

# Future of Bilingual Education

## Bilingual Education Programme



# Introduction

The Bilingual Education Programme (BEP) was established in 1996 under an agreement between Spain's Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sport (MEFPD), the British Council and the governments of 10 of the country's autonomous communities. Currently, around 40,000 pupils aged between 3 and 16 at 90 state infant and primary schools and 58 secondary schools participate in the programme. The BEP's goal is to provide bilingual and bicultural education through a content-based curriculum focused on achieving high levels of literacy. It uses English as a vehicular language and incorporates elements of the UK curriculum into its Spanish counterpart.

From the outset, research has made a fundamental contribution to the BEP and numerous studies on bilingual education have informed its development. The *Future of Bilingual Education* project (FoBE – PID2021-127031OB-I00) marks a new milestone as it includes, for the first time, feedback from pupils at participating schools on the perceived impact of bilingual education (or, in the case of schools in the Balearic Islands, plurilingual education).

Under an agreement between the University of Córdoba (HUM-1006 Research Group) and the British Council,

and led by Dr María Elena Gómez-Parra and Dr Roberto Espejo Mohedano, participation in this project was opened to every secondary school on the BEP programme. Of that number, 34 secondary schools provided feedback. A total of 2,829 pupils answered the questionnaires. Most were BEP pupils (or had participated in the BEP up to Year 4 of compulsory secondary education) while the rest were pupils attending the same secondary school but enrolled in other general bilingual (GBP) or non-bilingual programmes (NBP).

The study analysed how pupils perceive the impact of bilingual education on various aspects of their lives, among them language competence, future career prospects and intercultural awareness. As reported (see also pages 14 and 15), the overall picture is particularly encouraging for those of us who believe in the benefits of bilingual and plurilingual education.

The outcome of our Bilingual Education Programme is to prepare pupils to participate and thrive in a multilingual and multicultural world. This study's findings indicate that our pupils share this vision, that they clearly understand the benefits of bilingual education and that they believe that their education will help them achieve this goal.

# The Study

The aim of the *Future of Bilingual Education* project (FoBE – PID2021-127031OB-I00) is to gather the perceptions of pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes of the current and future impact of their bilingual education. The study is divided into the following four blocks addressing key areas in which to analyse the use of second languages in today's society:

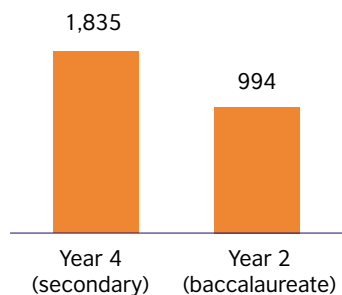
1. Internationalisation and Mobility
2. Employability
3. Intercultural Education
4. Plurilingual Competence.

Under the agreement signed between the University of Córdoba (HUM-1006 Research Group) and the British Council, the FoBE team surveyed 2,829 pupils receiving bilingual education at 34 secondary schools.

## General Data (descriptive)

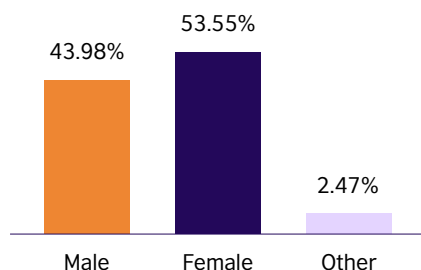
### FoBE survey: 2,829 subjects

#### Respondees



### Respondee gender:

#### Gender



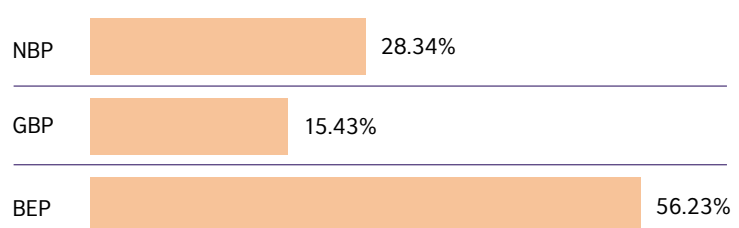
**NBP:** Non-Bilingual Programme

**GBP:** General Bilingual Programme

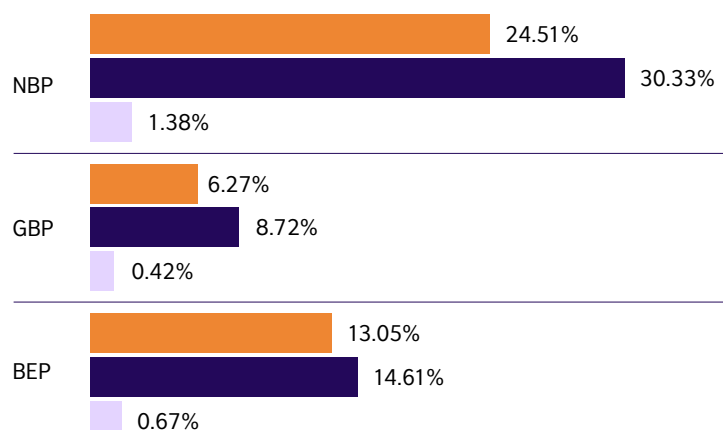
**BEP:** Bilingual Education Programme (agreements between Spain's Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sport, the British Council and 10 autonomous communities)

### Type of programme taken by surveyed pupils

#### Respondees



#### Gender



Male Female Other

## Key Area 1: Internationalisation and Mobility

In education, internationalisation is driven primarily by the Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes that have promoted exchanges between EU Member States' university students, school pupils and administrative staff for 37 years (1987–2024).

