

# Bilingual Education:

## Understanding California's Language Education Debate from the Perspectives of Teachers, Parents, and Students

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*A multicultural society brings forth diversity, strength, and creativity which can be found within our schools, workplaces, and professional settings. Amidst these various cultures, beliefs, and values, our educational institutions are tasked with creating environments which promote language sharing. In the case of America's schools, and more specifically, California's K-12 schools, this is a quite a controversial task. Time and time again, we find that capturing California's vastly multicultural society while promoting English language learning has not come without its challenges. As a result, methods of instruction and institutional motives have been questioned. In the November 2016 general election, California passed Proposition 58 "Non-English Languages Allowed in Public Education" initiative, a direct referendum to Proposition 227 "English in Public Schools" initiative passed in 1998 in regard to language learning in California's K-12 public schools. This thesis aims to tackle all questions including methods of instruction in language education courses, the transition from Proposition 227 to Proposition 58, and overall opinions on nationalized languages from the perspectives of scholars, teachers, and students. By utilizing interviews from all previously mentioned parties, we aim to tackle the debate itself and gather insight on the topic from those who are directly affected by language education.*

**W**ith an issue as controversial as California language education, it is no surprise that most Californians are divided on the issue and share dissimilar experiences and opinions in regard to various California language education programs. The common understanding remains that English language education is intended to be beneficial for English as a second language (ESL) students and English-speaking students alike. For ESL students, English language education seeks to enrich a student's ability to communicate in the United States with other En-

glish-speaking citizens. For English-speaking students, language education is intended to facilitate better communication with California's ethnically diverse citizens. In modern day California public schools, a uniform system for language education does not exist. Since the passage of Proposition 58, public schools are now capable of creating their own unique programs and assume local control over language education practices. Before the passage of Proposition 58, California language education continued to diversify to better represent children who speak different native languages. Considering the

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variety of language education programs available in California, we will highlight them as they are encountered during the administration and reporting process. It is important to note that in this thesis, we will refer to all language focused education programs as simply “language education”, rather than use the term “multilingual” which implies multiple languages or “bilingual” implying simply two languages.

In this particular line of research, I have conducted interviews with seven unique individuals. Amongst these interviewees we have three young adults who completed language education: one who is currently a language education student, two of which currently teach language education, and one who is the parent of an English-speaking student who completed language education during her early school years. As we continue through this thesis, we will note the unique experiences amongst all seven individuals. Once this thesis has concluded, we will have synthesized our collected information with our hypothesis; California’s complex language education system produces complications for California students and teachers.

In modern day California schools, there is an understanding that the availability of language education enriches an English-speaking student’s ability to process different languages. Of our seven interviewees, most of them believe that learning a second language is undoubtedly beneficial for students. Although this may be true in some cases, there are many who claim, students and teachers alike, that dual-immersion language education is a hindrance for students who did not grow up with English as a first language and believe in more direct forms of English education. Furthermore, dual-immersion is believed to have an even greater negative impact on English-speaking students who are still in the process of fine tuning their English language at a younger age.

Before diving into the topic of language education itself, it is important to take a look at the current subfields of political science that are associated with it. In regard to the domestic state of language education, one must look to the subfield of Ameri-

can Politics to better understand the local and state level processes that operate in order to make language education possible. With different bills, bonds, and propositions being introduced and new methods and practices constantly being discussed, we must first consider the diverse landscape of California. With nearly 73% Caucasian, 40% Hispanic, and 27% foreign-born Californians, it is crucial to closely examine the complex nature of California’s education system. With the passage of Proposition 58, we will now see more local school districts incorporate this diversity into the classroom. However, this is not the end of the discussion. Although Proposition 58 passed, the issue will continue to hold its relevance and be debated for years to come. Therefore, the end results of this thesis would be beneficial to anyone participating in the discussion.

There are various, complex topics which are associated with our language education debate such as multiculturalism, political education reforms, ethnic context, assimilation debate, age concerns, and many others. This thesis aims to analyze all of these topics and combine them with issues presented in our interview in an attempt to better understand our topic. Therefore, this particular line of research intends to answer the question; what are the concerns associated with California’s complex language education system?

This research question and concerning argument aims to analyze the presumption that language education is “good for everyone”. Considering the complex forms of language education and our interviews, I predict that this blanket statement will be considered too overly simplified to hold any validity. Whether this presumption will ultimately be confirmed, negated, or left unanswered, will be the goal of the thesis itself. At the conclusion of this thesis, I hope that readers will simply question language education and whether or not it is really “good for everyone”. I do not intend to prove that language education is fundamentally flawed or fails to assist students, because that is undoubtedly false. My goal is to contribute to the subfield of American Politics

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by simply highlighting the possibility that the effects of language education are mixed and are not shared unanimously throughout society and California's diverse students. By questioning the structure of language education, one may be able to introduce new methods or approaches to this controversial topic.

## Literature Review

Language education is a controversial concern within the subfield of American politics and California's K-12 education system. The literature available in regard to language education is similarly divided, focusing on both advantages and disadvantages of this particular form of education and its many complex methods of instruction. This thesis aims to examine the debate of language education from the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students. Additionally, the findings of this thesis will serve as contributions to the subfield of American politics by adding to the ongoing discussion of whether language education, in its current form, is beneficial for everyone affected by it.

In order to properly analyze the state of language education in California, such literary works are imperative to consider when constructing a solid thesis. Many scholars have focused on the effectiveness of language education, the controversy and complexities of its instruction, and various correlated historical perspectives. This thesis aims to draw a line connecting the literature and varying perceptions surrounding the viability of language education servicing English-speaking and non-English-speaking students. Considering that "public schools are projected to have more minority students than non-Hispanic whites" (Karaim, 2014) it is important to properly consider both California's non-English-speaking and English-speaking students in this thesis.

The following literature review examines a variety of different topics surrounding language education. Historical works provide in-depth accounts on the passage of public policies (Bali, 2001), and the evolution of language education in California. Controversial works include critiques of debilingualization (Montano et al., 2005), nationalized language (Donegan, 1996), and assimilationist education (Lampe, 1996). The thesis will also utilize texts which have analyzed the structure and functions of language education in California in order to understand its complex nature (Walker, 2000). This diverse set of literature outlines a very multifaceted issue in reference to the varying effectiveness of language education on California's K-12 students.

