



Employment, work abroad and bilingual education: Spanish bilingual graduates' self-perceived employability, mobility and intercultural competence

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Abstract

Bilingual programs have become more common in higher education around the world in an attempt to provide learners with the education they need to face today's world. These programs can provide academic, linguistic, intercultural, and professional benefits to students. Consequently, countries like Spain have developed bilingual education to help students become proficient in foreign languages and develop essential competences for their professional futures. Research has analysed how Spanish bilingual education is implemented, and how teachers are trained. However, few studies examine how bilingual programs impact graduates' employability, mobility, and intercultural awareness, and how graduates perceive their skill development. Moreover, little has been studied about bilingual graduates' work situation and whether participating in these programs has helped them find work abroad. This paper analyses whether a combination of participation in Spanish bilingual programs, employment, and experiences working abroad affects bilingual education graduates' self-perceived employability, mobility, and intercultural awareness. This study adopts a quantitative approach, in which 741 respondents participated. Findings show that bilingual graduates who are currently working have higher self-perceived employability and better perceptions of their mobility and employability competences than those who followed monolingual studies, even when they have not worked abroad.

Keywords:

Employment, work abroad; Spanish bilingual education, bilingual education graduates, intercultural competence, international mobility, employability, linguistic success.

Introduction

Being able to speak more than one's first language is a skill of paramount importance in today's world, and political and educational bodies from every part of the globe seem to be well aware of it. Such is the case of the Council of Europe and the European Commission (European supranational organizations comprising a group of countries that operate under the same economic, political and legal space and that respond to the same values of democracy and human rights; European

Commission, 2020), which claim that the knowledge of languages (including their linguistic and cultural aspects) *provides a better understanding of other cultures, thus contributing to the development of citizenship and democratic competences* (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 15). Indeed, this has been the premise followed in the European continent for decades, as can be seen from the diversity of official documents published in the field of language learning and teaching and intercultural awareness (e.g., the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, Council of Europe, 2001, 2018; the *White Paper on Education and Training*, European Commission, 1995; and the *Language Learning and the Linguistic Diversity Promotion Plan*, European Commission, 2003) that have shown the urgency of developing the communicative and intercultural skills of young learners to help them actively participate in the globalised society of today.

As a result, bilingual and multilingual education has become more common in educational systems around the world in an attempt to provide 21st-century students with the type of adaptive education they need to face the communicative situations they will encounter in their lives (García, 2009). This type of education, which may be strictly bilingual or multilingual depending on the number of languages of instruction used, is understood as the use of more than one language (national or foreign) to teach a wide range of non-linguistic areas of the curriculum (Ozfidan & Toprak, 2019; Rascón-Moreno, 2021; Terra, 2018; Turner, 2021). Research has reported the benefits of bilingual and multilingual education for students in the academic and linguistic fields (Pérez-Vidal & Roquet, 2015), but also in terms of intercultural awareness (Romanowski, 2018), professional skills (Callahan & Gándara, 2014), and willingness to travel abroad (Yang, 2017).

Considering these gains, and taking Europe's guidelines into account, countries like Spain developed bilingual and multilingual education programs at all educational stages (Chumbay & Quito-Ochoa, 2020; García-Calvo et al., 2019; Mancebo-Pérez, 2020; Pérez-Murillo, 2019) in order to help students become proficient in local and foreign languages as well as to develop essential skills. In this light, research has extensively analysed how Spanish bilingual education is implemented (Barrios & Milla-Lara, 2020; Chumbay & Quito-Ochoa, 2020; Valdés-Sánchez & Espinet, 2020), and also how teachers who take part in these programs are trained (Custodio-Espinar, 2019; Marzà, 2021; Palacios-Hidalgo, Gómez-Parra, & Huertas-Abril, 2018). Furthermore, the specialized scientific literature has also examined the academic and linguistic results of bilingual programs in Europe and other international contexts (Dockrell et al., 2021; Kirsch, Aleksić, Mortini, & Andersen, 2020; Lorenzo, Granados, & Rico, 2021). Similarly, studies have explored the influence of language learning on students' academic mobility (Mitchell, 2021) and employment (Hsieh, in press), and the specific effects of bilingual and multilingual education on their intercultural awareness (Gómez-Parra, 2020). While employability, mobility and intercultural awareness are key elements in evaluating the effects of bilingual education and individuals' linguistic success (Gómez-Parra, Huertas-Abril, & Espejo-Mohedano, 2021), few studies examine how these programs impact graduates' lives concerning these three aspects and how graduates perceive their development of such skills. Moreover, little has been studied about the work situation of Spanish bilingual/multilingual education graduates or whether their participation in these programs has helped them find work abroad.