This section analyses two sub-dimensions:

**Internationalisation** and **Mobility**. In this context, **internationalisation** is understood as part of an educational process that has long been linked to higher education (e.g. Buckner & Stein, 2020; Knight, 2007; Leask & De Gayardon, 2021, among others).

The FoBE research team considers that, today, this process also extends to non-university education, a change due principally to the impact that the Erasmus+ programme has had across all education given the high levels of participation among

primary and secondary schools and vocational training centres, as reflected in the most recent report published by the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sport (2020) (data as at 28 February 2024).

Mobility, on the other hand, is a broader concept that, as Adey (2017) indicates, encompasses international processes ranging from tourism and migration to refugee movements and the search for employment abroad, thus giving the term economic, cultural, social and political connotations.

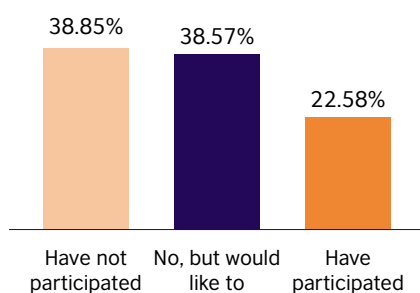
In summary, we can say that the surveyed pupils largely state that bilingual education 'has been useful' so far as regards their internationalisation and will continue to be so for their future mobility.

### 1.1. Internationalisation

#### 1.1.1. Current participation in international programmes

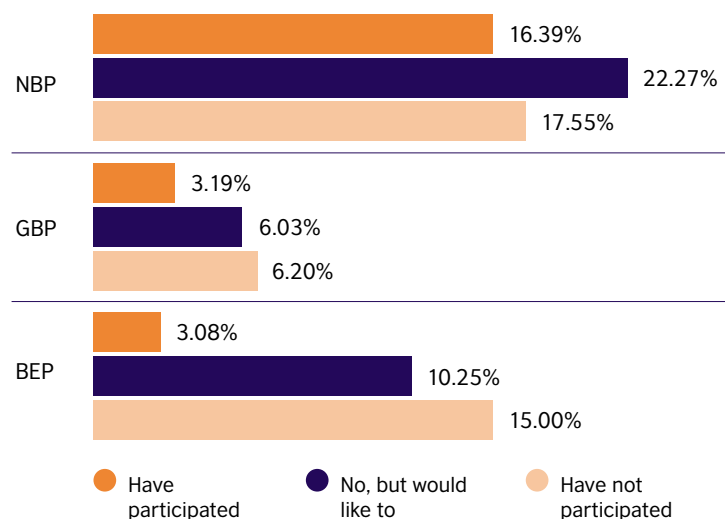
Data on **participation in international programmes** reveal the following:

**Participation in international programmes**



These data reveal that **pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes** (especially those enrolled in the BEP) **participate more actively in international programmes than those in non-bilingual programmes**. Thus, we deduce that **there is a positive relationship between participating in a bilingual programme and participating in international programmes**.

**Participation in international programmes**

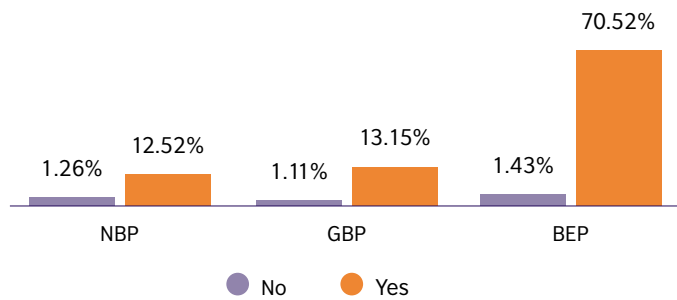


**“Bilingual education is the passport to an international experience”**

### 1.1.2. Future participation in international programmes

In addition, we analysed the data on pupils who have participated in international programmes. Most pupils express a **desire to repeat the experience** (data classified by type of programme taken):

#### Would participate in international programmes again



“Once international, always international: the boomerang effect of bilingual education”

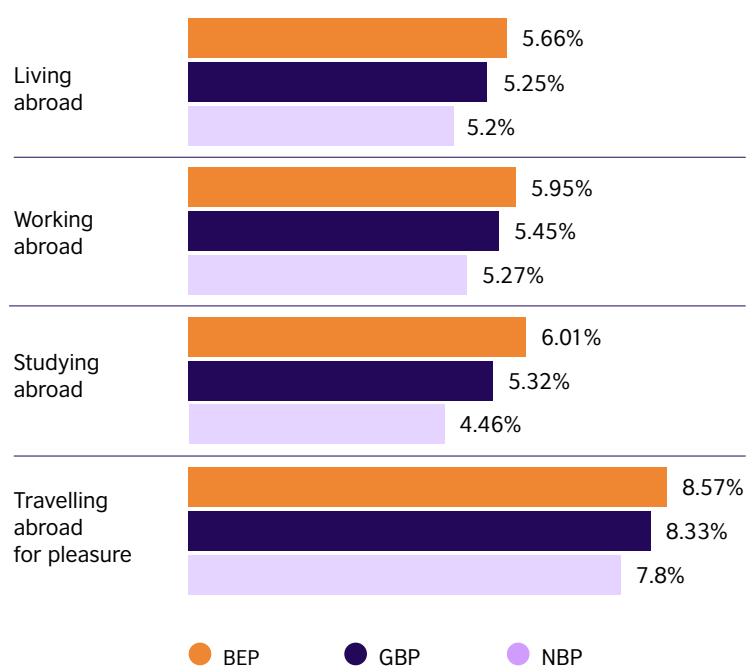
This section produces an interesting finding: **across all the programmes, most pupils who have participated in international programmes would do so again**, with this figure being highest among **BEP** pupils.