## *Historical Analysis*

One main scholarship for historical analysis of this topic includes Yoon Kyong, Hutchinson, and Winsler's, "Bilingual Education in the United States: a historical overview and examination of two-way immersion" (2015). Within this study, Y.K Kim et al. provides detailed explanations of different language education program models which include submersion, English as a second language, early-exit (transitional), late-exit (developmental), and lastly, TWI (two-way immersion, or more commonly known as dual-immersion). The scholarship takes note of the evolution that led to the development of dual-immersion, deeming it the more "intense bilingual education experience" (Y.K Kim et al., 2015), among its predecessors. According to Y.K Kim et al., TWI is designed to help language-minority students achieve additive bilingualism, as well as to help native English-speaking students acquire second language skills in a natural way (2015). This is achieved through "combining both native speakers of English interested in learning a second language, and language-minority students in the process of acquiring English, in the same classrooms learning throughout the day taught in both languages." (Y.K Kim et al., 2015). Considering that dual-immersion is more rigorous in comparison to previous methods and provides several advantages and disadvantages to its students, this method of language education continues to be a hot topic of debate in the dispute of various programs. With the increased popularity of dual-immersion in California's language education system, Y.K Kim et al.'s critiques, praise, and policy recommendations are sound contributors to the thesis in question.

Taking a step away from the evolution of current language education programs and their disputed effects, it is important to research the aftermath of the passage of Proposition 227 in California. The proposition intended to remove language education programs in California's K-12 public schools by replacing them with English-only programs. In a journal article written by Valentina A. Bali, the enactment of Proposition 227 encompassed many unique events concerning academic performance between that of bilingual and non-bilingual students (2001). According to Bali's findings, a large majority of non-bilingual students achieved math and reading scores that hardly varied from that of bilingual students. Although Proposition 227 was claimed to hold anti-immigrant, assimilationist connotations, the removal of language education programs had absolutely no negative effect on California's bilingual

students in comparison to non-bilingual students. Overall, they ended up achieving the same quality of performance with or without the programs being offered. Aside from there being no real negative effect on academic performance, Proposition 227 accomplished something that no other language education policy or study could accomplish before, that is, "Proposition 227 allowed for a natural experiment of the effects of bilingual education" (Bali, 2001). Regardless of the extreme gridlock present in the study and application of language education, Proposition 227's general application allowed us to reflect on something observable and draw our own conclusions, or in the case of the state of Arizona, pass similar legislation. However, with the creation of new language education programs annually, the reliability of readily available research, observations and statewide studies, is frequently questioned.

Considering the recent passage of Proposition 58 in California, the direct referendum to Proposition 227, Bali's findings are incredibly useful to consider. Arguments in opposition of Proposition 58 claim that the new "Non-English Languages Allowed in Public Education Act" would indirectly harm Latino children in California by forcing them into Spanish-almost-only classes which hinder them from acquiring the English language properly. Using historical references similar to that found in Bali's study, the passage of Proposition 58 was met with great resistance from both the Republican and Libertarian parties in California. Bearing in mind the declaration of widespread educational success amongst Hispanic and minority students in California from the passage of Proposition 227, it is crucial to examine the potential effects of a possible removal of English-only programs in California's K-12 schools.

It is also important to note the instantaneous effects that a swift change in education instruction produces affects students. For example, after the passage of Proposition 227, Bali found that the shift of educational regimes, from one encouraging instruction in a student's primary language to one emphasizing early English instruction, affected mostly Hispanic students with limited English skills (2001). Bali's findings may cause one to question whether or not an instant shift of educational regimes after the passage of Proposition 58 would have a similar negative effect on Hispanic and minority students in California. However, the intention of this thesis is not to highlight probabilities surrounding Proposition 227 and Proposition 58, but rather, highlight the complications which arise from a complex language education system. Therefore, Bali's findings in regards to the implementation of Proposition 227

and the discoveries of Y.K Kim et al. concerning dual-immersion (TWI) programs will be incredibly useful when considering the historical perspectives involved with dissecting language education.

### *Controversy*

Although most scholarly journals surrounding language education controversy are rather antiquated, they are still important to consider when analyzing language education programs as a whole. One of the most controversial debates over bilingualism is whether or not English should be classified as the nation's official language. By confronting this issue and similar controversies, we will have a more realistic understanding where arguments in favor of and stark arguments against language education programs such as dual-immersion may resonate from. In Craig Donegan's study, "Debate Over Bilingualism: Should English be the nation's official language" (1996), Donegan attempts to tackle this theoretical question by addressing the concerns of many at the local, state, and federal level. According to "Debate over Bilingualism", a lower court ruling determined that the state of Arizona's official-English provision violated the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment (1996). In direct contrast to this ruling, successful business owners and career politicians that Donegan spoke with employed a more conservative attitude in claiming that "approaches that focus almost entirely on native-language instruction are crippling the children's educational opportunities" (1996). Other conservative opinions on language education include that "many bilingual education programs perpetuates the students' original language and promote non-native cultures at the expense of the English" (Donegan, 1996). Although Donegan's work seems to be somewhat slanted towards one unilateral perspective, the topic of language education asks that we consider these controversial opinions when analyzing the entire debate itself.

Another significant controversy surrounding the debate of language education is the study of debilingualization which is also defined as the removal of bilingualism. In a published journal by Montano, Ulanoff, Sarellana, and Aoki, debilingualization is a major issue facing California students and teachers alike (2005). After the passage of Proposition 227, the debate over bilingualism developed into somewhat of a taboo topic among education advisory boards and even local educational institutions. This led to the removal of various board members and the exclusion of terms such as "bilingual" and "culture" from official state documents (Montano et al., 2005). The blatant

controversy surrounding what the text perceives to be as “linguistic supremacy” (Montano et al., 2005) is a direct contributor to the perceptions that there is a discriminatory homogenization that has taken hold of California’s public schools under Proposition 227. Aside from limiting cultural diversity in academic programs, debilingualization has also directly affected the availability of bilingual teachers. According to the Montano et al., regardless of language education, students seek to benefit from a bilingual teacher, and since the passage of Proposition 227, the demand for bilingual teachers has exceeded their supply (2005).

When assessing the mixed effects of language education and its various forms, this polarization exists at nearly every level of public opinion. In light of this clear and present divide, such conflicting discoveries prove to be incredibly useful when considering all sides of the debate accurately. In correlation to our study, both academia and the general public hold mixed opinions on the topic. Hence, the debate of language education is a complex issue where neither side, whether being proponents or opponents of language education, are quite superior to the other.

Additional controversial keynotes in debates over bilingualism include the array of studies associated with critiquing assimilationist institutional practices. One such scholarship was conducted by Van C. Tran titled, “English Gain vs. Spanish Loss? Language Assimilation among Second-Generation Latinos in Young Adults”, (2010) intended to tackle this very issue. In this particular investigation, Tran examined second-generation Latino children of American immigrants. Findings for this included varying academic success across various Latino groups who were enrolled within the same academic program. As these distinct Latino groups were assimilated into English-only programs, their native language fluency was damaged as a result. Among Mexicans, Cubans, Colombians, and Dominicans, Mexicans faced far more difficulties in English acquisition and assimilation in comparison to other Latino students in the program. According to Tran, Mexican-Americans hold the strongest Spanish retention in contrast with other Latino ethnic groups and are the most likely to speak Spanish at home (2010). Therefore, the underperformance of this particular set of Mexican-American students was a direct result of the assimilationist practices which contradicted their home life and community engagement. This specific examination of the Latino community adds to the debate that bilingualism is extremely multifaceted and is not as evenly retained amongst students who may or may not speak the same language. This probes the idea that language education requires variations of prac-

tice in order to coincide with various English retention abilities and non-English proficiency levels.