The study reported in this paper analysed whether a combination of participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education programs, being currently employed, and having worked abroad affects bilingual education graduates' self-perceived employability, mobility, and intercultural awareness. Three research questions underpin this study:

- RQ1.** Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education programs, who are currently employed and have worked abroad, have positive perceptions of their linguistic success?
- RQ2.** Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, who are currently employed, consider themselves more linguistically successful than those who did not participate in these programs?

RQ3. Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, who have worked abroad, consider themselves more linguistically successful than those who did not participate in these programs?

Theoretical framework: CLIL, competences and employability

The efforts of educational organisations in highlighting the need to enhance language learning among younger generations have been translated into a somewhat widespread implementation of bilingual and multilingual education in every part of the world (e.g., Dos Santos, 2019; Moore, 2021; Theobald, 2019). Likewise, European educational systems have engaged in developing bilingual and multilingual programs at all educational levels in an attempt to promote the learning of national and foreign languages among their citizens, as well as the development of their communicative competence (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2019; Lundberg, 2018; Nance, 2020).

These educational programs may be bilingual or multilingual depending on the number of languages of instruction used. Countries and regions within them may choose strictly bilingual programs, a trilingual option, or a multilingual type of education. For instance, Spanish regions may be monolingual (e.g., Andalusia or the Canary Islands) where Spanish is the only official language spoken. Conversely, they may be bilingual where a co-official language is also spoken in addition to Spanish; such is the case of Catalonia (with Catalan as the co-official language), Galicia (where Galician has co-official status), and the Basque Country (with Basque as a co-official language). In this light, monolingual areas follow strict bilingual education programs, since only Spanish and a foreign language (generally English) are used as languages of instruction (Méndez, 2013); on the other hand, bilingual regions follow trilingual programs to ensure the teaching and learning of Spanish, the foreign language and also co-official languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019). Other countries, such as Luxembourg, implement a multilingual approach (Kirsch et al., 2020).

Among the different existing approaches to bilingual and multilingual education, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become a common approach implemented in Europe and Spain (Bower, 2021; Renau-Renau, & Mas-Martí, 2019), and increasingly in other contexts (cf. Sasajima, 2019; Yang, 2019). According to Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010), CLIL *is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language* (p. 23). Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2013) state some of the clear differences between CLIL and other types of bilingual and multilingual education (such as immersion programs or content-based instruction), highlighting that, while in CLIL a foreign language or a lingua franca is used for instruction, other bilingual programs focus on second national languages of the context where they are implemented. In this case, students taking part in CLIL face the difficulty that the use of the language being learnt is almost totally limited to the classroom since it is not frequently spoken in other situations of learners' daily life (Dalton-Puffer & Smit 2013). Moreover, CLIL usually starts after students have acquired literacy skills in their first language(s), unlike other forms of bilingual and multilingual education, in which literacy in the languages of instruction is regularly acquired simultaneously. Moreover, CLIL teachers are usually non-native speakers of the language of instruction, and lessons are normally established as non-language lessons (i.e., science, music, or mathematics), while also offering the target language as a language subject taught by language specialists. Cenoz, Genesee and Gorter (2014) add other disparities between CLIL and other ways of bilingual and multilingual education, such as the main learning focus, which in the former is to develop the necessary skills to guarantee effective communication, while in other approaches it is to acquire native-like proficiency.

Some scholars consider CLIL as a type of content-based instruction (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2007). However, Cenoz (2015) states some differences between the two concepts. Despite both being broad terms encompassing different methodologies, CLIL tends to be used for the learning of

foreign majority languages like English, French or German, whereas content-based instruction is also used for the learning of second or minority languages. Additionally, Cenoz (2015) refers to the origin and context of both approaches, with CLIL being more *linked to the use of English-medium instruction in Europe in the 1990s*, and content-based instruction *often associated with the first French-medium immersion programmes in Canada in the 1960s* (p. 21).