## 1.2. Mobility (for academic and non-academic purposes)

### 1.2.1. Reasons for future mobility

Regarding how **possible international mobility relates to pupils' vision of the future**, they answer as follows:

#### In the future I see myself:



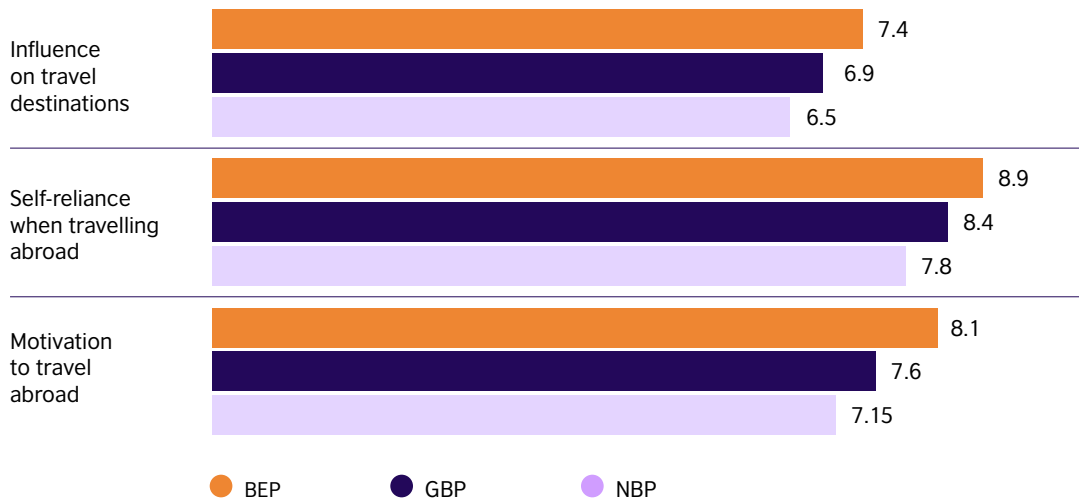
These data indicate that pupils make mobility part of their life plans, irrespective of the type of programme they are on. In all four questions analysed, pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes score higher than those in non-bilingual programmes, with BEP pupils reporting the highest percentages in the “Studying abroad” and “Working abroad” categories.

“Bilingualism: the GPS for a global future”

### 1.2.2. Role of languages in future mobility

The surveyed pupils consider that, in relation to mobility abroad, **languages have the following impact** on their life plans:

#### Impact of languages on future mobility



This section clearly indicates the importance that the surveyed pupils attribute to the impact of languages on their international mobility, which they see as closely linked to their motivation for travelling, the self-reliance that language competence instils and, naturally, the impact that language proficiency has on where they exercise their international mobility. We can therefore say that **international mobility correlates with language proficiency**.

Moreover, **pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes (GBP and BEP) score higher** than those in non-bilingual programmes in all three categories, confirming that **participating in these types of programme improves pupils' perceptions of the utility of languages in all facets of international mobility** (motivation, self-reliance and, to a lesser extent, destination chosen).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that scores in **the three categories** (i.e. 'motivation', 'self-reliance' and 'influence') **increase from NBP to GBP, and from GBP to BEP**.

Finally, it is highly significant that, **unequivocally and in almost the same percentage across the programmes, participating in international programmes enhances creativity, critical thinking, social skills, team work, digital competence, autonomous learning and the sense of belonging to the EU**.

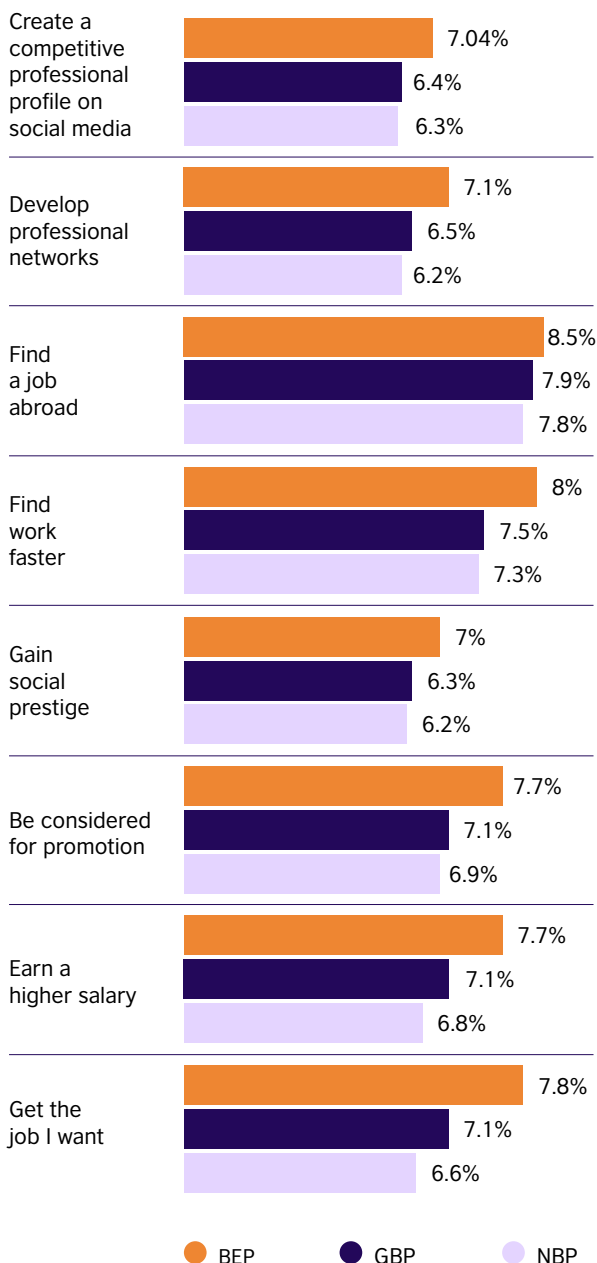
“ **Bilingual education: passport to a world without borders** ”

