

## ANALYSIS OF TEACHING METHODS FOR EIGHTH GRADERS: FULL LANGUAGE IMMERSION-BASED INSTRUCTION VS. BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION

**Análisis de Métodos de Enseñanza para Estudiantes de Octavo Grado: Instrucción basada en el Full Immersion vs. Instrucción Bilingüe**

**Análise de Métodos de Ensino para Estudantes da Oitava Série: Instrução Baseada em Full Immersion vs. Instrução Bilingüe**

Ing. Christopher Ricardo Valle Miranda \*, <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4654-5088>

Dr. C. Miguel Macías Loor, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5958-354>

Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, Ecuador

\*Autor para correspondencia. email [christopher.vallemiranda5602@upse.edu.ec](mailto:christopher.vallemiranda5602@upse.edu.ec)

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### ABSTRACT

Introduction: Effective language teaching requires appropriate methods and adaptations to achieve positive student learning outcomes. In this context, in Maximiliano Spiller School, students exhibit poor English proficiency levels, leading to an analysis of teaching approaches to address these issues better. Objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of the Direct Method (DM) and the Transitional Bilingual Method (TBM) in enhancing students' speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills, determining which method is more suitable for their current proficiency levels. Materials and Methods: A quasi-experimental design was applied to 70 eighth-grade students, divided into two groups: Group A, instructed using the TBM, and Group B, using the DM. Both groups took an initial pre-test to measure their baseline competence, followed by a post-test after four weeks of instruction to assess their progress. Additionally, student surveys on motivation, participation, and confidence were conducted, complemented by teacher observations, to evaluate the experience with each method. Results: showed that Group A significantly improved in all evaluated skills compared to Group B. In speaking, Group A enhanced by 37.2%, while Group B achieved only 20.0%. Group A advanced by 22.8% in writing, compared to Group B by 12.1%. Reading scores improved by 27.2% in Group A, while Group B showed a 17.1% improvement. Lastly, Group A enhanced by 21.4% in listening, whereas Group B achieved 18.6%. Discussion: The TBM allowed students to clarify doubts and connect their English learning with their native language, facilitating better comprehension and engagement. In contrast, the DM, while helpful for developing listening skills, was less effective for lower-proficiency students, often overwhelming them. Conclusion: the TBM proved more effective for beginner-level students, providing a supportive transition to the DM once foundational language skills are strengthened, ensuring smoother progression.

**Keywords:** Transitional Bilingual Method, Direct Method, English Teaching, English Proficiency.

### RESUMEN

Introducción: Una efectiva enseñanza de idiomas requiere métodos adecuados para garantizar el éxito en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes. En este contexto, en la Escuela Maximiliano Spiller, los estudiantes muestran niveles insatisfactorios de competencia en inglés, lo que lleva al análisis de los métodos de enseñanza para mejorar esta situación. Objetivo: Analizar la efectividad del Método Directo (MD) y el Método Bilingüe Transicional (MBT) en la mejora de las habilidades de speaking, writing, reading y listening, con el objetivo de determinar cuál es más adecuado según el nivel de competencia de los estudiantes. Materiales y Métodos: Se aplicó un diseño cuasi-experimental a 70 estudiantes de octavo grado, divididos en dos grupos: el Grupo A, instruido con el MBT, y el Grupo B, con el MD. Ambos grupos realizaron un pre-test inicial para medir su competencia referencial y un post-test después de cuatro semanas de instrucción para evaluar su progreso. Además, se utilizaron encuestas sobre motivación, participación y confianza, complementadas con

observaciones del docente. Resultados: mostraron que el Grupo A mejoró significativamente en todas las habilidades evaluadas. En speaking, el Grupo A mejoró un 37.2%, mientras que el Grupo B solo alcanzó un 20.0%. En writing, el Grupo A avanzó un 22.8%, frente al 12.1% del Grupo B. En reading, el Grupo A mejoró un 27.2%, mientras que el Grupo B un 17.1%. Finalmente, en listening, el Grupo A alcanzó un 21.4% de mejora, frente al 18.6% del Grupo B. Discusión: El MBT permitió a los estudiantes aclarar dudas y conectar el aprendizaje del inglés con su lengua nativa, facilitando una mayor comprensión. Conclusión: el MD fue menos eficaz para estudiantes de nivel principiante, lo que sugiere que el MBT es más adecuado para una transición hacia el MD una vez que se hayan fortalecido las habilidades básicas.