Several studies have reported the varied benefits that bilingual and multilingual education and CLIL may have for students. In their work, Pérez-Vidal and Roquet (2015) find linguistic gains in certain language domains in students enrolled in a bilingual Catalan/Spanish program, such as in reading and grammar. Similarly, Hipfner-Boucher, Lam and Chen (2014) discover that children participating in bilingual education had higher levels of phonological awareness and word reading skills. As for intercultural awareness, Romanowski (2018) discusses how certain forms of bilingual education favour intercultural learning, an idea also supported by Hus and Hegedis (2021), who show that teachers of bilingual programs believe that this sort of education is the most appropriate for intercultural learning. Yang (2017) explores the views of bilingual education university undergraduates and reveals that improved international mobility and employability are well-regarded advantages of this type of education according to students. Finally, Callahan and Gándara (2014) and Porras, Ee and Gándara (2014) examine how participation in bilingual education and speaking more than one language enhances employability.

Certainly, ‘competence’ and ‘communicative competence’ are key terms not only in European bilingual and multilingual education but in European educational systems in general. The former is understood as the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that involves meeting *complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context* (OECD, 2005, p. 4), whereas the latter draws on *an individual’s knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating* (p. 4). The development of students’ communicative competence is then key in bilingual and multilingual education. Nevertheless, if these programs are to prepare students to face the challenges of 21st-century society, it may be reasonable to assume that communication-related competences are not their only focus, but that other professional skills like international mobility and employability that have become essential dimensions to measure social progress are also important. In this sense, national and international organisations within Europe devote efforts to guarantee that European citizens are granted opportunities to freely move within the borders of the continent for professional reasons. These initiatives and efforts seem to be resulting in the growing international mobility of European working-age citizens seeking economic integration (Fries-Tersch, Jones, & Siöland, 2021). Among the different European countries, Spain is rated as one of the most important destinations for high-skilled movers, but it also suffers a considerable outflow of nationals (around 56,000 working-age citizens leaving the country) that choose to look for better labour opportunities somewhere else (Fries-Tersch, Jones, & Siöland, 2021).

Within this context, research shows that bilingual and multilingual education

...can help to improve employability of university graduates in the international job market (Schluessel 2007; Tsung 2009; Zelasko and Antúnez 2000), as many companies demand an intercultural and multilingual profile for the staff they hire, in addition to the competences which are specific to the job these will develop (Gómez-Parra, 2018, p. 95).

In fact, in the 2006 Eurydice Report, a summary developed by the *European Information Network* that provides insights on the structure of European education, it was already pointed that one of the key aims of bilingual programs and CLIL specifically was *preparing pupils for life in a more internationalised society and offering them better job prospects on the labour market* (Eurydice European Unit, 2006, p. 22). However, it seems necessary to examine to what extent CLIL and

bilingual and multilingual education contribute to enhancing graduates' professional competences, something still unknown (Tudor, 2008; Yang, 2017).

As mentioned previously, research is profuse when analysing how bilingual and multilingual education is implemented in different contexts, how teachers who participate in these programs are trained, and the academic results of students, among other areas of study. Nevertheless, few investigations have explored whether graduates consider that their participation in these programs has enhanced their linguistic success. This type of success has been traditionally measured in terms of neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic benefits (cf. Li & Grant, 2016; Thierry, 2016), and little has been mentioned in relation to students' and/or graduates' professional or intercultural gains. Nevertheless, Gómez-Parra et al. (2021) have recently demonstrated that linguistic success can be understood as a combination of intercultural competence, international mobility, and employability, and that the evaluation of the success of bilingual and multilingual programs may be related to it.

Methodology

This paper reports on a study which aimed to determine whether a combination of participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education programs, being currently employed, and having worked abroad affects bilingual education graduates' self-perceived linguistic success, understood as a combination of employability, mobility, and intercultural awareness. To this purpose, an online questionnaire was used to examine potential differences among groups when considering participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, employment, and work abroad as grouping variables.

