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Attitudes Towards Bilingual Education: A Study of Educators and University Students in Bloomington-Normal, IL

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Attitudes Towards Bilingual Education:

A Study Of Educators And University Students in Bloomington-Normal, IL

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Purpose

This study examines the differences in attitudes of teachers and university students towards bilingual education, with an emphasis on how each group defines bilingual education and what role they believe bilingual education should play. This information will be important in determining the level of support and understanding the people of Bloomington-Normal have towards the needs of the Spanish speakers in the community. The conclusions from this study may provide insight into the factors that affect the education of Spanish speakers.

Research Questions

1. How is bilingual education defined by different groups?
2. What is the envisioned purpose of bilingual education?
3. How important is bilingual education within our school systems?

Method

The participants in this study consist of 9 primary and secondary school bilingual education teachers and 56 university students from Illinois Wesleyan. The teachers were all females and come from 5 different local elementary, junior high, or high schools. The teachers have an average of 14 years experience each. The majority of the students are also female (76.8%) and 35.7% are majoring or double-majoring in a foreign language. The same percentage considered themselves fluent in a language other than English.

Data was gathered via an online questionnaire to determine general attitudes towards bilingual education. The participants answered 16 questions in total, 5 pertaining to their background and 11 that evaluated their perception and attitudes towards bilingual education. The participants were contacted through email messages requesting their participation and providing the web link for the survey.

Results

Who should be the main target of bilingual education?