**Palabras clave:** Transitional Bilingual Method, Direct Method, Enseñanza de inglés, Competencia en inglés.

## RESUMO

Introdução: O ensino eficaz de idiomas requer métodos e adaptações apropriadas para garantir resultados positivos no aprendizado dos alunos. Nesse contexto, na Escola Maximiliano Spiller, os estudantes apresentam níveis insatisfatórios de proficiência em inglês, o que leva a uma análise das abordagens de ensino para melhorar essa situação. Objetivo: Avaliar a eficácia do Método Direto (MD) e do Método Bilingue Transicional (MBT) na melhoria das habilidades de speaking, writing, reading e listening, determinando qual método é mais adequado aos níveis de proficiência atuais dos estudantes. Materiais e Métodos: Foi aplicado um design quase-experimental a 70 alunos do oitavo ano, divididos em dois grupos: Grupo A, instruído com o MBT, e Grupo B, com o MD. Ambos os grupos realizaram um pré-teste inicial para medir sua competência basal, seguido de um pós-teste após quatro semanas de instrução para avaliar seu progresso. Além disso, foram realizadas pesquisas de motivação, participação e confiança, complementadas por observações dos professores para avaliar a experiência com cada método. Resultados: mostraram que o Grupo A melhorou significativamente em todas as habilidades avaliadas em comparação com o Grupo B. No speaking, o Grupo A melhorou 37.2%, enquanto o Grupo B alcançou apenas 20.0%. O Grupo A avançou 22.8% no writing, em comparação com 12.1% do Grupo B. As notas de reading melhoraram 27.2% no Grupo A, enquanto o Grupo B mostrou uma melhoria de 17.1%. Finalmente, o Grupo A melhorou 21.4% no listening, enquanto o Grupo B atingiu 18.6%. Discussão: O MBT permitiu aos alunos esclarecer dúvidas e conectar seu aprendizado do inglês à sua língua nativa, facilitando uma melhor compreensão e engajamento. Conclusão: O MBT provou ser mais eficaz para alunos iniciantes, proporcionando uma transição mais suave para o MD uma vez que as habilidades básicas de linguagem sejam fortalecidas, garantindo um progresso mais fluido.

**Palavras-chave:** Método Bilingue Transicional, Método Direto, Ensino de Inglês, Proficiência em Inglês.

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## INTRODUCTION

English is the most commonly used language in scientific research, global business, and technology. As stated by Rao (2019), intercultural communication also relies on this language. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2023), Ecuador is positioned 80th out of 111 countries evaluated, showing poor levels of English proficiency. Meanwhile, nations such as Sweden, The Netherlands, and Denmark are among the best in this rank. These countries also tend to have more advanced economies and better access to global opportunities.

The Language Curriculum of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2016) indicates that students in Ecuador must have a B1 or intermediate level in English to graduate. Citing Sevy-Biloon et al. (2020), achieving this objective depends on effective methods, the hours designated for English classes, class size, and resources employed in class. However, Muñoz et al. (2018) mentioned that despite the efforts made by the government and teachers, Ecuador continues to have problems teaching English and getting the expected outcomes.

The Maximiliano Spiller School in Tena, Napo, clearly reflects this situation. Over the past five years, students' assessments have consistently shown poor progress in the different English language skills. These outcomes come from formative and summative evaluations throughout the school year, with notably low grades in daily tasks, especially in the trimester exams, which measure proficiency in given topics across the English skills. Most students struggle significantly with speaking and listening and have a limited understanding of grammar and writing development. These results indicate that current methods are not effectively working in English classes, among other factors.