The work follows a quantitative approach, which *involves measurement and assumes that the phenomena under study can be measured* (Watson, 2015, p. 1), and which allows using a large group of participants to examine the relations among the variables (Muijs, 2010).

This study is part of the research project 'Facing bilinguals: Study of bilingual education programmes' results through social data analysis (BESOC)' (Ref. no. EDU2017-84800-R), granted by the 2017 call of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, and whose objective is to study how bilingual education programs across the world impact on 21st-century citizens. The BESOC team has been designed ad hoc and is composed of experts in the fields of Philology, Psychopedagogy, Statistics, Informatics, Economics, and Legal and Business Sciences. It also had the support of distinguished international experts in bilingual and multilingual education. This guarantees the multidisciplinary nature of the research project.

Procedure

An online questionnaire was used for the collection of data. First, Facebook Audience Insights was used for cross-sectional sample modelling; this tool allows selecting individuals that meet certain conditions (such as age, languages spoken, or educational background) by using their personal information and their behaviour on Facebook. The researchers chose to use this tool instead of simply selecting a convenience sample as it guarantees to obtain a larger number of participants for the study.

Once the audience was identified, the questionnaire was made available through *SurveyMonkey*, inserted in advertisements, and distributed on Facebook. In this way, users located in Spain were provided the link to the questionnaire and invited to participate in the study. The research team had access to the anonymous responses to the questionnaire but not to respondents' personal, activity and interaction information, which was exclusively manipulated by Facebook.

After gathering the responses to the questionnaire (from December 2019 to January 2020), data were refined by identifying and dismissing anomalous information, and discarding incomplete responses (due to the size of the sample, this process was applied instead of imputation; Van Buuren, 2018).

Instrument

An online format was chosen for the design and administration of the instrument in order to guarantee accessibility and reaching a larger sample. The questionnaire (see Appendix) was designed by the BESOC team as part of the aforementioned research project. It consists of a total of 37 items classified as follows: 13 general questions, with binary and numerical variables, including age, gender, languages spoken, participation in bilingual programs, employment, and experience working abroad, among others; and 24 specific questions related to linguistic success, measured with a 10-point Likert (1 = Very little; 10 = A lot), which are in turn divided into three dimensions (international mobility, employability, and intercultural competence). It is worth mentioning that the instrument makes no reference to the languages of instruction of the bilingual programs in which respondents may have participated, their nationality or region of origin, the educational stage in which they received this teaching, or the type of schooling in which they were enrolled (i.e., public, or state-funded education); these variables, therefore, are not considered in the study. Additionally, it is worth noticing the possible conflicts of the questionnaire relying on self-reported answers and the potential bias of the results (Devaux & Sassi, 2016). Nonetheless, as stated by Althubaiti (2016), *when self-reporting data are correctly utilized, they can help to provide a wider range of responses than many other data collection instruments* (p. 212).

The questionnaire was published and validated by Gómez-Parra et al. (2021), who tested its reliability and internal consistency by applying Cronbach's Alpha (higher than 0.88 for the three dimensions, and 0.950 for the total scale; Taber, 2018), Bartlett's sphericity test (0.00; sig. < 0.05) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.949; sig. > 0.8). The authors also performed confirmatory factor analysis to verify whether the three established dimensions can be used to measure linguistic success (Gómez-Parra et al., 2021).

Participants

741 respondents comprised the national representative sample of the study. 472 (63.7%) were women, 263 (35.5%) were men, and one (0.8%) did not answer this question. The mean age was 39.9 (SD = 14.6), while the mean time of study in bilingual/multilingual education was 7.92 years (SD = 6.35). According to their work situation, 483 (65.18%) participants were employed, out of whom only 79 (10.66%) had participated in a Spanish bilingual or multilingual program; in terms of experience working abroad, 242 (32.66%) claimed having done so, of whom only 41 (5.53%) had studied in a bilingual or multilingual program. As mentioned before, nationality and educational stage in which respondents participated in bilingual and/or multilingual education were not considered for the study. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants (including frequencies and percentages).