### *Literature Review Conclusion*

This literature review intends to highlight the various sources of information that aim to study the language education in California’s K-12 schools. Considering factors such as the historical evolution of language education, its complex structure, and surrounding controversies, it is important to reference such literature in this thesis. By taking into account these sources, we are provided detailed information in regard to our study. Utilizing historical texts will provide us with a longitudinal analysis of the topic and a structural foundation for finding room for possible improvement. By examining the controversies encased within the debate itself, we will have a better understanding of the direct polarization that exists between the major points of disagreement. An additional analysis of the various forms of language education will also provide an in-depth explanation to the assessment of the case study associated with this thesis.

## **Methodology**

This thesis will take a qualitative approach by conducting a series of interviews in regards to language education. In order to properly understand the language education debate and the complex nature of California’s language education programs, these interviews will be administered with multiple interviewees in an attempt to gather their thoughts on this complex topic. Considering the controversially mixed views regarding language education, the effectiveness of this thesis derives directly from the unshared experiences and perspectives of the respondents. Before discussing the interview process that was selected for this thesis, we will first discuss the state of California from which the respondents were selected from.

The state of California has an exceedingly large foreign-born population which far surpasses the U.S. percentage two times over. Of these 27% foreign-born citizens, at least half have at minimum one immigrant parent. In addition, a vast majority of California’s foreign-born citizens are Hispanic and Asian. However, over the more recent years, more than half of California immigrants come from various Asian countries. The majority of foreign-born or immigrant Americans occupy over 30% of California’s largest counties including Los Angeles County. The majority of this thesis will closely examine language education as it exists in Los Angeles County. That being said, our interviewees will come from different back-



grounds and will possess dissimilar first languages.

We will interview four language education students (current and former), one parent, and two language education teachers --- a total of seven interviews. By speaking with students who have completed the program or are currently enrolled, we can discuss their progress and outlook on the education they have received. This will be an important factor when analyzing the academic impact of language education on its students. Parents will also be questioned in order to gather an adult perspective on issues involving child welfare, opinions on their child's success, and the quality of the program itself. Through interviews conducted with teachers, we will gather a professional perspective of their experiences and opinions on language education and the many students they have seen progress throughout their programs. It is important to note that we have used aliases for all of our interviewees, as a way to protect their identities throughout this study.

Concerning the interview questions, there will not be any central focus on a particular form of language education, but rather, the various relevant forms discussed in the interviews. Questions will be primarily open ended and specialized for each interviewee. Therefore, interview questions for current students, former students, teachers, and parents will vary in order to maximize relevant information collection. Although there will be more specialized questions, the interview will also include general demographic questions and blanket, opinion-oriented questions. For this thesis, general demographic questions will include gender, age, ethnicity, and first language. Additionally, I have asked all interviewees to specify the area and location of their relevant experience (which school they attended/taught and the corresponding area). Opinion-oriented questions included asking the interviewee for their opinions on language education as a whole, Proposition 227, Proposition 58, whether the United States should have an official language, and what their opinions are on the assimilation of language. Considering that forming an opinion on Proposition 227, Proposition 58, and language education requires independent research, I provided interviewees an alternative to skip any question they do not feel confident in answering. In order to properly describe assimilation of language to the interviewees and remain completely unbiased, the question will provide a brief general definition and ask interviewees for their opinion and to explain their reasoning.

For our single current student interview, questions were asked to probe discussion in regards to their present experience. In order to gather a bigger picture in regards to what they are currently encountering in

their program, I asked the current student to describe the events that led up to their participation of the program. These questions were directly related to their educational background, ethnicity, and first language. I also asked the current student to comment on the quality of education they are currently experiencing and how they feel it has impacted them thus far. Queries include asking how they feel about the performance of their teachers, performance of their fellow students, the quality and/or quantity of resources provided to them in school, and their opinion on their personal academic performance thus far. Considering that current students are still quite young and may not grasp the depth behind questions concerning nationalized language, language assimilation, and California propositions and initiative processes, I have collected their opinions but kept in mind their age and educational level when reporting my results.

While interviewing former students, I have attempted to gather information from students belonging to different ethnic backgrounds. For this particular thesis, we will examine two former Hispanic, Spanish speaking students and one former Armenian speaking student, all three of which were tasked with learning English in elementary school. Considering that California has a much smaller Armenian population in comparison to its Hispanic population, questions for the former Armenian student included asking them additional questions in regards to availability of resources and staff. In regards to all former student interview questions, additional queries included asking for their completion age/grade, the type of program they experienced, whether or not they were able to provide ample time to properly focus on each of their subjects, and their overall rate of success in the program. It is also important to note that while interviewees were answering specific questions, they were able to provide additional information that did not exactly correspond to the direct question. For example, although the interviews were directed towards particular people, many the respondents shared the experiences of their friends and classmates. As a result, many interesting and unexpected topics were recorded in regards to each individual's unique experience.

Considering that interviews are extremely qualitative in nature, it is expected that the findings of this thesis will be somewhat subjective, or otherwise, limited in the general application towards language education as a whole. Although a quantitative approach to this dilemma is as equally crucial in order to properly monitor language education, it is imperative to also record individual experiences considering that California commands it. The complex structure of California's language education

## Appendix: Interview questions

### Demographic Questions

1. Gender (male, female, other)
2. Age
3. Ethnicity
4. First language. If you acquired English as a second language, what was the form you were taught?
5. Are you fluent in any other languages other than your first language? If so, how did you acquire this additional language?

### Language Education Questions Based on Relevant Experience

6. What type of program did you (or your child/students) experience?
7. What was the language being learned?
8. Where was the program located and what type of school was it?
9. How old were (are) you (or your child/students)?
10. How would you rate the success of the participants of the bilingual education program? (unsuccessful, somewhat unsuccessful, somewhat successful, successful, neither). Why did you answer this way?
11. What are your opinions on this form of bilingual education you (or others) experienced?
12. Did the program help or hurt your (or your child/student's) other academics?
13. Do you feel that enough adequate resources were provided to you (or your child/students) in order to succeed? Adequate resources may contain, but are not limited to, knowledgeable and helpful staff, materials, quality time and so forth?

