

Conclusion

As the United States continues to become more culturally and linguistically diverse, English remains the dominant language, and English proficiency is assumed to be necessary for social acceptance as well as educational and economic success. The census data support the assumption that a lack of rapid English acquisition could hurt one's chances for employment and for high-status jobs. Consequently, a great deal—though not all—of the research and policy-making with regard to language minority students focuses on their shift to English.

In the U.S., the nation's public schools are entrusted with developing language minority children's English language abilities. This is a considerable challenge given the increasing numbers of children with limited English proficiency entering the schools, the limited resources available, and the politicized environments in which bilingual educators work. The most popular types of instructional programs for language minority students—ESL and transitional bilingual education—emphasize rapid English language development.

Language education programs appear to be falling short of adequately supporting language minority students' development of academic English language proficiency and achievement in content areas. Our review of the literature has led us to identify at least five focus areas for research that could lead to improvement in program policy:

- 1) **Student Identification.** Given the variety of methods used by state and local educational agencies to identify LEP students, a student who is identified as such in one state may not be in another. As a result, those who need language services may not be receiving them.
- 2) **Program Provision.** Differences among program typologies and variation in how programs are implemented make comparisons difficult. Also, program structures are frequently modified to respond to localized needs. Distinguishing program goals from program structures is one way to create a basis for comparison.
- 3) **Teacher Professional Development.** A major challenge in providing adequate language services for language minority students is the lack of teachers sufficiently trained in ESL and bilingual education; this is especially true in secondary schools.
- 4) **Assessment (language and subject matter).** Assessment of language proficiency and academic achievement are of great importance in identifying the need for language services, in student placement, and in monitoring students' progress. However, our knowledge of how to reliably assess language minority students is limited.

ited, and until recently, many language minority students have been excluded from standard assessments of academic achievement.

- 5) **Classroom Practice.** How bilingual education is implemented varies considerably depending on the size and mix of the language minority population, teachers' proficiency in the students' language, the availability of bilingual aides, decisions about instructional allocation of language, teacher training and professional development, and the socio-economic context of the classroom.

We turn to Cooper's notion of acquisition planning and Hornberger's continua of biliteracy to understand how research in these five areas, with a focus on the students' perspective, could inform language education policy.

Research Framework

Cooper defines acquisition planning as "organized efforts to promote learning of a language" (1989, p. 157). He identifies two dimensions of language education planning, goals and methods. Goals include acquisition as a foreign or second language, reacquisition of a once native tongue, and language maintenance. Among methods, there are those which create or improve *opportunities* to learn the target language, such as using authentic materials in the classroom; those which create or improve *incentive* to learn, such as requiring an English language proficiency exam; and those which *do both simultaneously* such as using the target language as a medium in a student-sponsored project.

The continua of biliteracy provide a model of the processes involved in becoming literate in two languages (Hornberger, 1989; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 1998). There are continua of *contexts*, for example, that include micro to macro, oral to literate, and bi- and multilingual to monolingual dimensions. There are also continua of *development, content and media* of biliteracy. A premise of this model is that, given the goal of facilitating language minority learners' English language development, there is a need to shift power to the less powerful ends of the continua. A shift in power results not only in a focus on learners but in the empowerment of learners by granting them *agency and voice*.

The continua provide us a way to operationalize Cooper's notions of opportunity and incentive in the context of both bilingual and ESL programs. For example, by providing programs which focus on native language development (content and development continua) and by using texts which draw on learners' background (media and context continua), educators are in essence providing opportunities for second language acquisition and creating incentives to learn the second language. See Figure 2.

Our study assumes that the learners' perspective on language education is central. In our proposed framework, the learners' perspective is

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circumscribed by what occurs in the classroom, school, and school district. We will not be looking at language learning outside of school. Nevertheless, we recognize that decisions and actions that occur outside the classroom influence what occurs within it. We also recognize that test scores and perceptions of learning influence policy. Therefore, our understanding of how opportunities and incentives are created for the learner is incomplete without an account of how context interacts with the classroom.

Research areas	Continua of biliteracy			
	Context	Development	Content	Media
Student identification				
Program provision				
Teacher professional development				
Assessment				
Classroom practice				

Figure 2. Opportunities and incentives matrix: Research areas and the continua of biliteracy.