## Key Area 2: Employability

The data on the perceived impact of bilingual education (BE) on employability are unequivocal. Under all three programmes (NBP, GBP and BEP), **pupils (whether or not they are enrolled in BE) recognise BE's positive impact in enabling them to get the job they want, earn a higher salary, be considered for promotion, gain social prestige, find work faster, find a job abroad, develop professional networks and create a competitive social media profile.**

The percentages across the three types of programme were as follows:

### Employability



As in the previous case, the scores in all the categories are higher among pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes. Furthermore, as was the case in Key Area 1 (Internationalisation and Mobility), **the scores for the eight items in Key Area 2 increase from NBP to GBP, and from GBP to BEP.**

The two highest-scoring categories are, in descending order, “Find a job abroad” (8.5 points) and “Find work faster” (8 points).

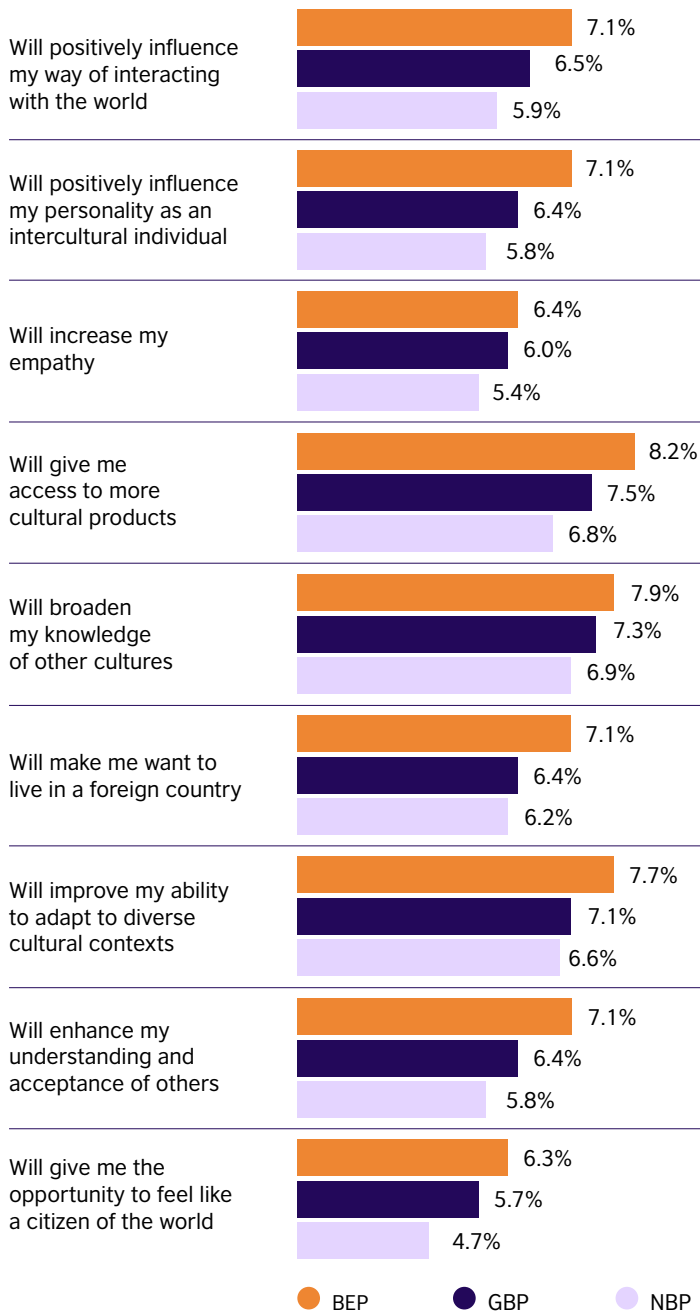
**“ Bilingual education: the source code for global career success**

## Key Area 3: Intercultural Competence

The analysis of the data on the impact of bilingual programmes on intercultural competence are also unequivocal. Under all three programmes (NBP, GBP and BEP), pupils (whether or not they are enrolled in BE) recognise that language proficiency has a positive impact on their sense of global citizenship, enhances their understanding and acceptance of others, improves their ability to adapt to diverse cultural contexts, makes them want to live in a foreign country, broadens their knowledge of other cultures, allows them to access cultural products, increases their empathy and positively influences their personality and way of interacting with the world as intercultural individuals.