### Opinion-based Questions

14. What are your opinions on language education as a whole?
15. Do you believe there is room for improvement with language education? If so, could you explain your reasoning?
16. Do you happen to have an opinion on the Proposition 227 or Proposition 58? If you do not feel you have enough knowledge to answer this question, we can skip it.
17. The definition of assimilation is "to make similar". Do you believe that Americans should be assimilated, or "made similar", in regards to language? Could you explain your reasoning?
18. Do you believe that English should be the official language of the United States? Could you explain your reasoning?

programs, the diverse background of California's students, and questionable availability of proper resources and need for quality instruction methods, asks that we record more than statistical data and general census information to properly assess the complicated topic. We must, as political scientists, ask questions which allow interviewees to adequately describe their experience in a way that cannot simply be measured. Therefore, a qualitative approach to this topic will be useful when assessing California's multifaceted language education debate.

## Results

Amongst the various interviews that were conducted for this thesis, the results varied greatly and no two interviews were quite the same. The conversations that took place during each individual session differed. For the former and current students, our interviews were more extensive, while the interviews with parents and teachers were done much quicker. Additionally, the willingness to share more personal opinions also varied between respondents. While some interviewees seemed eager to share raw and somewhat intimate information, others were more reserved or attempted to rush the interview with short, poised responses. Regardless of the differences between the interviewees, the sessions were conducted tentatively while avoiding leading any questions for the participants or probing predicted responses. Similarly, some of our interviewees were more positive than others. With each response and shared dialogue, the analysis became far more interesting and further added to the California language education debate. From struggles at home or in the workplace, each interviewee came across unique obstacles and triumphs that made the interview process far more compelling in comparison to asking the same monotonous, repetitive questions without any real reward.

While we analyze the findings of this study, I will focus on each interviewee while comparing and contrasting similar statements from their corresponding respondent type. For example, I will report on the findings of our three former student respondents by highlighting key points of each interview while simultaneously synthesizing them against each other. We will then apply the same process when discussing our two current teachers, reporting their individual responses and then directly comparing findings. In regards to the current students and parents of this study, we must investigate each respondent's statements individually, since there is only one of each. After we have highlighted major points of each interview and group findings, we will then reflect on all respons-

es concerning our specific questions on Proposition 227 and 58, language assimilation, and whether or not our interviewees believe English should be the United States' official language. After all responses have been reported concerning relevant experiences and general opinion, we will then attempt to either reject or confirm our original hypothesis that California's complex language education system produces complications for California students and teachers.

### *Former Students*

We will begin our report with an interview conducted with Martin, a 25 year old male and California language education student in his early elementary school career. The program he participated in was an English Development Program (ELD). With Spanish being his first language, Martin was placed in the program in order to acquire English as a second language. Martin partook in the ELD program in a Los Angeles County public school located in the city of Covina from kindergarten through fifth grade. According to Martin, "My situation was complicated because my parents didn't know any English so they had no way of teaching me. They were banking on me learning it in elementary school". When asked what the ELD program consisted of, Martin claimed that "They used our knowledge of Spanish and would compare Spanish words to the same word in English. We essentially learned English through Spanish. When you would first start the program, the questions were very simple. They would show you a picture of a dog and ask what color it was and your responses could only be in English." A key element to highlight in Martin's interview is progression in terms of age and language and the use of English-only instruction. Since Martin started this ELD program in kindergarten and began English-language instruction at five years old, he was able to progress throughout elementary school while being taught English at the same pace. However, for other students who started the ELD program later, they were placed in the same beginner English courses that Martin took in kindergarten, although most of these students were at much higher levels academically. According to Martin, "I recall a friend who came from Mexico and went straight into ELD and had to take the same test that we took in kindergarten. They didn't have different levels. You were expected to start from the beginning and that was that." In a discussion with Martin, we concluded that this would not be an issue if these ELD classes were taken separately in their own time slot and did not come at the expense of other classes. However, this was not the case with Martin's



ELD program. Martin pointed out several times that within these ELD programs, students were pulled out of regular classes to attend ELD class, “We had our normal classes and then around two-to-three times a week, they would pull us out of our regular classes to go to ELD class. So by pulling us out of those classes, we were forced to miss whatever we learned that day. I remember having to miss math or English.” When I asked Martin why this may have occurred, he speculated that “Since every teacher had their own schedule, it didn’t line up with all of the other teachers, and since all of the ELD students were from different teachers, we encountered schedule conflicts which resulted in us being pulled out of class”.

Although it seemed that the ELD program that Martin experienced seemed to possess its own set of issues, Martin did not feel that it was a complete failure and claimed that he was “somewhat successful” in terms of completing the program. Additionally, Martin’s ELD program did grant students some flexibility. “Every year there was a test that you could take to complete the program. If you passed, you were placed in regular English courses with the rest of the students. There were quite a few that were able to test out but there were a lot of students who fell behind. From those who did pass after cramming preparation, I remember a lot of them struggling with English courses later on in school.” Essentially, participants did not need to remain in the program if they could prove they were English proficient. However, Martin notes that some of these students did experience English difficulties later on. When asked if there was room for improvement with language education or his program, Martin claimed that “My program was pretty good, but I think it could be better. Schools need to look more into the actual students and how they are learning and decide what is best for them.”

Our next interviewee was a former language education student named Arthur, a 28 year old male who participated in an English as a Second Language program (ESL) from kindergarten to fourth grade in a Los Angeles public school. With Armenian being his first language, the pathway to Arthur’s English learning success is extremely useful for this thesis. When I asked if there were adequate resources or quality teachers to help him transition from Armenian to English, Arthur noted that only speaking Armenian was not an issue because the teachers in the ESL program never had to speak Armenian with him. Arthur noted that, “There was no Spanish speaking in the hour or two that I was there, I only spoke English with them.” This English-only, Proposition 227 mandated program allowed Arthur to acquire English without any Spanish immersion.

Although a more dual-immersed Spanish-to-English program could be useful for Spanish speakers, this English-only program allowed someone like Arthur to solely focus on English learning while he was simultaneously perfecting his native Armenian language. The ESL program achieved this English-only method of instruction by utilizing techniques such as showing photos to students and asking them to translate the contents in English. Other methods included short puzzles and simple vocabulary questions.

In comparison to Martin’s experience, Arthur’s general opinion regarding his time in the program was far more positive. Starting ESL in kindergarten, Arthur noted that “Kindergarten was really hard for me because I couldn’t communicate with anyone. I had to do charades and could only say “hey” and “yeah”.” Arthur went on to highlight the success of his English acquisition experience by saying “I knew zero English and by second grade, I was fluent in the language.” Although Arthur commented on his overall English acquisition success, he claimed that “I was successful, but I didn’t take mental notes at the time. I wasn’t sure if it was ESL that helped me learn English or my surroundings.” He followed up his feelings of improbability by claiming, “Being surrounded by English speakers is what helped me learn, more so than the structured class itself.” This uncertainty of where to attribute English acquisition success was a recurring topic brought about in many of the interviews conducted. In an interview with one of the current teachers in our study, she noted that in her experience as a teacher, she found that it is more likely that her students will acquire English when they are constantly surrounded by the English language outside of the classroom. Our parent interviewee also contributed to this point by claiming that her daughter’s ability to learn Spanish as an English-speaking student was limited since she was not exposed to Spanish at home or anywhere else. Therefore, her daughter was far more unlikely to acquire Spanish in comparison to a Spanish speaking student who is attempting to learn English.