This study seeks to explore and find the more effective English teaching method to improve student performance at Maximiliano Spiller School. The first method explored is the Direct Method (DM), which promotes learning through complete immersion without using the student's native language (Albukbak & Msimeer, 2021). On the other hand, this research explores the Transitional Bilingual Method (TBM), which partially uses the student's native language at the same time as the English language to establish a strong comprehension of linguistic structures, sounds, and expressions (Polanco & Luft de Baker, 2018).

## **Direct Method**

As Albukbak and Msimeer (2021) say, the Direct Method in language teaching focuses on using the language all the time during class. For Walker and Tedick (2000), full immersion pretends to emulate the natural language acquisition process by encouraging the practical use of English during class; it is like being in the deep end to learn how to swim.

Porter and Castillo (2023) consider that the best way to learn a language quickly is to immerse completely in it. Speaking and listening in the target language makes it easier for students to improve their communication skills. Also, Cheng (2012) affirms that this way of learning helps students to rely less on their teacher and more on themselves, making them more independent learners. Ó Ceallaigh et al. (2021) demonstrate that DM helps students improve their grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In addition, Kersten and Rohde (2015) demonstrated that immersion facilitates second language acquisition in primary school using comprehensive programs such as scaffolding, contextualization, and multisensory learning.

Despite this, Cheng (2012) mentions that a low percentage of teachers are trained in all aspects of teaching to manage a fully immersive class, which is a considerable challenge for the DM. In the same way, Walker and Tedick (2000) studied the complexity of immersion education using the information from immersion schools; this research indicated that the effectiveness of the method depends on the sociopolitical and geographic context, the programs in the curriculum, the spectrums of students and the profile of the school.

## **Transitional Bilingual Method**

Conversely, educators who employ the TBM, like Konflikte (2005), find it an appropriate way to start learning a new language. The TBM principle is that gradually transitioning from the mother tongue to the target language is crucial to help reduce students' cognitive load and enhance their overall comprehension and retention of skills (Clark et al., 2020). Polanco and Luft de Baker (2018) affirm that it is highly beneficial to integrate a portion of Spanish during English language learning. Blending both languages allows students to ask about concepts they do not clearly understand and even creates a correlation with their native language (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021).

Tsang and Lo (2020) promoted a bilingual program to teach English while improving students learning behavior, self-efficacy, and confidence. As a result, the students in this program qualified the course as comfortable, efficient, and innovative. In addition, the study of Eljishi et al. (2022) about the effectiveness of teaching methods showed that bilingual instruction classes had higher participation and engagement than monolingual instruction classes.

Based on the investigation of Bretuo (2021), the main challenges in implementing TBM include limited cognitive development in the native language, insufficient educational resources in the mother tongue, and diverse linguistically developed skills in the classroom. In the same way, Scherzinger and Brahm (2023) mentioned that teachers need well-developed competencies in bilingual instruction, including skills, pedagogical, and professional knowledge.

These two perspectives are considered in this work as they are present in the debate among educators at Maximiliano Spiller School about which works best for their eighth-grade students. Therefore, it highlights the necessity for additional analysis to determine which approach may be more effective for helping students improve their English by creating appropriate teaching practices according to their level. This paper seeks to compare the effectiveness of DM and TBM in teaching English.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Approach**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to get a comprehensive understanding of the research question. For Firdaus et al. (2021), quantitative research uses deductive reasoning, where pre-established theories and hypotheses are tested on collected data. In this investigation, student performance was measured through a pre-test and a post-test, which provided objective data on improvement in English skills. Similarly, Firdaus et al. (2021) highlight that qualitative research prioritizes inductive reasoning, where insights are drawn from patterns and themes based on the data collected. This study used teacher observations and surveys to analyze student behavior, motivation, and classroom engagement. Combining both methods allowed a more thorough analysis, ensuring that qualitative insights into the learning process and student experience support the quantitative data.