Table 1: Distribution of Participants

Item		Participation in bilingual or multilingual education	N	%
Gender	Male	Yes	51	6.88
		No	212	28.61
	Female	Yes	89	12.01
		No	383	51.69
	N-A	Yes	2	0.27
		No	4	0.54
Total		741		
Employed	Yes	Yes	79	10.66
		No	404	54.52
	No	Yes	63	8.50
		No	195	26.32
	Total		741	
Experience working abroad	Yes	Yes	41	5.53
		No	201	27.13
	No	Yes	101	13.63
		No	398	53.71
	Total		741	

Data analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS V22.0. First, the 759 responses initially gathered were reduced to 741 after finding 18 participants who had provided contradictory information. Then, a descriptive analysis of the data was developed to get a general summary of the collected information. Finally, Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to discover statistically significant differences (when sig. < 0.05; Field, 2013; Sokal & Rohlf, 2001) among groups considering the three grouping variables (i.e., participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, employment, and experience work abroad).

Results

Table 2 shows the results of responses in the items of the questionnaire regarding employability, distinguishing between participants and non-participants of bilingual or multilingual education.

Table 2: Descriptive Results in the Dimension ‘Employability’

Item	Participation in bilingual or multilingual education	N	Mean	SD
Bilingualism/languages favouring employability	Yes	142	6.577	3.08123
	No	599	5.778	3.33008
	Total	741		
Bilingualism/languages impacting job development	Yes	142	6.485	3.10510
	No	599	5.998	3.34899
	Total	741		
Use of second language to communicate with colleagues	Yes	142	5.809	3.39573
	No	599	4.609	3.31324
	Total	741		
Difficulty to communicate in the second language with colleagues	Yes	142	4.288	3.06335
	No	599	4.297	3.11247
	Total	741		
Use of second language abroad when travelling for work	Yes	142	3.063	3.26541
	No	599	6.101	3.42204
	Total	741		
Bilingualism/languages improving salary	Yes	142	6.626	2.90416
	No	599	5.581	3.26986
	Total	741		

As presented in Table 2, mean scores differ when considering participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education; when considering their employability, participants of bilingual programs score higher than their non-bilingual counterparts in 4 of the 6 questions. The results of Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests applied to these 6 items are presented in Table 3, finding statistically significant differences (sig. < 0.05) in 3 of the 6 items in favour of bilingual education graduates.

Table 3: Significant Differences According to Participation in Bilingual/Multilingual Education

Item	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig.
Bilingualism/languages favouring employability	36727.50	216427.50	-2.556	.011*
Bilingualism/languages impacting job development	39181.00	218881.00	-1.478	.139
Use of second language to communicate with colleagues	33878.00	213578.00	-3.833	.000*
Difficulty to communicate in the second language with colleagues	42063.00	221763.00	-.206	.837
Use of second language abroad when travelling for work	39618.50	219318.50	-1.288	.198
Bilingualism/languages improving salary	34791.50	214491.50	-3.406	.001*

Note. Significant differences (sig. < 0.05) marked with (*) and in bold.

Table 4 shows the descriptive values when considering the three grouping variables of the study (i.e., participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, employment, and experience working abroad), the three dimensions (i.e., mobility, employability, and intercultural competence), and the total scale (i.e., linguistic success as a whole).

Table 4: Descriptive Values

Employed	Experience working abroad	Participation in bilingual or multilingual education	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	
Yes	Yes	Yes	Mobility	32	5.00	50.00	38.4375	11.74442
		Employ.	32	4.00	40.00	28.4375	11.30783	
		Intercult.	32	25.00	50.00	41.4375	8.09993	
		Total	32	59.00	140.00	108.3125	25.75497	
		No	Mobility	162	5.00	50.00	39.3148	9.50676
		Employ.	162	4.00	40.00	29.7346	8.65616	
		Intercult.	162	5.00	50.00	39.9198	10.23814	
		Total	162	14.00	140.00	108.9691	24.88718	
	No	Yes	Mobility	47	5.00	50.00	31.4894	14.18798
			Employ.	47	4.00	40.00	23.9787	10.78342
			Intercult.	47	13.00	50.00	36.6383	11.24901
			Total	47	32.00	140.00	92.1064	32.3131
No		Mobility	242	5.00	50.00	30.3967	13.57229	

