

Perspectives from a Korean-English Two-way Immersion Program: Insights, Tensions, and Hope

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ABSTRACT

The potential for successful language development outcomes in Two-Way Immersion (TWI) programs has sparked great interest among educators, researchers, and policy makers. However, to date most empirical research in TWI settings has focused on Spanish-English programs. Given the documented cognitive, social, and economic benefits of heritage language maintenance and bilingualism (Lee & Suarez, 2009), this paper examines the experiences of Korean-American students and their parents and teachers in a Korean-English TWI program that offers an instructional venue for the development of both English and the heritage language. Many of the insights they shared about the benefits and challenges of their experiences participating in a TWI program were common to the parents, children, and teachers, while others were unique to each of the three groups given their different roles in the school. The differences in perspectives suggest that future research needs to account for the multiple perspectives in the experiences of the participants to gain a fuller understanding of the linguistic and academic outcomes of TWI programs.

Keywords: Two-way immersion (TWI) programs, Korean and English, perspectives

I. Introduction

Research has shown that Two-Way Immersion (TWI) programs are effective in helping students develop proficiency in two languages (Baker, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (2012), there are currently 415 TWI programs in the United States, 387 of which are Spanish-English programs. To date, most research on TWI programs has focused on Spanish-English programs (DePalma, 2010; Dorner, 2010; De Jong & Howard, 2009; Howard et al., 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Parkes & Ruth, 2011; Potowski, 2002; Whiting & Feinauer, 2011). Given the unique characteristics of different linguistic and cultural groups, there is still much to be understood about the educational experiences of students, parents, and teachers in TWI programs, especially in programs based on the less commonly taught languages such as Korean.

There are only six Korean-English TWI programs in the nation (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2012), despite the fact that over one million Koreans reside in the United States, making them the fifth-largest Asian immigrant group (US Census Bureau, 2012). This study presents an examination of the experiences of Korean-American children, their parents, and teachers in a newly instituted Korean-English TWI program. The data present the insights and tensions experienced by the main stakeholders—the teachers, parents, and children—of the program, and based on their experiences, implications for improved practices and policies are derived.

II. Theoretical Underpinnings in TWI Models

TWI is defined as an “educational approach that integrates language minority and language majority students for all or most of the day, and provides content instruction and literacy instruction to all students in both languages” (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003, p. 14). Three defining criteria of TWI programs clearly point to their emphasis on the presence and integration of these two groups of students. First, the programs must include both native speakers of a language other than English and native English speakers, with at least one third or two thirds of the student population coming from each group. Second, both groups of students must be integrated for content and literacy instruction for all or most of the day. Finally, content and literacy instruction in both languages must be provided to all students (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2012).

III. Methods

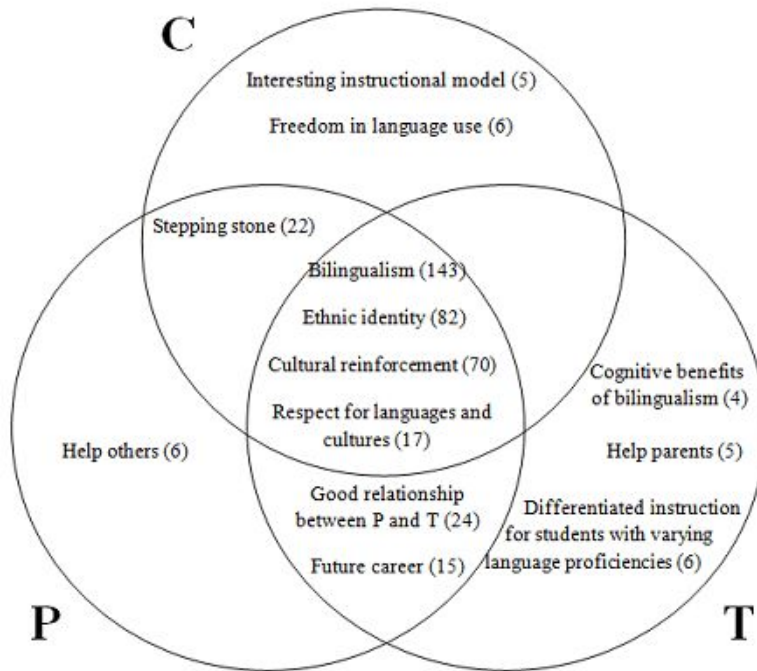
[TABLE 1] Research Site, Participants, Data Collection and Analysis