## **Type of Research**

The methodology was based on explanatory and comparative research. According to Makri and Neely (2021), the explanatory type is an excellent way to investigate why something is happening by establishing cause-effect relationships. This study is also explanatory since it seeks to understand how each teaching method impacted students' learning and attitude. As stated by Esser and Vliegthart (2017), this is a comparative study since it contrasts different research objects, explaining their similarities and differences. This study evaluated the differences between the two pedagogical approaches on their effectiveness in achieving learning outcomes. Based on this comparison, the intention was to establish practical recommendations for improving English language teaching in similar contexts.

## **Research Design**

The study used a quasi-experimental design. Maciejewski (2020) defines it as a study in which one of several groups is intentionally selected. This research selected two groups that are the same classes organized within the school and chosen for ease of data collection. This decision was made because the researcher teaches these classes and has direct access to all the necessary information.

## **Instruments**

This investigation aimed to measure the students' learning, skills, motivation, participation, and interest through carefully designed data collection instruments. Each tool was meticulously created and aligned with Ecuadorian education standards to meet the goals of the investigation. The pre-test was designed to assess the students' initial knowledge of key English language topics such as personal pronouns, the verb "to be," possessive adjectives, and the present tense. It covered all four fundamental skills: writing (grammar), reading, speaking, and listening. The researcher designed the questions based on the English Language Curriculum of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2016) and adapted them to the cognitive and linguistic level of eighth-grade students.

The pre-test creation began with a first draft of the questionnaire. It passed validation by a panel of four experts, including two English teacher colleagues, the English area coordinator, and the school vice-principal. Expert validation was carried out based on the research instruments validation guide proposed by the Adventist University of Chile (2018). Each reviewer checked the test for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study object. Based on their feedback, the test was adjusted to ensure it accurately measured the desired skills. According to Sharma (2022), this kind of tests provides reliable data due to its structured nature, allowing researchers to collect data quickly and effectively.

In order to assess the students' progress in the specified topics and skills after the intervention for both groups, a post-test was applied. This post-test mirrored the pre-test with respect to structure and content, but it included questions of increased difficulty to reflect the expected knowledge acquisition over a four-week period. Like the pre-test, the post-test underwent the same validation process by the panel of experts to guarantee its reliability and validity in measuring student improvement. For both the pre-test and the post-test, the speaking section incorporated a rubric to guide the teacher in assessing pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, organization, and coherence.

After the intervention, the students completed a survey to show their motivation, participation, engagement, and interest inside the classroom with both methods. The survey used a Likert scale to capture the students' self-reported levels of engagement with each teaching method. Additionally, the teacher used a structured observation guide throughout the intervention to observe and record classroom behaviors in real time to correlate them with the students' self-reports. These instruments were also the subject of a rigorous validation by the experts panel who supported on the research instruments validation guide proposed by the Adventist University of Chile (2018).

As noted by Sharma (2022), these observation tools allow for the direct collection of data in a natural setting, offering rich insights into students' classroom behaviors and interactions. These observations were vital for correlating student performance with the observed levels of engagement and motivation.

## **Population**

The population in a research study refers to the complete set of individuals or events with the same characteristics and similar behaviors of interest (Berndt, 2020). The population of this study consisted of four eighth-grade classes in Maximiliano Spiller School, each one with 35 students, totaling 140 students. These students were distributed homogeneously across the classes at the beginning of the current school

year based on their academic and behavioral performance from the previous year, including final grades and teachers' reports. This uniform distribution provided an ideal setting for evaluating the effects of the Direct and Transitional Bilingual Methods on student learning and attitude.

### Sample

This investigation employed a non-probabilistic and non-aleatory sample. As stated by Berndt (2020), this approach involves choosing a sample based on researcher's judgment rather than random selection. This study included a total of 70 students, divided into two classes: Eighth grade A with 35 students and Eighth grade B with 35 students. The researcher's position as the English instructor for these two classes made it easy to choose this sample, as they were perfect for the experimental study.