It is also important to contrast the differences between Martin’s and Arthur’s experience in terms of the longevity of the program and exit strategies, or lack thereof. Although Martin was able to test out, Arthur was required to remain in the program, which he later went on to say, “There were times when I would take advantage and was happy to leave but other times it sucked. At one point, it became so casual that I would leave and I would say that I was going to class, even though I wasn’t. Thankfully, no one ever noticed.” In Arthur’s case, there was no opportunity to prove that you could exit the pro-

gram, and in his own words, ESL “became a waste of time”. When evaluating language education, it is important to scrutinize programs that have no exit-strategy, are not properly supervised, and fail to accommodate each student’s developing skills.

Additionally, Arthur reported the same issue that Martin experienced with having to leave class in order to participate in ESL by saying “I think it affected my academics because once or twice a week I had to leave my regular classes to go to ESL. If there was a test or anything going on at the time, I had to skip it.” He also claimed that “If you’re removed from class to be placed in an ESL class and miss out on crucial information, it can certainly affect your overall grade.” Although Martin and Arthur both claimed that pulling students out of regular instruction for language education classes could be potentially damaging towards a student’s overall academic success, they failed to associate any personal conflicts with the issue. Overall, both Martin and Arthur were successful in the program and only held recommendations for improvement of treatment with other students.

Our third and final former language education student interview was conducted with Julie, a 19 year old Hispanic female who was tasked with learning English from kindergarten through third grade. The form of which she was taught English was a dual-immersion program (otherwise known as “TWI”) which allowed for exit tests if students met the necessary requirements. In this particular type of program, Julie mentioned that “They taught all subjects in different languages and afterwards students would return to their main school work.” Amongst all three students, Julie’s experience seemed to be the most positive. Her only comments for improvement involved the issue of children leaving their regular classes to learn English and the overall problem of not having enough quality time with teachers. “Sometimes we would come in late to social studies or art, which wasn’t that bad since it’s not English or Math, but it was free time that we missed out on. At the time, I didn’t know what I was missing.” She also stated, “When the teachers would take us out, they would extend the lesson the next day because some students couldn’t comprehend it. This was good for us but was frustrating for other students who wanted to move forward.”

Towards the end of her interview, Julie divulged her opinions and experience considering the teachers which were assigned with helping her learn English. She mentioned that all English learning students in the school were assigned to the same teacher and there was no other option. Although she enjoyed her time with the teacher, she noted that “Looking back as an adult, I couldn’t imagine how difficult it must

have been to teach English to an entire school of students who didn’t know the language. I’m sure parents were also placed in a difficult position because the school provides no other options for their child. If the teacher is substandard, you’re stuck with them.”

### *Current Teachers*

Our first current teacher interview was conducted with Mary, a kindergarten teacher of both Spanish and English-speaking students. Within her classroom, Mary instructs her children in English and Spanish, a dual-immersion (TWI) method of instruction. Mary noted that “Some students are dominant in English and some are dominant in Spanish. I teach them in the same class.” Since Mary has been a kindergarten teacher in the same school for nearly 15 years, she has seen major changes in the forms of language education being taught. She stated, “It’s changed. We used to solely teach bilingual education which consisted of more Spanish instruction throughout the day and then an additional 45 minutes of instruction in their native language. Today, half of the class is taught in Spanish and the other half is taught in English. This is our sixth year implementing dual language and it’s working well.” However, although Mary claimed that the dual-immersion implementation has been great for her students, she still stated, “I wish we could return to the old bilingual program, although the dual language program is good, I think it’s harder for teachers to teach dual language. We simply do not have enough time in the day. We are tasked with teaching everything twice and it is sometimes harder for us. For example, if I teach math in the afternoon, students will get math in English and then next week they will get math in Spanish. No one is getting a full day’s worth of their native language, which requires additional explanation for some students. This is good for students, but it is harder for teachers to accommodate everyone and still get through the items of the day.” Although this presents an issue to Mary as an instructor, she still praises the current program for the rewards it provides to the students. According to Mary, “My students end up acquiring a second language ninety percent of the time. For all of my students, whether they are native English or Spanish speakers, they are provided with amazing opportunities in the future due to dual-immersion and I am proud to be a part of that.”

Our next interviewee was Kim, a second grade dual-immersion teacher in Los Angeles County who teaches fourth grade in both English and Spanish. During this interview, I noticed that Kim’s feelings towards dual-immersion were similar to the dis-

cussion shared with our parent interviewee (which will be discussed later). That being, a majority of the conversation focused on the ineffectiveness of dual-immersion for English-speaking students. Kim described her concerns by stating “Since we implemented dual-immersion, I noticed that this has greatly helped my Spanish-speaking students but has not helped my English-speaking students. I feel that most of my Spanish-speaking students are more exposed to English throughout their daily lives and are already in the process of solidifying their English acquisition. My English students are forced to speak Spanish in order to learn basic concepts and I can see them struggling, especially those who joined the program at an older age.”

Kim also discusses the lack of proper resources in great detail by claiming, “In terms of inadequate resources, availability of bilingual teachers is a major issue. Since dual-immersion requires that every student is taught two languages, it’s difficult to find bilingual teachers who can capture the needs of all our students. This may change in the future with newly credentialed staff, but in its current state, most teachers are not fluent enough to provide this. As a result, the bilingual teachers we do have are stretched thin and some students potentially fall through the cracks.” In comparison to all of our interviews, Kim’s responses primarily focused on the problems she encounters with language education daily. Of all seven interviewees, she is one of two who did not have a single positive remark in regards to her relevant language education experience (the other being Carol, our only parent).

### *Parents*

Carol, the only parent we were able to interview with for this thesis, primarily focused on the negative experience she and her daughter had with language education. Carol’s daughter Amy is an English-speaking student who encountered language education in Azusa, California from first to third grade. In order to accommodate the large majority of Spanish-speaking students at the school, Amy was placed in dual-immersion classes with Spanish speakers. According to Carol, this greatly affected Amy academically. “Since Amy was placed in these dual-immersion classes, she was forced to stay behind while other students were attempting to grasp the English language portion of the class.” Carol continued to say that Amy “did not pick up any new information” and most students “were very behind”. Additionally, Carol pointed out that Amy was unable to fine tune her English language. “At first, I thought that it would be a great thing for her to learn Spanish. I then re-

alized two years too late that dual-immersion was the issue and I quickly pulled her out of the school”.