We will take into account three types of contextual influence (see Figure 3). First, national, state, and local education policies influence the learners' perceived opportunities and incentives to learn, for example, through the allocation of program resources. Second, the economic functions of language influence participants. We should account for teachers and school administrators' attitudes and beliefs about the value of the various languages involved, as well as the relative value of the languages to the student, the community and society. The economics of language literature helps us to identify how attitudes, beliefs and values interact with the policy-making process and helps us to interpret choices learners make about how much to invest in learning a language (Grin, 1996a, 1996b; Vaillancourt, 1996). Third, we need to maintain attention on the ways sociopolitical context interacts with the provision of opportunities and incentive to learn. Our literature review has shown, for example, that language education policy is alternately constrained and enhanced by changes in the U.S. political environment.

Our primary research goal is to inform language education policy in the above-mentioned five areas, with a focus on the learners' perspective.

This research fits well with recent research agendas formulated at the national level. There has been a recent call for investigation into language-minority education that focuses on the learner and extends existing theories and methodologies, addresses questions of interest to teachers and policymakers, and combines interpretive and analytic paradigms (August & Hakuta, 1997). There has also been a call to understand the part that language plays in investment in human capital (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1995). This project seeks to inform these national research agendas as well.

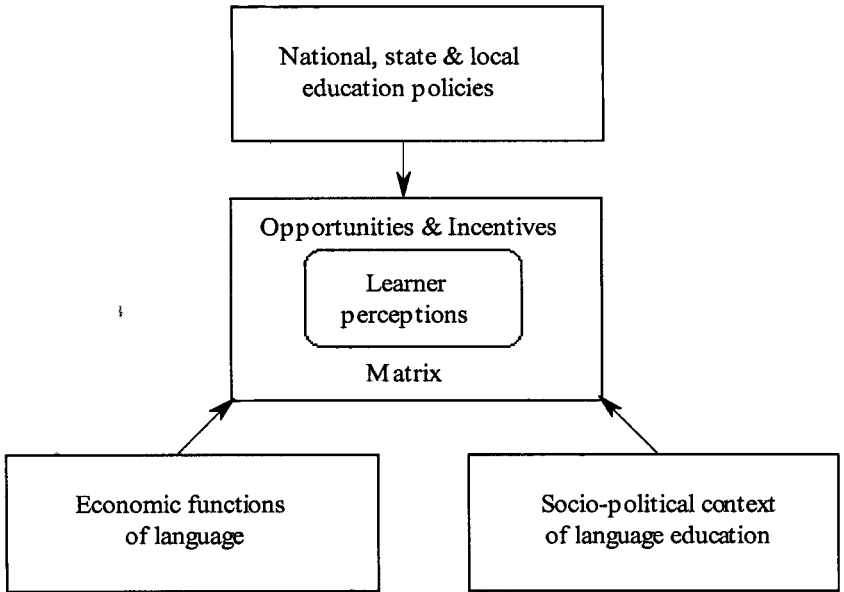


Figure 3. Research Framework.

Research Questions

Our focal question is, How do schools structure opportunity and incentive for language minority learners to acquire language and literacy? We will examine that question in a number of schools and/or school districts to be determined, in a geographic location also to be determined.

- A. How do schools structure opportunity and incentive for language minority students to acquire language and literacy in ways that *focus on the learner*?

Student Identification
Program Provision
Teacher Professional Development
Assessment (language and subject matter)
Classroom Practice

- B. How do the *economic functions of language* and the *sociopolitical context of language education* influence the ways in which schools structure opportunity and incentive for language minority students to acquire language and literacy?

Student Identification
Program Provision
Teacher Professional Development
Assessment (language and subject matter)
Classroom Practice

- C. How do *local and national educational policies* constrain and enhance the schools' structuring of opportunity and incentive for language minority students to acquire language and literacy?

Student Identification
Program Provision
Teacher Professional Development
Assessment (language and subject matter)
Classroom Practice

- D. What *policy modifications* would enhance opportunity and incen-

tive for language minority students to acquire language and literacy?

Student Identification

Program Provision

Teacher Professional Development

Assessment (language and subject matter)

Classroom Practice