The figure below shows the comparative results based on the type of programme in which the surveyed pupils are enrolled:

### Intercultural competence



As was the case with employability, the **scores** are **higher** among **pupils enrolled in bilingual programmes** across all the categories. Moreover, as was likewise the case with Key Areas 1 (Internationalisation and Mobility) and 2 (Employability), **the nine categories on the Intercultural Competence scale increase from NBP to GBP, and from GBP to BEP.**

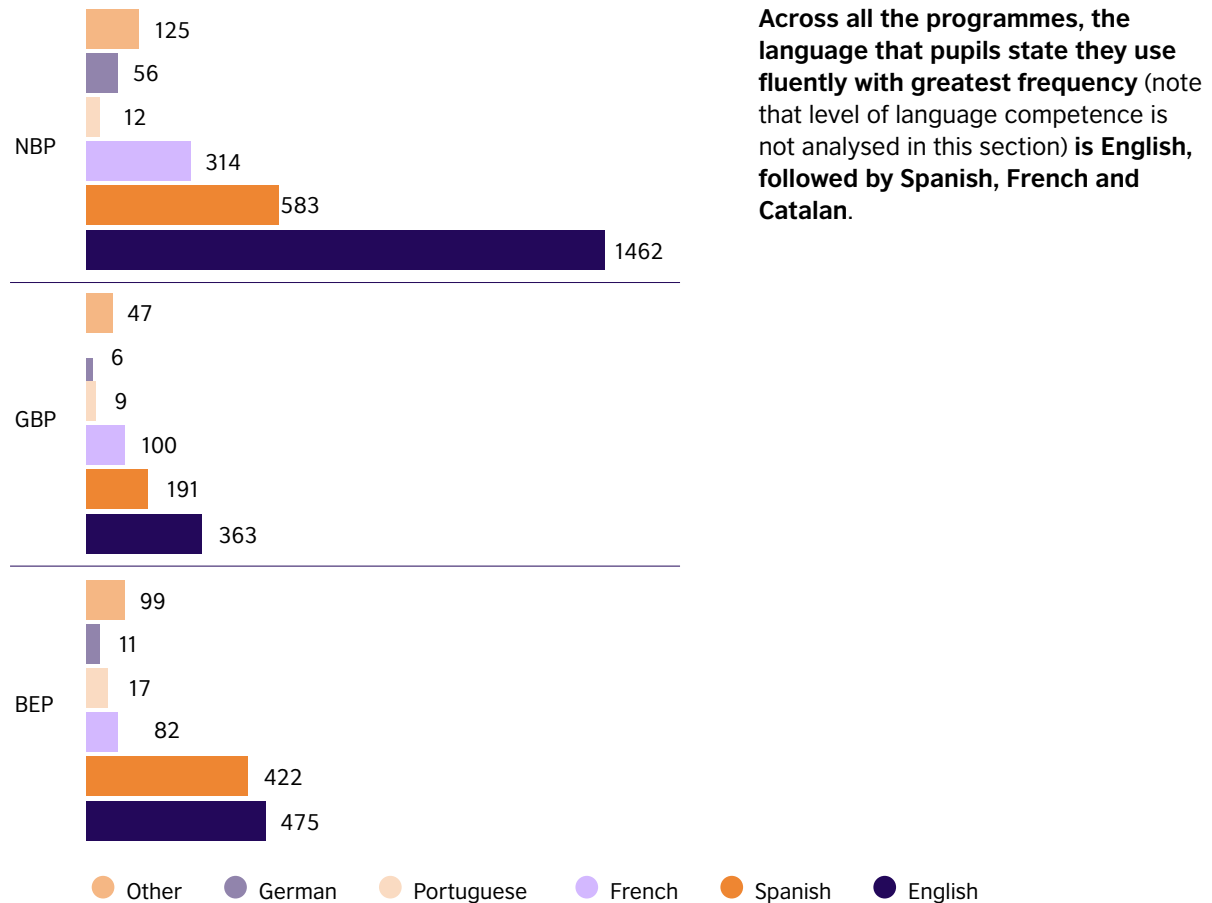
The two highest-scoring categories are, in descending order, “Will give me access to more cultural products” (8.2 points) and “Will broaden my knowledge of other cultures” (7.9 points).

**Bilingual education: the high-definition lens for an intercultural world**

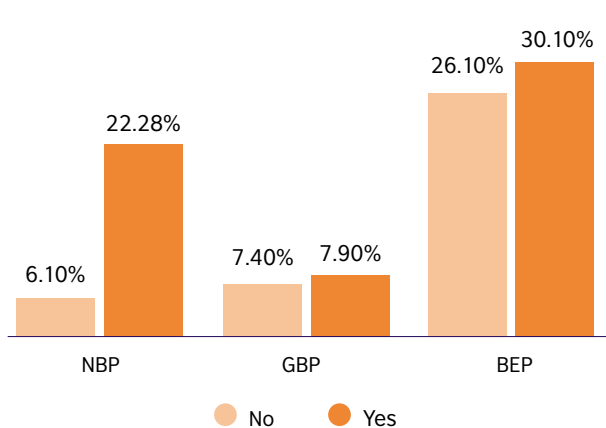
## Key Area 4: Plurilingual Competence

This area analyses the 5 sub-areas set out below:

### 4.1. Languages that pupils use ‘reasonably fluently’



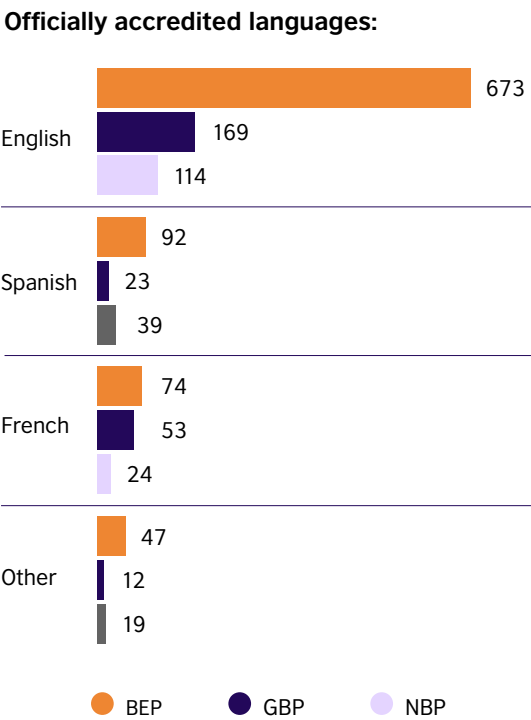
### 4.2. Official accreditation of language competence



Under the bilingual programmes (both GBP and BEP), the difference between pupils with accredited and non-accredited language competence is smaller than among **NBP pupils**, most of whom do not hold any official language qualifications.