As Carol’s interview continued, the topic of language education itself was no longer the main topic of conversation, and instead, she discussed the experience she encountered when she attempted to voice her concerns. “When I approached the teacher about my daughter’s issues with dual-immersion, she was offended and thought I was attacking her as a person. When I finally talked to the principal, he suggested that I opt to move Amy forward by one grade and insinuated that I was a racist. At the time, she had already placed one grade above and it made absolutely no sense to move her up further when I knew that she wasn’t prepared for that. My only option was to take Amy out of the school.” Although interpersonal interactions vary in opinion from all parties included, it is still important to include this interaction in our thesis, for it may explain some of the controversies associated with language education as a whole. Later in our interview, Carol went into great depth about her recommendations for language education and noted that schools should “group children by language and skill level, so no one falls behind”. As we delved into more opinion-based questions concerning nationalized language and Proposition 227 and 58, she was extremely open-minded and enthusiastic in regards to the acquisition of new languages. However, she did not believe dual-immersion was the best option by claiming that “This experience affected my daughter negatively, which required additional tutoring to bring her up to speed with her classmates.”

### *Current Students*

Our final interview was conducted with Max, a 15 year old male who came to the United States from Mexico at nine years old and attended a dual-immersion program at a La Habra public school. According to Max, “I fell behind in most of my classes because I was not prepared for dual-immersion.” As a result, Max was required to retake his second grade year. Max noted, “I felt alone most of the time and that I was the only student who couldn’t keep up.” When I asked Max what his issues are with dual-immersion, he claimed that “I wasn’t exposed to enough English throughout the day and my parents don’t speak English. When I come home, I don’t have any help with homework or anything else.” Max continued to discuss the issues he experienced by not being exposed to enough English throughout the day and now as a 15 year old teenager. Max claims that “It would have been better if the school taught me more English when I was younger because I think I would

have learned faster. Also, I think I entered the program too late so I missed most of the basic concepts.” Throughout most of Max’s interview, he primarily focused on the issues associated with not naturally progressing through dual-immersion and the difficulties of not having English-speaking parents at home.

### *Opinion-Based Questions: Nationalized Language*

When our interviewees were asked, “Do you believe that English should be the official language of the United States? Could you explain your reasoning?” various responses ensued. Of our three former students, only Arthur did not have an opinion. He felt that he was “biased” in his reasoning because he already knows English. However, Julie claimed that, “I believe there should be one language in the United States. We need to communicate with different people belonging to different cultures and sharing one universal language would achieve that.”

When asking our current teachers for their opinion on the possibility of English becoming our nation’s language, Mary and Kim differed greatly from one another. Mary strongly advocated against English being the official language and stated, “We are a melting pot and there are so many languages here. We should all learn as many languages as possible and a nationalized language may change that.” In comparison, Kim felt strongly in support of English becoming the nation’s official language and directly correlated this with the issues she encounters with language education in her career. She stated that, “I believe that if we had a nationalized language, we would be able to properly position our education system and professional institutions. Currently, this confusing spectrum of language identity is causing events like the passage of Proposition 58 to take place.” When Martin, our only current student, and Carol, our only current parent, was asked the same question, both responded with a simple “yes” to the question.

### *Opinion-Based Questions: Assimilation of Language*

Our interviewees were also prompted with the following question which consisted of a brief definition introduction and follow-up controversial inquiry. “The definition of assimilation is “to make similar”. Do you believe that Americans should be assimilated, or “made similar”, in regards to language? Could you explain your reasoning?” Considering the term “assimilation” holds a certain degree of negativity, we

were able to predict that some of our responses would be passionate in nature. Of all seven responses to this prompt, only Arthur, our former student, and Mary, our current teacher, responded strongly in opposition of language assimilation. Arthur noted that, “What makes America special is its diversity. If language is assimilated and we are expected to speak one universal language, America will lose some of that diversity. Diversity is responsible for different forms of thinking and that is a direct result of coming from a different background and knowing different things.” Mary, our current teacher, contributed to this ideal by stating, “We should all have the right to learn any language. If the opportunity arises and it is available, we are liberated. More language means more opportunity.”

In comparison, five of our seven respondents believed that students should be assimilated into speaking English. In comparison to Arthur and Mary who focused primarily on the collective good of the nation, a majority of our respondents were more concerned with individual opportunity. In Max’s response, he directly relates language assimilation to his father’s current career prospects by claiming that, “Knowing English would help my dad find a better job, but he doesn’t know it and he’s more limited in terms of what jobs he can apply for.” In Kim’s response, she passionately stated, “I believe that language is the common denominator amongst people and if we do not advocate for a shared language, those who do not learn it will be disadvantaged. It is important to learn and imply the language that will be employing and educating you in the future. Therefore, I am a strong advocate for language assimilation in terms of mandatory English language learning.”

### *Opinion-Based Questions: Proposition 227 and Proposition 58*

In one of our final questions, interviewees were asked, “Do you have an opinion on Proposition 227 and Proposition 58?” Of all seven interviewees, only Martin, our current student, opted to skip the question. When assessing the remaining answers, four out of six stated in their response that they “did not have enough information” to answer the question, but continued to voice opinions. We will not list these opinions in our findings considering they may be categorized as responses based on misinformation. Therefore, only two valid opinions can be extracted from this particular prompt.

The only two responses which can be extracted from this question came from Kim, our current teacher, and Julie, our former student. Kim stated, “I personally voted against Proposition 58, although the



California Teachers Association supported it. I knew that my school would not be able to properly implement greater language education reforms, so I advocated against it. I still believe that we should have continued to enhance the quality of language education that we already had." In comparison, Julie noted, "I know that many teachers in Los Angeles want the best for the students and I think they have the right idea to give back local control. However, I am concerned that school districts with inadequate funding could fall by the wayside. I'm also fearful that we now lack any statewide language education structure. How will we be able to study this longitudinally?" Julie concluded her statement with, "I believe that an adaptation from the former Proposition 227 would have been a better choice. Since Proposition 58 has passed, we are now removing all of the progress we made."

### Conclusion:

Amongst the various findings that were collected during our interviews, many results were discovered to better support our hypothesis. Now that our results have been reported, we can correlate our final conclusions. It is important to note that each interviewee provided different pieces of information that have been extremely useful for this thesis and support our argument that language education is not simply "good for everyone" and if executed incorrectly, can negatively affect both California students and teachers. Therefore, the general ideology that a complex California language education system is good for culturally diverse students and teachers, contradicts the findings in our thesis. Although our study did not attempt to focus on whether a more general application of language education is more effective in comparison, we can still draw the conclusion that more various language education programs can potentially hinder the performance of our teachers and students. For the conclusion of this thesis, we will focus on some of these hindrances in detail by those who have been directly impacted by them.

