

Chapter 19

Teaching English From a Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Approach: Insights From the Basque Autonomous Community

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the transformative potential of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies in the multilingual context of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC). The authors discuss how English as a Lingua Franca should become central in Basque schools, influenced by globalization and new educational policies. The authors delve into the integration of culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) and Translanguaging in English education, highlighting their effectiveness in enhancing students' linguistic and cultural competencies. The authors review the most relevant literature on the topics and ground the current and future research on these studies. Finally, the authors address the challenges and opportunities of multilingual education in the BAC, emphasizing the importance of English as an equalizing language learning space in this diverse linguistic setting. Thus, we set the stage for future research directions in CSP and Translanguaging in the Basque context, aiming to foster inclusive and equitable English language education that respects and leverages students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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INTRODUCTION

English teaching as a Foreign Language (FL) in Basque schools has acquired an increasingly significant place over the last decade, as schools dedicate steadily more class hours to its teaching. The growing demand for English can be attributed to several reasons, including imperialism and globalization (Jenkins, 2015; Penycook, 2007; Seidhoffer, 2017). Furthermore, the recent passing of the new Education Decree for Secondary Education in Spain (Real Decreto 217/2022) also provides a new framework in which the role of English as a Lingua Franca (henceforth ELF) for intercultural communication is expected to play a pivotal part. For the first time in the Spanish education system, the decree introduces the plurilingual competence in its aim to ensure that any student, by the end of their compulsory education, the student effectively uses one or more languages, in addition to the familiar language(s), to respond to his/her communicative needs, in an appropriate and adequate manner to his/her development and interests as well as to different situations and contexts in the personal, social, educational, and professional spheres (Real Decreto 217/2022, p. 41598). If the goal is to ensure that students are competent plurilingual speakers, there is a necessity to revise the way language has been taught in recent years, given that Basque society is more multilingual and multicultural than ever (Roman Etxebarrieta et al., 2020). With more than one hundred languages coexisting in the Basque Country (Aierdi et al., 2021), we need to bridge the gap that many students face when it comes to learning English. Traditionally, English teaching has been focused on a Target Language only policy, assuming that teachers would either be native speakers or behave like a monolingual native (Ellis, 2016), a concept that Holliday (2006) Calvet-Terré and Llurda (2023) have coined as “native-speakerism.” As much as these teaching approaches have been long established in the classroom, current research advocates for a multilingual turn (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011) in language education, providing space for emergent multilinguals to use their entire linguistic repertoire, not only to efficiently learn a language but also to sustain their linguistic and cultural capital (Paris & Alim, 2017). English, as the first foreign language studied globally, or as Seidlhofer asserts, “the first truly global Lingua Franca” (2017, 392), plays a crucial role in the development of learners’ plurilingual competence (Melo-Pfeifer, 2018). Thus, by adopting the translanguaging stance (García et al., 2017) in the English classroom, and by transitioning into an ELF approach in the classroom, we would provide room for the integrated learning of subsequent languages (Melo-Pfeifer, 2018) emphasizing the importance of redefining the role of the teacher and reshaping the educational strategies within the classroom. This implies a paradigm shift from a traditional monolingual teaching framework towards a more inclusive and flexible pedagogy that recognizes and utilizes the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. In practice, this approach encourages teachers to adopt an English as a Lingua Franca perspective, which not only acknowledges the global role of English but also its function as a bridge among various cultures and languages. By doing so, the teaching of English transcends the mere acquisition of linguistic proficiency, aiming instead to foster plurilingual and pluricultural competences. This holistic development ensures that students are not only able to communicate effectively across different linguistic landscapes but also to navigate and appreciate the richness of multiple cultures. The integration of an ELF approach within the educational system, therefore, signifies a commitment to preparing students for a globalized world where intercultural understanding and linguistic agility are indispensable.

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