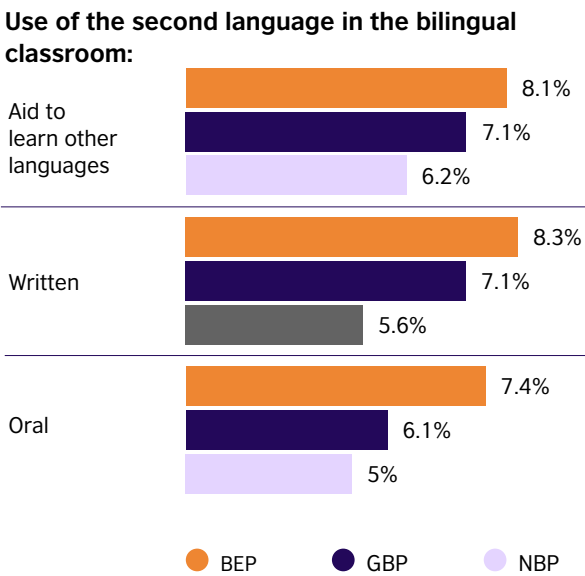
**“ Under the bilingual programmes, language competence accreditation is the norm, not the exception ”**

4.3. Languages in which pupils hold official language qualifications



The language in which **most pupils hold official qualifications** is **English**, followed by Spanish and French, which share second and third place depending on programme type.

4.4. Use of the second language in the bilingual classroom

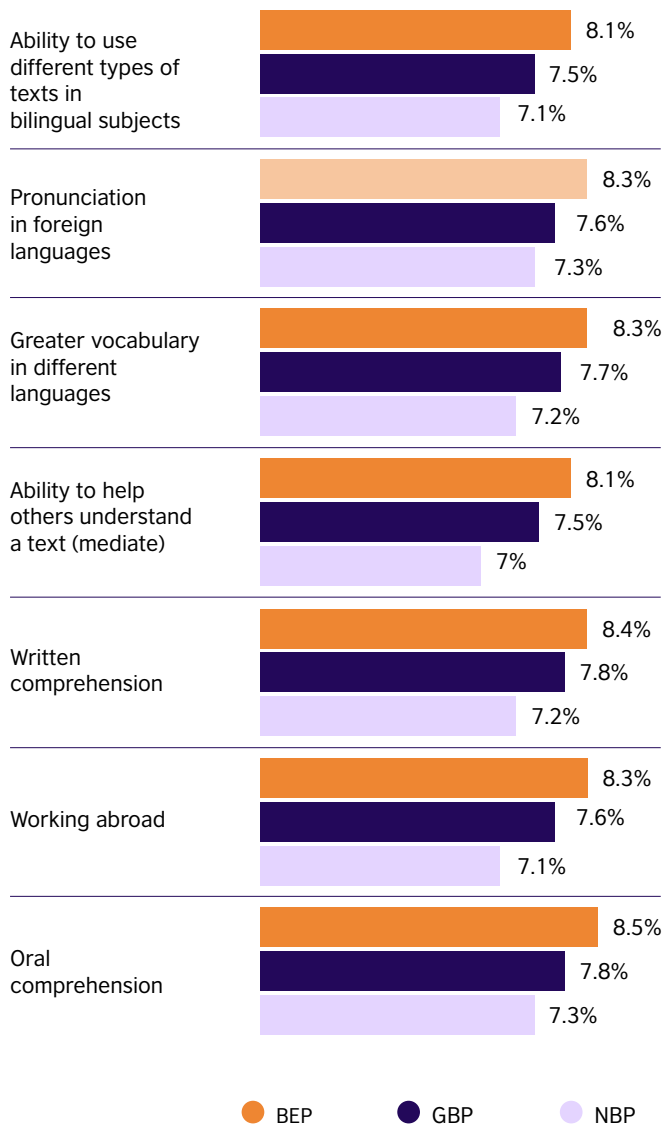


These data indicate that pupils perceive a balance between oral and written use of their second language, as well as the benefit that participating in bilingual programmes has when learning other languages. As was the case in the three previous areas, the three items related to Plurilingual Competence increase from NBP to GBP, and from GBP to BEP.

“ **Bilingual education: the linguistic domino effect that balances skills and multiplies languages**

## 4.5. Impact of participating in bilingual programmes on diverse aspects of plurilingual competence

### Perceived impact of BE on plurilingual competence



Under all three types of programmes (NBP, GBP and BEP), pupils acknowledge that participating in bilingual programmes has a positive impact on language proficiency, with none of the items scoring below 7.1 points.

This Key Area yields the highest percentages of the four analysed and, as was the case in the previous three areas, the seven items on the Plurilingual Competence scale increase from NBP to GBP, and from GBP to BEP.