			Employ.	242	4.00	40.00	20.0413	11.27579
			Intercult.	242	5.00	50.00	32.5868	13.69567
			Total	242	14.00	140.00	83.0248	34.41761
No	Yes	Yes	Mobility	9	19.00	50.00	37.4444	10.73675
			Employ.	9	12.00	40.00	28.1111	11.03907
			Intercult.	9	25.00	50.00	41.5556	8.83333
			Total	9	56.00	140.00	107.1111	28.68991
		No	Mobility	39	5.00	50.00	32.6410	13.56367
			Employ.	39	4.00	39.00	23.2564	11.62058
			Intercult.	39	5.00	50.00	35.5641	13.13852
			Total	39	14.00	135.00	91.4615	36.25483
	No	Yes	Mobility	54	5.00	50.00	33.3333	13.08463
			Employ.	54	4.00	40.00	24.3519	10.15197
			Intercult.	54	10.00	50.00	36.1852	10.80020
			Total	54	36.00	140.00	93.8704	30.24120
		No	Mobility	156	5.00	50.00	28.4295	14.89192
			Employ.	156	4.00	40.00	18.5641	11.41147
			Intercult.	156	5.00	50.00	31.1218	14.36184
			Total	156	14.00	140.00	78.1154	36.21459

Table 5 shows the mean ranks and sum of ranks after the cross-tabulation of the three variables, which are necessary to calculate non-parametric Mann Whitney and Wilcoxon tests.

Table 5: Ranks

Employed	Experience working abroad		Participation in bilingual or multilingual education	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Yes	Yes	Mobility	Yes	32	98.34	3147.00
			No	162	97.33	15768.00
			Total	194		
		Employability	Yes	32	96.48	3087.50
			No	162	97.70	15827.50
			Total	194		
		Intercultural	Yes	32	101.16	3237.00
			No	162	96.78	15678.00
			Total	194		
		Total	Yes	32	97.33	3114.50
			No	162	97.53	15800.50

	No	Mobility	Total	194				
			Yes	47	150.88	7091.50		
			No	242	143.86	34813.50		
		Employability	Total	289				
			Yes	47	169.83	7982.00		
			No	242	140.18	33923.00		
		Intercultural	Total	289				
			Yes	47	164.72	7742.00		
			No	242	141.17	34163.00		
		Total	Total	289				
			Yes	47	162.43	7634.00		
			No	242	141.62	34271.00		
		No	Yes	Mobility	Yes	9	27.83	250.50
					No	39	23.73	925.50
					Total	48		
Employability	Yes			9	30.44	274.00		
	No			39	23.13	902.00		
	Total			48				
Intercultural	Yes			9	29.72	267.50		
	No			39	23.29	908.50		
	Total			48				
Total	Yes			9	29.50	265.50		
	No			39	23.35	910.50		
	Total			48				
No	No			Mobility	Yes	54	120.21	6491.50
					No	156	100.41	15663.50
					Total	210		
		Employability	Yes	54	127.88	6905.50		
			No	156	97.75	15249.50		
			Total	210				
		Intercultural	Yes	54	119.34	6444.50		
			No	156	100.71	15710.50		
			Total	210				
		Total	Yes	54	124.84	6741.50		
			No	156	98.80	15413.50		
			Total	210				

Finally, Table 6 presents results of Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon W tests applied to the cross-tabulations considered in order to discover statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants of bilingual education programs.

Table 6: Significant Differences According to Participation in Bilingual/Multilingual Education

Employed	Experience working abroad	Mobility	Employ.	Intercult.	Linguistic success	
Yes	Yes	Mann-Whitney U	2565.000	2559.500	2475.000	2586.500
		Wilcoxon W	15768.000	3087.500	15678.000	3114.500
		Z	-.093	-.112	-.406	-.019
		Sig.	.926	.911	.685	.985
	No	Mann-Whitney U	5410.500	4520.000	4760.000	4868.000
		Wilcoxon W	34813.500	33923.000	34163.000	34271.000
		Z	-.528	-2.228	-1.770	-1.562
		Sig.	.598	.026*	.077	.118
No	Yes	Mann-Whitney U	145.500	122.000	128.500	130.500
		Wilcoxon W	925.500	902.000	908.500	910.500
		Z	-.793	-1.416	-1.245	-1.189
		Sig.	.428	.157	.213	.234
	Sig. (one-sided)	.435	.164	.219	.239	
	No	Mann-Whitney U	3417.500	3003.500	3464.500	3167.500
		Wilcoxon W	15663.500	15249.500	15710.500	15413.500
		Z	-2.066	-3.148	-1.945	-2.714
Sig.		.039*	.002*	.052	.007*	

Note. Significant differences (sig. < 0.05) marked with (*) and in bold.

