/evaluation-integrationskurse.html> (Accessed: 6 April 2026).
- Casanova, C. (1991) 'Bilingual education: Politics or pedagogy?', in García, O. (ed.) *Bilingual Education*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 15–23.
- Cummins, J. (2017) 'Teaching minoritized students: Are additive approaches legitimate?', *Harvard Educational Review*, 87(3), pp. 404–425.
- European Commission (2012) *First European survey on language competences: Executive summary*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/languages/library/studies/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf (Accessed: 10 May 2026).
- European Commission/Eurydice (2023) *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe*. Brussels: European Education and Culture Executive Agency. Available at: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-teaching-languages-school-europe-2023-edition> (Accessed: 6 May 2026).
- Fisher, K. (2023) 'Pennsylvania Dutch and English in Amish communities', *Journal of Plain Anabaptist Communities*. Available at: https://plainanabaptistjournal.org/article/ojs_id/9294/ (Accessed: 25 April 2026).

García, O. and Wei, L. (2014) *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Genesee, F. (1983) 'Bilingual education of majority-language children: The immersion experiments in review', *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 4(1), pp. 1–46.
doi:10.1017/S0142716400001739.

Genesee, F. (1988) 'The Canadian second language immersion program', in Paulston, C.B. (ed.) *International Handbook of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, pp. 118–131.

Hultgren, A.K. (2016) 'Domain loss: The rise and demise of a concept', in Linn, A. (ed.) *Investigating English in Europe: Contexts and Agendas*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 153–158. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308207894_Domain_Loss_The_rise_and_demise_of_a_concept (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

Lewis, H.G. (2026) *Section 10: Complete Booklet Content | Models for Bilingual Teaching (ECDA7005)*. Available at: https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/410246/mod_resource/content/1/ECDA-7005-FullTextDocument.pdf (Accessed: 1 March 2026).

Mediendienst Integration (2026) *Erfolgsquote bei Integrationskursen*. Available at: <https://mediendienst-integration.de/bildung/sprache/erfolgsquote-bei-integrationskursen> (Accessed: 9 April 2026).

Menken, K. and Kleyn, T. (2010) 'The long-term impact of subtractive schooling in the educational experiences of secondary English learners', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 13(4), pp. 399–417. doi:10.1080/13670050903370143.

Sundqvist, P. (2009) *Extramural English matters: out-of-school English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary*. Doctoral thesis. Karlstad:

Karlstad University. Available at: [https://kau.diva-](https://kau.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:275141)

[portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:275141](https://kau.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:275141) (Accessed: 26 April 2026).

The Citizens Foundation and Thar Foundation (2021) *Finding identity, equity, and economic strength by teaching in languages children understand: Mother tongue-based multilingual education research report*. Karachi: The Citizens Foundation. Available at:

<https://view.publitas.com/the-citizens-foundation/mtb-mle-research-report/>

(Accessed: 6 April 2026).

Wright, W.E. and Baker, C (2025) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

8th edn. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.