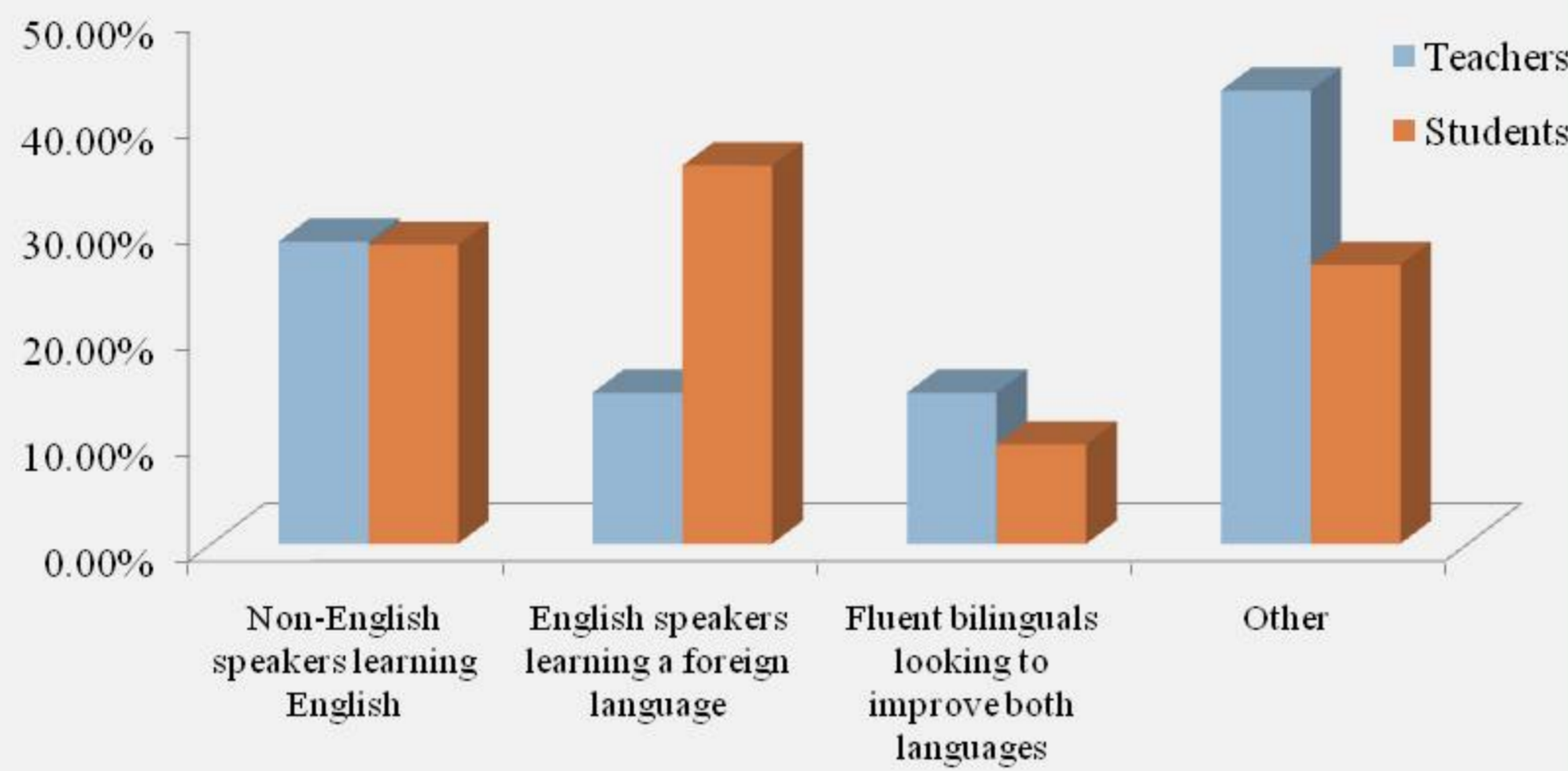


Figure 1

Tables 1&2:

These questions were designed to determine overall attitudes towards bilingual education and a lot of information can be garnered from the data. Teachers and students generally agreed that funding to these programs should be increased, bilingual education should begin early in a child's learning, that bilingual education is important, and bilingual education should be a required part of the curriculum. Interestingly, in the comments section for both groups, having bilingual education was noted as ideal but the current economic struggles of public schools was noted as a hurdle preventing widespread implementation. The university students also noted that they believe being bilingual in our society is important in today's global society, but aren't sure the best way to go about achieving this goal.

| Table 1. Teachers | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | N/A |
|--|----------|---------|-------|-------|
| The funding to bilingual education programs in the U.S. does not need to be increased. | 66.7% | 16.7% | 16.7% | 0 |
| The bilingual education programs in Bloomington-Normal are above average. | 20.0% | 60.0% | 20.0% | 0 |
| Bilingual education should begin when a child first enters the school system. | 0 | 0 | 83.3% | 16.7% |
| Bilingual education is not as important as subjects like math and science. | 83.3% | 0 | 0 | 16.7% |
| Bilingual education is a privilege. | 50.0% | 33.3% | 16.7% | 0 |
| Bilingual education is important. | 0 | 0 | 83.3% | 16.7% |
| There are only a few life-long benefits from bilingual education. | 100% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bilingual education should be a required part of a school's curriculum. | 33.3% | 0 | 50.0% | 16.7% |

Figure 1:

42.9% of teachers responded with "other," generally stating that learning a second language is important, but that maintenance of the home language is also important. 35.8% of students believe English speakers learning a foreign language should be the main target of bilingual education. 26.4% chose "other," stating that some combination of the provided answers was the best option and that anyone wanting to learn a foreign language should be given the opportunity.

Figure 2:

The overwhelming majority of teachers and students (71.4% and 73.6%, respectively) believed that the primary purpose of bilingual education is to teach two languages and cultures.

What is the primary purpose of bilingual education?