#### *Language Education & Age*

From the interviews conducted with our former students, we discovered a connection between students and the complications they experience due to the age of which they enter a particular language education program. In the case of those we interviewed, the student's lack of progression throughout the program was a major issue, which was a direct result of them entering the program too late. In the case of Martin's friends who were also in the ELD program

and entered later, they were placed in the same beginner's class as kindergarten students, regardless of their academic standing. Although these students are essentially learning together, being one of the older students implies that they are not being as equally challenged, considering the majority of the class is learning at a much lower level. This disproportionate age difference amongst students could certainly affect a student's ability to retain information at the academic level which best suits their corresponding age.

On the other hand, if you enter a program after it has already begun, such as Max did, this can also be extremely problematic. When Max started his dual-immersion program, the remaining students had already been immersed into the program and had acquired far more English than Max did. As a result, Max was extremely ill equipped to handle the English half of the class and his grades suffered. For someone such as Max who was still learning English while simultaneously struggling with mathematics, it was difficult for him to learn math in English, considering he hardly knew the language. When formulating ideas for improved language education programs, it is imperative to keep age between students and age of program initiation in mind so that no student is left behind or placed into scenarios they cannot overcome.

#### *Prioritizing Language Education*

One of the largest reoccurring issues we discovered in our interviews with former students was how many of them were pulled from regular class to attend language education. According to our respondents, they had to "sacrifice" whatever they were currently learning to learn English for an hour or two. For our former students, this included missing out on lessons in math, English, social science, science, or art. According to our respondents, you would need to miss class, whether or not you had an exam or more pressing commitments. This clear and present issue of extracting children from class to prioritize another, pressures students to sacrifice particular subjects and cram lessons that they may have missed. If a teacher is understanding and notices that a portion of the class had to skip lecture for language education, they could possibly teach the lesson again but this is to the detriment of the students who had already learned it.

#### *Exit Strategies and Completion Tests*

In our interviews with Martin and Arthur, we discovered that although Martin was able to complete his ELD program and join the other children in regular English classes, Arthur was not provided the same option and had to stick with language education until the very end of the program. When discussing



this “exit test”, as Martin referred to it, he did not go into too much detail in regards to the parameters of the completion test, however, he claimed that some students still struggled after passing it. In Martin’s case, he was successful in English after he exited the program, although some students fell behind. In Arthur’s case, there was no exit strategy for students and as a result, he was pulled out of his other classes for a program that he felt he had already completed.

When assessing this issue, I noticed there were two major considerations to notice. First, schools must develop exit-strategies for students. Second, if they do develop an exit-strategy such as a completion exam, it must be standard enough so that if a student passes, they have proven that they are less likely to struggle later. In the case of Martin’s friend, they were able to cram studying in order to pass the exam, so they can return to regular English classes. Most of these students which Martin mentioned, encountered several challenges later on due to the low level of difficulty associated with the test. Therefore, if applying the findings of this thesis, schools may consider developing exit strategies for language education programs which include completion exams that are only passable if the student has acquired a longitudinal understanding of the English language.

### *Teacher Ability & Lack of Available Staff*

When discussing California education, lack of adequate resources continues to be a pressing issue in the state of California and its public schools. During our interviews, many respondents noted that their language education teachers were tasked with teaching all of the language education students in their particular school. Although not every school solely has one language education teacher, we must question those who do not have enough teachers available. According to our literature, the availability of bilingual teachers is a major issue in California, which further adds to this point. Additionally, students of smaller minority groups such as Arthur, with an Armenian background, may have even greater issues with this dilemma. For someone such as Arthur, the lack of available teachers able to synthesize English with his native Armenian language is even more difficult to find.

During our interviews with current teachers, both noted the difficulties they face while attempting to capture the needs of all of their students. Mary expressed her positive opinions in regards to dual-immersion but continued to convey her frustrations towards teaching students in both English and Spanish. Mary described how difficult it is to help each student who requires her additional assistance

while speaking to them in their own language, all the while, not being able to speak to the majority. For Mary and Kim, this is a necessary skill that teachers must have, although it becomes a very cumbersome task and delays their instruction. In Kim’s case, she focused primarily on the negative feelings she has towards dual-immersion and noted the same problems which Mary described. Overall, although positive attributes linked with dual-immersion were noted, the interviews were overwhelmingly negative towards to this particular program since it is difficult for teachers to accommodate each student and, in the case of Carol, can potentially hold back English-speaking students and in the case of our teachers, hold back the progression of the classroom.

### *English-only vs Dual Language*

Proposition 227 provided an English-only method of instruction for students. For Arthur, our former Armenian student, he was taught English under a Proposition 227 mandated, English-only program. During our interview, Arthur was asked if the lack of Armenian instruction made it more difficult for him to acquire English. He claimed that the language education teacher never spoke Armenian with him, but rather, taught him English only. For someone such as Arthur who speaks a very uncommon language in California, English-only instruction was extremely beneficial for him. If Arthur were to have been placed in a dual language program that taught English and Spanish, this success may have never occurred, as is the case of Amy, the daughter of our parent interviewee who was placed in dual-immersion and regressed in terms of language and academic performance. Overall, for students who speak uncommon languages that are not English, English-only instruction provides a common ground for them without introducing a third language (mostly, Spanish).

## **Conclusion**

From the interviews we conducted in this thesis, many results were found and many interesting topics were discussed concerning students, teachers, and the future of language education in California. These conversations highlighted numerous conditions in California that require further consideration when creating new language programs in California K-12 schools. Since the passage of Proposition 58, school districts now hold local control over the language education programs they choose to implement, which could potentially give rise to new issues associated with our already complex California language edu-

cation system. Although these new locally controlled programs must be evaluated annually by local parents and district officials, one can only hope that they will bear in mind past mistakes and currently flawed processes associated with various language education programs. These issues include student age and age of initiation, the expectation of students to sacrifice one class over another, the need for language education programs to have exit strategies, the issues related to poorly constructed completion tests, the limits of our teachers, the lack of available staff, and the concern for students who speak uncommon languages to not be lost in the shuffle of dual-immersion.