**Bilingual programmes: where every language is a step up and multilingualism is the pinnacle**

# Authors

## **Dr María Elena Gómez-Parra (University of Córdoba – Spain)**

M<sup>a</sup> Elena Gómez Parra holds a professorship in the Department of English and German Philologies at the University of Córdoba. Her area of expertise is bilingual and intercultural education. She heads the PAIDI HUM-1006 Research Group and is the lead researcher on three projects investigating bilingual education and second language acquisition. Her work has been published in numerous international journals on second language acquisition, intercultural education and bilingual education. She has likewise participated in numerous international projects (including several under the IP and Comenius schemes) and directs the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree titled "Play, Education, Toys and Languages" (PETaL EMJMD). She has also spoken at international conferences on bilingual and intercultural education and has contributed as guest speaker at numerous events addressing international cooperation (e.g. Africa Climate Talk, 16 October 2016, where she gave a plenary lecture on the role of women in sustainable development) and bilingual and intercultural education (e.g. 8th World Play Day, 7 May 2017, Istanbul, where she gave a plenary lecture on the importance of play in early initiation in a second language). She likewise led the bilingual teacher training courses (primary and early childhood education) at the UIMP (Menéndez Pelayo International University) (2017 and 2018).



## **Dr Roberto Espejo Mohedano** (University of Córdoba – Spain)

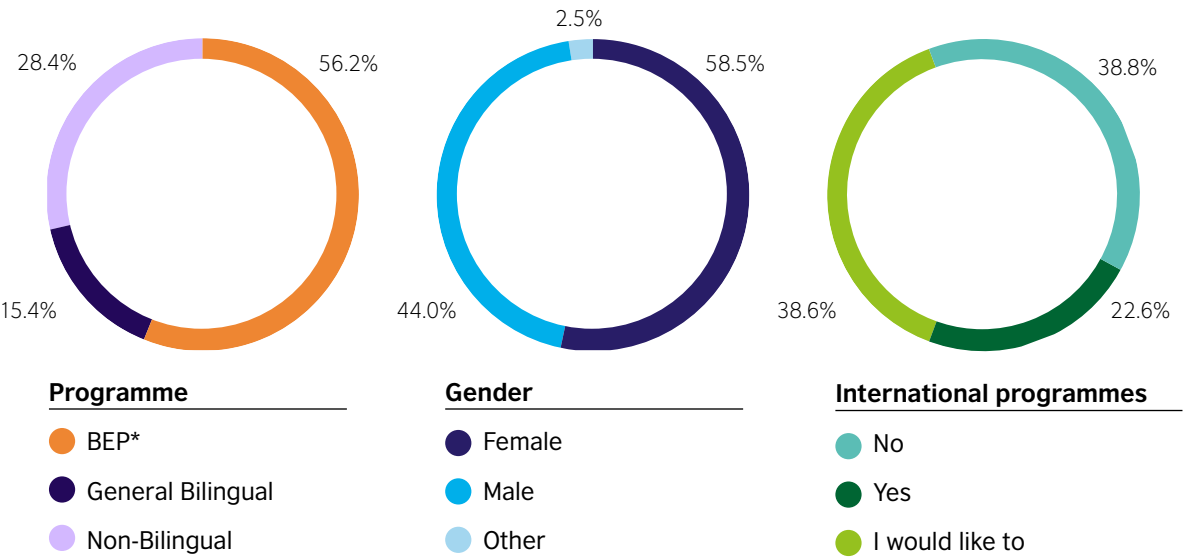
Roberto Espejo Mohedano holds a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics (specialisation Statistics) and a PhD in Computer Science (Computational Statistics). He currently holds a professorship at the University of Córdoba and has taught on various engineering and master's degree courses over the last 36 years. He has acted as academic coordinator of the Undergraduate Programmes in Computer Engineering and has helped develop various syllabi at the University of Córdoba's Polytechnic School. His work has been published in leading journals in the fields of Applied Statistics and Bilingualism and he has headed various educational innovation projects. His research primarily focuses on innovation in e-learning and on applied statistics. He is also joint lead researcher of the BESOC (ref. EDU2017-84800R) and FoBE (ref. PID2021-127031OB-I00) projects investigating bilingualism. He likewise leads Andalusian Research Group SEJ-395 – Applied Statistics and Operations.