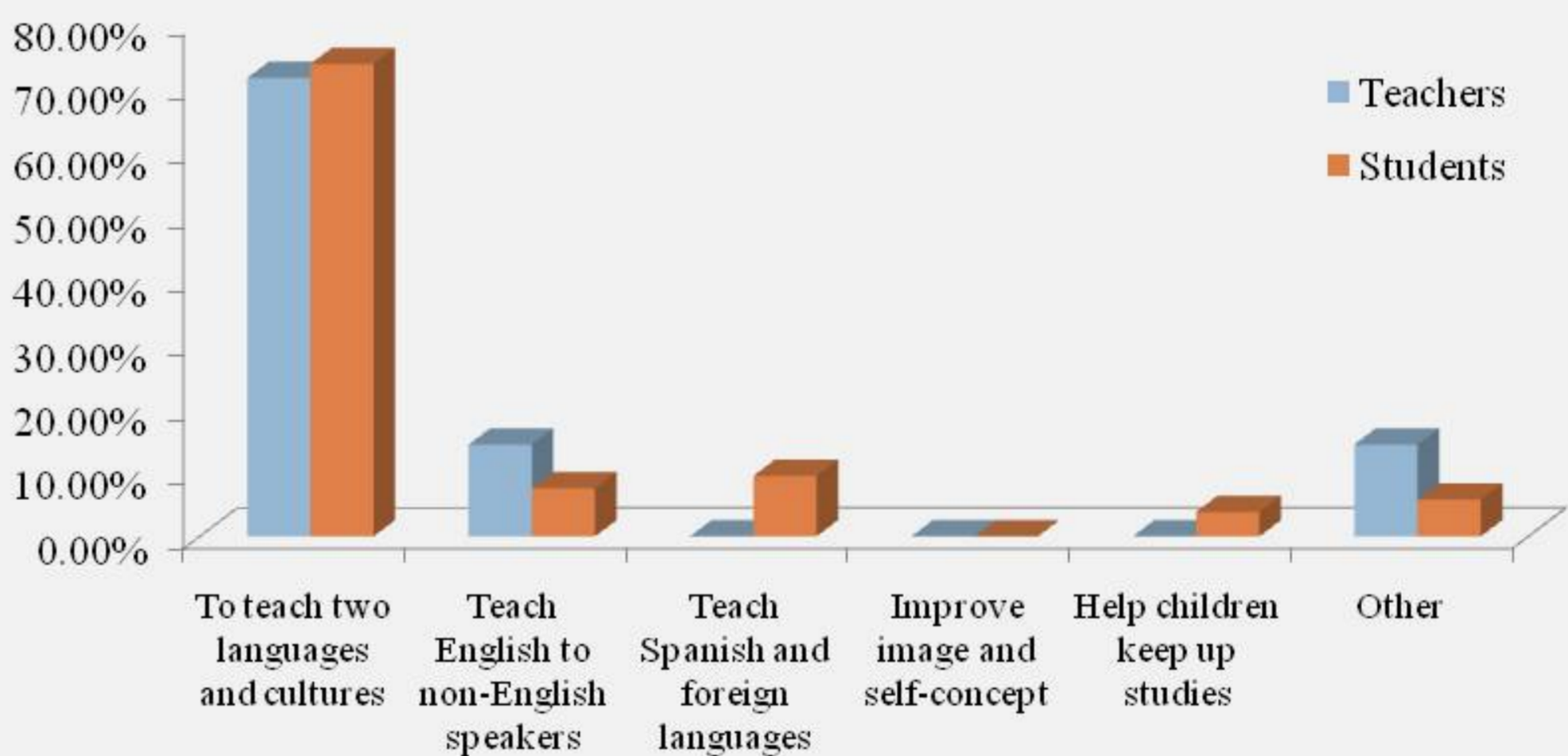


Figure 2

Overall Opinions

The final, open-ended question of the survey asked: "what role do you believe bilingual education plays in our school systems?" While the responses were varied, there were trends in both groups responses. The teachers tended to respond saying that bilingual education helps build bi-literate and bicultural people, with their responses focusing around non-English learners of English. The students tended to talk about the benefits of being bilingual, such as having a wider understanding of different people and being more open to different ideas. They also tended to note that as of now, bilingual education does not play as big of a role as it needs to in our schools.

Discussion

The data collected in this survey provides an interesting insight into the knowledge and attitudes about bilingual education among teachers and students in this community. As one would expect, students tend to view bilingual education more as for anyone wanting to learn a foreign language, especially English speakers, whereas the teachers think of it more as helping non-English speakers become bilingual in English and their native tongue. Interestingly, both groups noted the effects of limited public funding on implementing successful and long-term bilingual education programs. Both groups also understood bilingual education to be a program that should teach two languages and cultures in order to be most beneficial.