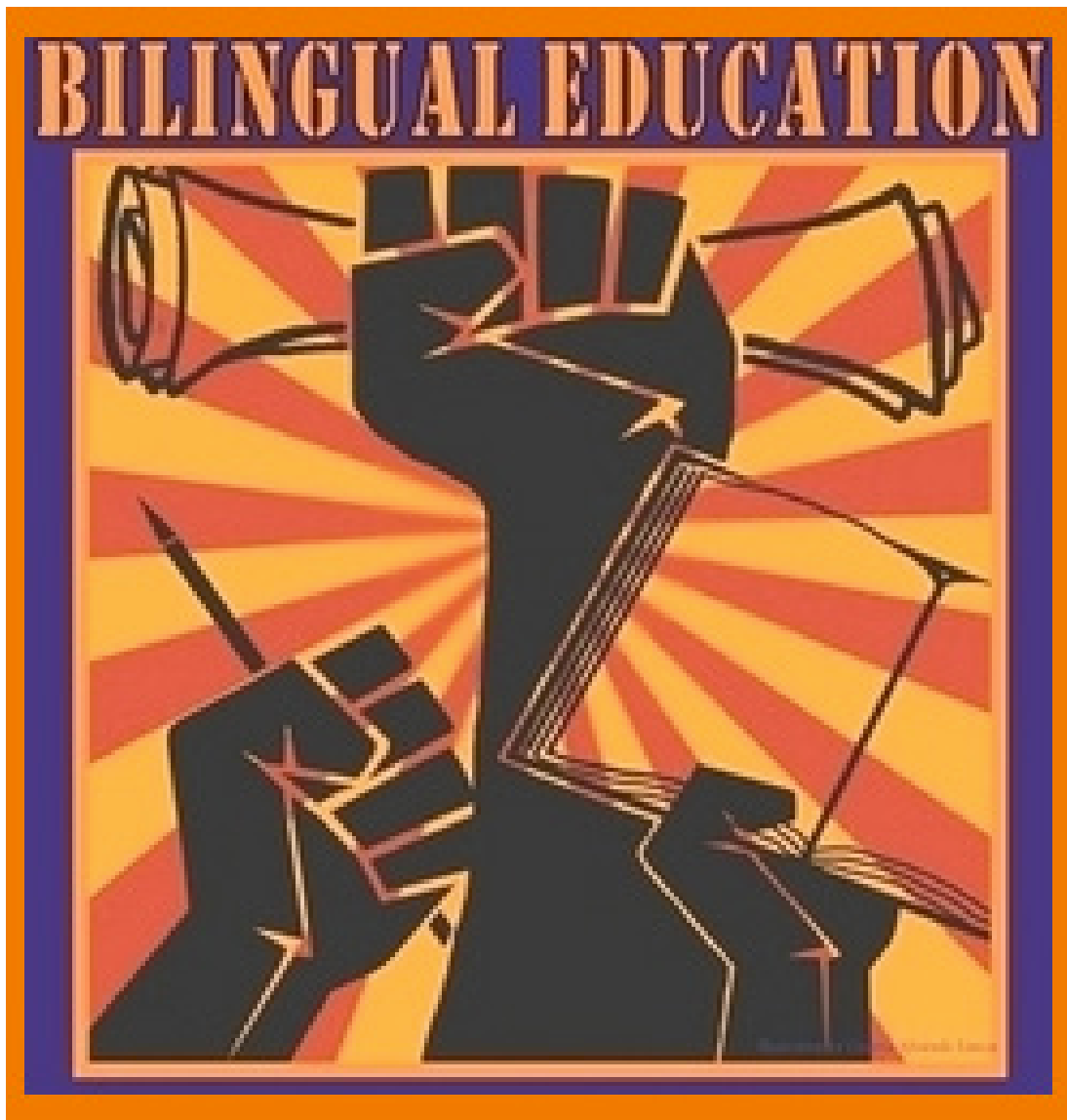
The main goal of this thesis was not to paint an image of what a successful language education program looks like, but rather, take note of the mistakes and shortcomings of former and current language education programs which have arisen as a result of

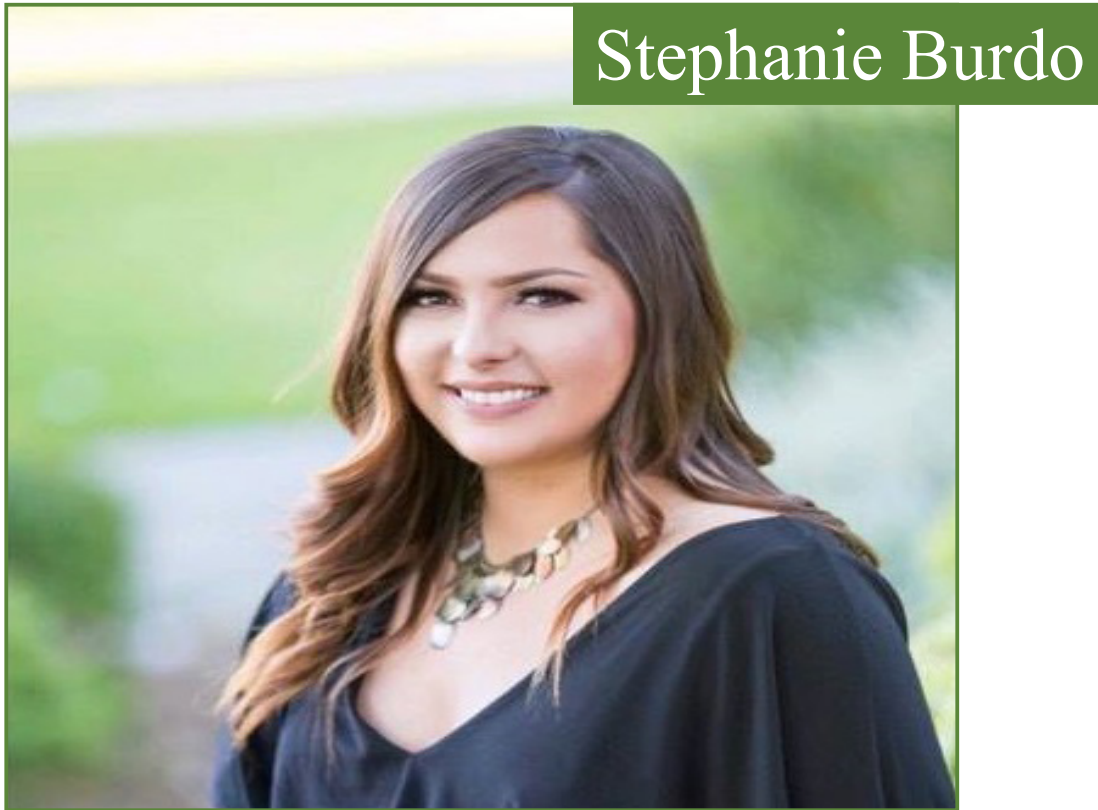
our complex language education system. Now that we have gathered opinions on nationalized language and language assimilation from those who have directly been affected by language education, we can now attempt to tackle the debate moving forward. Additionally, as we conclude this thesis, we can confirm our hypothesis that California's complex language education system produces complications for California students and teachers. As language education programs continue to diversify and local school districts implement their own teaching methods and programs, it is imperative to consider what we have discovered and continue to conduct qualitative research on the experiences of our students, teachers, and parents in regards to language education so that each student has a chance at success and no teacher is expected to achieve impossible results.

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