### Study Process

This study followed a structured process divided into some phases. First, both groups were evaluated with the pre-test to measure their initial knowledge and skills. This pre-test provided initial data for each student, which was essential for measuring their progress at the end of the experiment. After the pre-test, the intervention phase began. Group A was taught using TBM, where instruction was delivered in English and Spanish, while Group B was instructed using DM, with total immersion in the English language. The intervention lasted four weeks, with each group receiving three hours of instruction over three days per week. During these sessions, students were exposed to the same content, but the teaching approach varied according to the assigned method for each group. In addition, data on motivation, participation, and student interest were collected through the student survey and the teacher observation guide. These tools provided valuable insights into how each teaching method influenced student engagement and confidence in the classroom.

Finally, the data collected from all the instruments was carefully organized and analyzed. Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to determine if there were any significant differences in language acquisition between the two groups. Qualitative data from the surveys and teacher observations were analyzed using coding and thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns in student motivation, participation, and overall engagement with the learning process. These combined data provided a comprehensive understanding of each teaching method's impact on student learning and classroom dynamics.

## RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, Group A, instructed using TBM, significantly improved all the evaluated language skills. The greatest progress was observed in speaking with a 37.2% increase. This improvement was favored by using Spanish as a support tool during the instruction, allowing students to express themselves more confidently in English by forming clearer connections between the two languages. Spanish provided a scaffold for clarifying difficult concepts, facilitating smoother communication in the second language.

Table 1 Pre-test and Post-test Results from Group A

Skill	Pre-Test	Post- Test	Improvement (%)
Writing	39.3%	62.1%	+22.8%
Reading	25.7%	52.9%	+27.2%
Speaking	17.1%	54.3%	+37.2%
Listening	34.3%	55.7%	+21.4%

Source: Own elaboration

Reading also showed a big progress, with a 27.2 % of improvement, suggesting that clarifications in Spanish facilitated students' comprehension of English texts. Writing improved by 22.8%, reflecting the benefit of Spanish in helping students grasp grammatical structures. Listening showed a 21.4 % increase, though this skill remained more challenging even with native language support.

Group B, which was taught using DM, also improved all the skills, but not in the same extent than Group A. Writing improved by 12.1%, indicating that fully immersing students in the target language was beneficial, it was less effective in enhancing grammatical skills than the Bilingual Method. The reading skill showed a 17.1% of improvement, suggesting that although students could improve their reading comprehension, the lack of native language support may have hindered the understanding of more complex texts.



Table 2 Pre-Test and Post-Test Results from Group B

Skill	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Improvement (%)
Writing	40.0%	52.1%	+12.1%
Reading	30.0%	47.1%	+17.1%
Speaking	21.4%	41.4%	+20.0%
Listening	35.7%	54.3%	+18.6%

Source: Own elaboration

Although speaking improved by 20.0%, students in Group B faced more difficulties expressing themselves in English without the chance of using Spanish as a reference. Listening improved by 18.6%, reflecting the benefits of continuous exposure to the English language in developing auditory comprehension, but the overall progress remained slightly lower than Group A.

The average improvement rate for each method is summarized in Table 3. Group A, showed a higher improvement rate (+2.63 points) compared to Group B (+1.60 points). This suggests that using Spanish as a support tool in teaching English to eighth-grade students facilitated more solid learning, helping them to reach a better understanding and apply grammatical structures which allows them to advance faster in their language skills.

Table 3 Improvement Rate by Method

Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Improvement Rate
Group A (TBM)	3.11	5.74	+2.63
Group B (DM)	3.34	4.94	+1.60

Source: Own elaboration

Additionally, the survey conducted among students and teacher in both groups, provided valuable insights about student motivation, participation, and confidence. In Table 4 are the results which contrast the perspectives of students and the teacher.