When considering participants in bilingual/multilingual education, statistically significant differences are found in mobility, employability, and global linguistic success in favour of graduates who are not employed and have not worked abroad. Likewise, significant discrepancies are appreciated in employability in favour of employed graduates who have not worked in another country.

Discussion

The number of subjects that have participated in the study (n = 741) has allowed the identification of how graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs perceive their international mobility, employability, intercultural competence, and global linguistic success in comparison to their non-bilingual/multilingual counterparts. Moreover, the results of the study have shown that, unlike individuals' experiences working abroad, being employed may be a determinant factor in bilingual education graduates' self-perceived employability.

When examining participants' responses regarding their employability, different perceptions can be found depending on whether subjects have been enrolled in a bilingual/multilingual program or monolingual education (see Tables 2 and 3). Graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs are more positive regarding how their bilingualism/languages have favoured their employability and how this can improve their salary; likewise, they claim using the languages they speak more than graduates from monolingual education when communicating with their colleagues, and believing that their bilingualism/languages have a positive impact on the development of their job (although differences are not statistically significant in this respect; cf. Table 2 and Table 3). These findings are in line with previous studies (e.g., Callahan & Gándara, 2014; Porras, Ee, & Gándara, 2014) that show employers' opinions about the potential of bilingual and multilingual education for the improvement of their businesses and the service they offer to their customers, who, as a result, are willing to pay more to employees who speak more than one language. This also links with research on students' perceived advantages of bilingual/multilingual programs in different contexts (e.g., Yang, 2017), which reveals that enhanced employability is one of the key benefits of participating in bilingual/multilingual programs seen by learners. Although the results of these studies are not focused on Spain, they may help understand bilingual/multilingual education graduates' high self-perceived employability skills.

Data analysis has also shown that bilingual/multilingual graduates who are currently working but have not worked abroad have higher self-perceived employability skills than those who followed monolingual studies (see Table 6). This reveals that the idea of enhanced employability thanks to participation in bilingual or multilingual education seen among university undergraduates (Bozdoğan & Karlıdağ, 2013; Yang, 2017) prevails among employed graduates, who consider their educational background has helped them to find work. Likewise, graduates who have studied in a bilingual/multilingual program but are not employed and have not worked abroad have better perceptions of their mobility and employability competences as well as their global linguistic success than their counterparts, which may also suggest the prevalence of the idea of how beneficial bilingual and multilingual education is in terms of international orientation and job prospects (Goris, Denessen, & Verhoeven, 2019; Yang, 2017).

Moreover, research has shown that students of bilingual and multilingual education consider their participation in this educational option may be an advantage for them to study and work in another country (e.g., Bozdoğan & Karlıdağ, 2013). The results of the present study, however, indicate that having worked in a different country does not seem to impact participants' self-perceived linguistic success or employability. Similarly, studies in the field of intercultural learning have extensively analysed its essential role in bilingual and multilingual education, and especially in CLIL, and how these approaches can help enhance students' intercultural awareness (Gómez-Parra, 2020; Yang, 2019). Nevertheless, this study has not found any hints of improved intercultural awareness when considering the combination of participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education programs, being employed, and having worked abroad.

Conclusions

This paper has reported on the effect of participation in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education programs, being currently employed, and having worked abroad on bilingual/multilingual education graduates' self-perceived employability, mobility, intercultural awareness, and global linguistic success. Findings show that having participated in bilingual/multilingual education and being employed are determining factors in graduates' self-perceived employability skills, while work abroad, seems not to have impacted their perceptions of their linguistic success, employability, mobility, or intercultural awareness. Notwithstanding how employment and work-abroad experiences affect bilingual education graduates' perceptions, participation in bilingual and multilingual programs certainly results in more positive views of linguistic success among alumni.