# OVERALL FINDINGS:

## Future of Bilingual Education

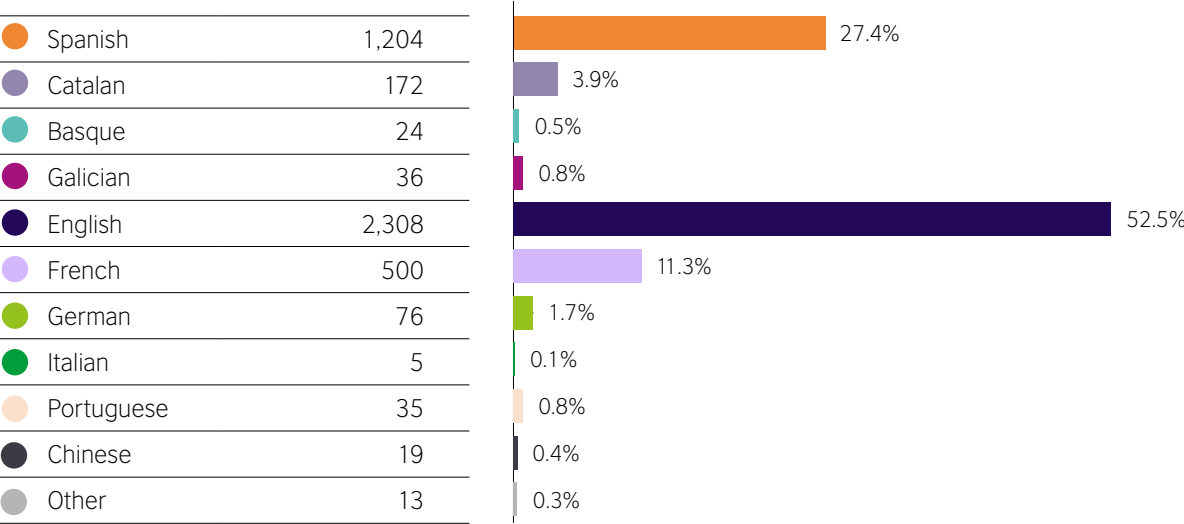
### Pupil profile



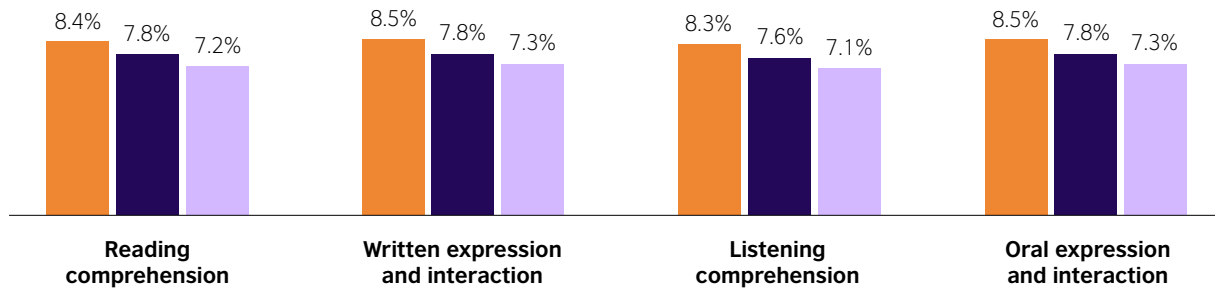
\* BEP: Bilingual Education Programme

### Proficiency in a second language

N° of unique responses:  
Total N° of responses:

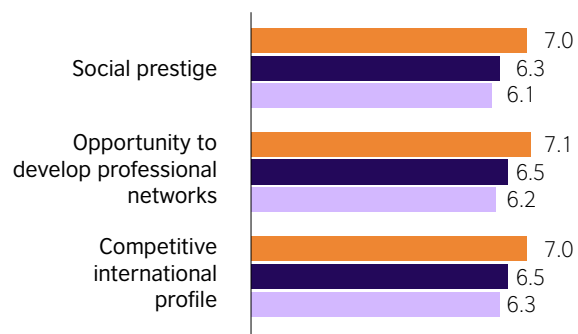


## Participating in bilingual programmes improves my ...

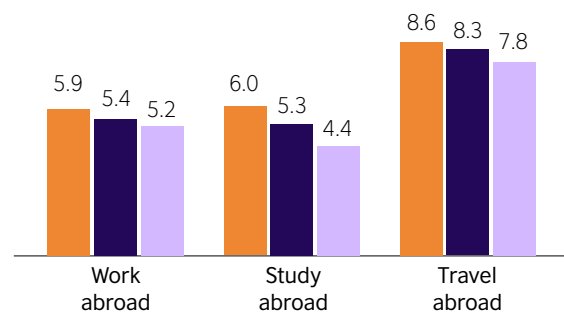


## Perceived impact of bilingual education on ...

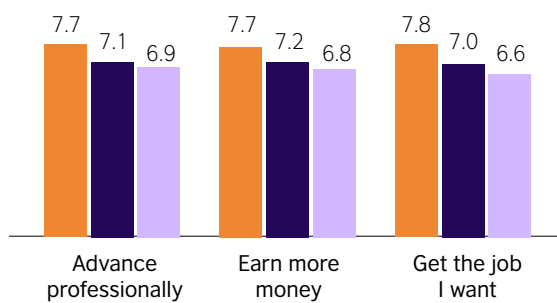
### ... present and future status



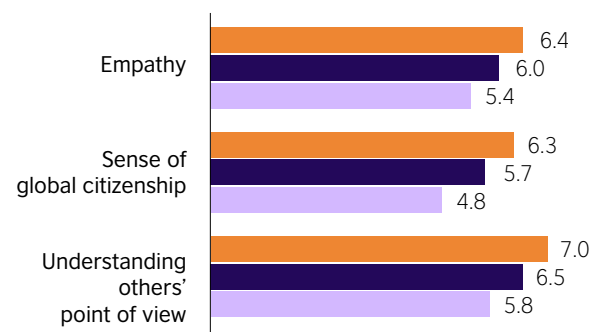
### ... international opportunities



### ... employability: I will be able to



### ... greater intercultural awareness



● BEP: Bilingual Education Programme

● General Bilingual Programme

● Non-Bilingual Programme

# References

Adey, P. (2017). *Mobility*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669298>

Buckner, E., & Stein, S. (2020). What counts as internationalization? Deconstructing the internationalization imperative. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(2), 151–166.

Knight, J. (2007). Internationalization: Concepts, complexities and challenges. En J. J. F. Forest & P. G. Altbach (Eds.), *International handbook of higher education* (pp. 207–227). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4012-2\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4012-2_11)

Leask, B., & De Gayardon, A. (2021). Reimagining internationalization for society. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 25(4), 323–329.

Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes. (2020). *Estadística de Programas Educativos Europeos Erasmus+*. <https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano/estadisticas/externor/programas.html>

## Acknowledgements

The British Council and the research team would like to thank all the pupils who participated in this research project and the teachers who made it possible.