Table 4 Survey and observation results

Questions	TBM Group A		DM Group B	
	Students	Teacher	Students	Teacher
Q1: Active Participation	3.8	4.0	2.7	3.0
Q2: Contribution Frequency	3.7	5.0	2.7	2.0
Q3: Interest and Motivation	4.0	4.0	2.9	3.0
Q4: Focus and Attention	4.1	4.0	2.7	3.0
Q5: Confidence in Participation	4.3	5.0	2.5	2.0

Source: Own elaboration

Students who were taught using the TBM demonstrated significantly higher levels of active participation, contribution frequency, interest and motivation, focus and attention, and confidence in participation than students in the DM group. These results show a significant consistency between student responses and teacher observations, reinforcing that the Bilingual Method fosters greater active and frequent participation.

## DISCUSSION

The results demonstrated that the TBM method improved all four language skills more effectively. This success supports the findings of Cheng (2023); Montle (2022), who highlight the importance of providing native language support when learning a second language to enhance proficiency, particularly in contexts where English is not the dominant language, especially at the early stages. The notable progress in Group A confirms the effectiveness of using Spanish as a scaffold. This approach helped students feel more confident, be more engaged, and make more precise linguistic connections with what they already know in their native language, therefore building a strong foundation for the new language.

The results are also consistent with the findings of Rämä-Ory (2023), which suggest that using the native language as support during second language instruction helps retain the new language by reducing cognitive load and allowing for a deeper understanding of complex grammatical structures and stronger language skills. Speaking progress was particularly relevant; it shows that students gained confidence by expressing their ideas in English with the support of Spanish. This is consistent with the investigation of Cheng (2023), who suggested that bilingual instruction enhances

verbal fluency by switching between languages, thus enhancing cognitive flexibility.

In contrast, the DM enhanced all language skills, but it was not as effective as the TBM, especially in skills such as writing and reading, where native language support is often necessary to fully understand complex grammatical structures. However, the DM showed similar results for listening, likely due to the constant exposure to English, which helps with auditory comprehension. Similar to Cheng (2023), these results suggest that total immersion in the target language seems to be more suitable for students with a higher initial level of English proficiency, as they may not need the same support as beginners. This implies, as noted by Walker and Tedick (2000), that teachers should progressively introduce this method as students become more proficient in the language.

The surveys and teacher observations further reinforce that the TBM fosters language acquisition, promoting a more motivating and engaging student environment. Students in Group A consistently showed higher levels of confidence, participation, and interest compared to Group B. Giving students the option to clarify doubts and ask questions in their native language made students in Group A feel more engaged and comfortable, increasing their frequency of contribution and active participation. This aligns with the findings of Swain and Lapkin (2000), which highlight the benefits of bilingual education in reducing anxiety and boosting students' confidence in foreign language classes.

On the other hand, the DM appeared to overwhelm most of the students, particularly those with the lowest proficiency, leading to lower levels of participation and contribution frequency. Yildiz and Celik (2020) mentioned that an initial total immersion can be overwhelming for students who need more linguistic support, so they are likely to avoid speaking in English due to the fear of making mistakes or not fully understanding the instructions. This is also supported by Hardacre and Güvendir (2020); Rämä-Ory (2023) who mentioned that when students experience significant frustration, they may feel uncomfortable, struggle to acquire knowledge, and follow instructions, hindering their ability to engage with the material effectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

The TBM proved to be more effective for beginner students, significantly improving their English proficiency, especially in speaking and comprehension. Using their native language as a bridge facilitated a smoother transition to the target language, resulting in superior language acquisition success rates. While DM improved language skills, it was less beneficial for Eighth-grade Students. The immersion approach overwhelmed those with low proficiency, resulting in reduced engagement. It seems to be more effective for students with advanced English knowledge. Students in the TBM group also exhibited notably higher participation, motivation, and confidence. The possibility of clarifying doubts in their native language and relating new content to familiar linguistic structures significantly enhanced their engagement.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **Authorship Disclaimer**

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