In relation to RQ1 (*Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education programs, who are currently employed and have worked abroad, have positive perceptions of their linguistic success?*), results have shown that when considering a combination of these three variables, no effect on bilingual graduates' perceptions of linguistic success, employability, mobility or intercultural competence is found; however, when graduates have studied in a bilingual/multilingual program but are not employed and have not worked abroad, they value their international mobility, employability skills and global linguistic success more positively than graduates from Spanish monolingual education. As for RQ2 (*Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, who are currently employed, consider themselves more linguistically successful than those who did not participate in these programs?*), the study has proved that bilingual/multilingual graduates currently working have higher self-perceived employability only if they have not worked in a foreign country; conversely, the other two dimensions and global linguistic success are not affected when these two variables are combined. Finally, regarding RQ3 (*Do graduates from Spanish bilingual/multilingual education, who have worked abroad, consider themselves more linguistically successful than those who did not participate in these programs?*), findings have revealed that experiences working abroad do not affect how Spanish bilingual graduates view their linguistic success.

This study and its results should be interpreted considering some limitations. First, deeper analysis is still necessary to determine the relationship between the three established dimensions, participation in bilingual/multilingual education programs, employment, work abroad, and self-perceived linguistic success. Second, the sample could be expanded to allow generalising the results, comparing the perceptions of bilingual/multilingual graduates from different countries and contexts, and drawing more conclusions. Third, these findings may show bias since they are based on self-reported quantitative information (Althubaiti, 2016; Devaux & Sassi, 2016); in this sense, other instruments and a mixed-method approach could be used in future studies in order to gather more data. Notwithstanding these constraints, it is worth mentioning that the BESOC team is in the process of studying the correlation between these variables in different contexts, which will allow obtaining more data regarding the real effects of bilingual and multilingual education on graduates.

Nevertheless, the implications of the study for educational policy are clear. The findings regarding the role of employment, work-abroad experiences and participation in bilingual/multilingual education should be seen as a motivation to promote this type of teaching and more specifically the CLIL approach. Nonetheless, a revision of how this type of education is planned and implemented at all educational levels cannot be overlooked. In this sense, the place that international mobility, employability, and intercultural awareness occupy in Spanish bilingual/multilingual education must be revisited so that graduates are fully prepared. Furthermore, these results suggest the perceived potential of Spanish bilingual/multilingual programs according to graduates, and they should be seen as an encouragement to continue examining how bilingual and multilingual education can be best implemented so as to help improve the professional competences of 21st-century citizens.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Section 1: Personal and general information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Age– Gender– Languages you speak– Country/countries where you went to school– Country where you live now– Other countries you have lived in– Which language/s did you learn at school?– In a bilingual programme?– If yes, for how long?– Are you employed?– How much do you use your second language as written?– How much do you use your second language as oral?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages help/s you learn more languages?
Section 2: Mobility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Have you ever worked abroad?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages favour/s your mobility abroad?– How much do you use your second language/s abroad when you travel for pleasure?– Do you feel more international due to your second language?– How much do you think your second language makes you more willing to travel abroad?– How much does your second language influence your destination when travelling abroad?– Have you ever followed a training course abroad?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages make/s you willing to follow training courses abroad?
Section 3: Employability
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages has/have favoured your employability?– How much do you think your second language has impacted the development of your job?– How much do/would you use your second language to communicate with your colleagues at work?– How difficult do/would you find to communicate in your second language with your colleagues?– How much do/would you use your second language abroad when you travel for work?– E6. How much do you think your bilingualism/languages can improve your salary?
Section 4: Intercultural competence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages make/s you a citizen of the world?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages favour/s your understanding and acceptance of others?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages favour/s your adaptation to other cultures abroad?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages make/s you willing to live in a foreign country?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages has/have impacted the way you are?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages has/have impacted the way you live?– How much do you think your bilingualism/languages make/s you evolve as an intercultural individual?

- How much do you think your bilingualism/languages make/s you competent in different cultural contexts?
- How much do you consider that being bilingual/plurilingual helped you understand/feel empathy with foreign citizens?
- How much do you think your bilingualism/languages help/s you have access to and enjoy a wider spectrum of cultural products (e.g., books, films, TV series, music, videos, video games, etc.)?

Note. Source: Gómez-Parra et al., 2021