Research Site	Participants	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A newly established 50/50 Korean-English TWI program in southern California • Second year of operation at the time of the study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Among 26 first graders, 6 Korean-American students and their families: 3 boys K8, K9, K10 3 girls K11, K12, K13 • 2 bilingual teachers who are 1.5 generation Korean-Americans: Mrs. Park, Korean teacher Miss Kim, English Teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video-recorded observations of the school (8 visits) and home settings (5 visits per family) • Audio or video-recorded Interviews: each parent: 4 interviews each child: 3 interviews each teacher: 2 interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transana program: 307 interview excerpts with keywords • Domain Analysis

IV. Findings

1. Insights: Perceived benefits of the TWI program

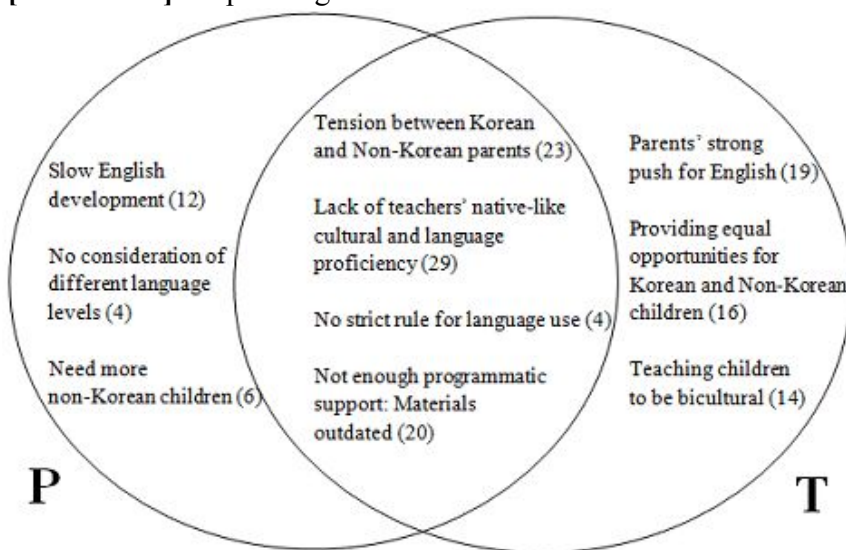
[FIGURE 1] Graphic organization of the perceived benefits of the TWI program



*C refers to children, P refers to parents, and T refers to teachers.

2. Insights: The concerns of parents and teachers

[FIGURE 2] Graphic organization of the themes associated with the perceived concerns



V. Conclusion and Future Directions

In this study, we examined the perceived experiences of the Korean parents, children, and teachers in one Korean-English TWI program. The participants' responses revealed that the unique characteristics of the dual language immersion program brought forth tensions in terms of the languages (English vs. Korean language development), academic expectations (bilingual vs. English-only education), parental involvement (Korean vs. non-Korean parents), and instruction (needs of Korean vs. non-Korean students).

Based on the findings, it was clear that parents did not fully understand how bilingual competence is developed and the process of bilingual language development. Due to concerns that English tended to develop at a slower pace for students in TWI programs than for students in English-only programs and that the learning of Korean may have a negative effect on children's English development, teachers commented that it had been very difficult to recruit Korean families to the program and keep them in it. Therefore, more parent education programs to enhance parents' understanding of bilingual language development and the characteristics of TWI programs are needed.

Also necessary is improved facilitation for linguistic and cultural understanding across parent groups. It is naïve to expect parents, especially in a multilingual and multicultural setting, to be able to instinctively work together without any facilitation from the school. The success of a TWI educational model rests on mutual understanding and collaboration not only across linguistically and culturally different student groups, but also across parent groups. In this sense, what is needed is more deliberate intervention from administrators and teachers to coordinate parent collaboration and involvement.

Finally, more research needs to be conducted on TWI programs of the less commonly taught languages. The differences in the status or the societal utility of the non-English partner language, motivations for enrolling in a TWI program, and expectations for academic outcomes are all topics that warrant more research.

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About the Presenter

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