

AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
TEACHER AND STUDENT  
VIEWS, ATTITUDES AND  
BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS  
ENGLISH IN  
ASTURIAS, SPAIN

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Across Spain (and many other countries in the EU), there has been increasing interest in recent years in the creation of bilingual programmes integrating the/a home language with English. These programmes are seen as a departure from the traditional monolingual classroom paradigm (or in areas with two home languages, such as the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, a departure from a bilingual model to a trilingual one). Within Spain, the decision to create bilingual learning programmes has been devolved to regional governments and as such, has been implemented to varying levels of saturation. Certain areas, such as Madrid, have had bilingual learning since the early part of this century, which has grown steadily. In other regions, movement towards bilingual/trilingual programmes that include English has been at a less intense pace, as regional governments faced the challenge of not having enough subject teachers with sufficient levels of English to fill the role of a bi/trilingual teacher. Bi/trilingual programmes have grown slowly as more teachers were trained, or teachers improved their English to meet each regional government's specific B2, and in some areas later C1, requirements to teach on the programme.

The bilingual programme<sup>1</sup> in Asturias was created for learners aged 6 to 16. It has been introduced in stages in both state and state-subsidised private schools, and any student in those schools is able to join the programme. In 2017, the Asturian government contracted Trinity College London to test the English language proficiency of a sample of students across the region. Trinity agreed to provide the exam and the examiners, and the Asturian Education Ministry provided the funding. The aim was to gauge the level of English in Primero de la ESO students (12-13 years old) and Primero de Bachillerato students (16-17 years old). The Primero de la ESO students took GESE Grade 3 and the Primero de Bachillerato students took GESE Grade 5. Alongside this, Trinity offered to investigate views, attitudes and beliefs regarding learning and using English. The study aimed to better understand the role of bilingual and non-bilingual English-Spanish classes in Asturias.

## 1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

The study set out to collect views from both teachers and students. The teachers were asked for their opinions regarding the curriculum, students' performance, learning goals, methods, use of resources and interests. Specifically, the following lines of enquiry were built into the survey:

- ▶ Teachers' views of the curriculum learning priorities for English
- ▶ Teachers' views of the use of English for communicating in the class
- ▶ Teachers' views of learner independence in their English classes
- ▶ Teachers' views of their students' learning priorities in English classes
- ▶ Teachers' views of what their students enjoy/don't enjoy doing when learning English
- ▶ Teachers' views of future needs and priorities
- ▶ Teachers' views of possible future improvements/changes to the English language teaching system in Asturias

The research focus for the students was to elicit their views regarding their interests in English, their skills and their learning aims. The study incorporated the following lines of enquiry:

- ▶ Students' age, years spent studying English, school
- ▶ Favourite language
- ▶ Any experience of and attitude towards bilingual education
- ▶ Students' view of their skills, abilities, strengths, weaknesses in English
- ▶ What they enjoy/do not enjoy doing in English
- ▶ What activities they do in English
- ▶ Their use of technology in English

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<sup>1</sup> Despite Asturias having its own regional language of Asturian in addition to Castilian, the English-Castilian programme is known in Asturias as the 'bilingual programme'.

### 1.3 PARTICIPANTS IN THE SURVEY

To ensure a representative cross section of learners for their programme of English language assessment, the Asturian government selected 10 schools from across the region. The schools selected were a mix of schools with bilingual programmes and schools that taught English as a foreign language using the non-bilingual traditional approach. From these schools, the Asturian government randomly selected students to participate. The students who took part in the assessment programme were invited to take part in the survey after they had completed their assessment. Students in the project were aged either around 12 years old and in 'Primero de la ESO' (the first year of the ESO school programme) or around 16 years old and in 'Primero de Bachillerato' (the first year of the Bachillerato programme). Teachers from the schools selected by the Asturian government for the assessment programme were invited to take part in the survey along with some who had helped to organise the testing programme.

### 1.4 COLLECTING SURVEY DATA

#### Creating the survey

The first stage of the data collection process for this research was to create an online survey for both the teachers and the students to complete. To create the surveys, the research aims for the two research populations, the teachers and the students, were first identified and defined. Survey questions were written in draft form and then transferred onto an online platform (SurveyMonkey, professional version). The drafts and online surveys were created following good practice principles in survey design (item writing, survey flow, response pathways, mitigating risk of response bias, data processing and storage). Once created, the teacher and student surveys were sent to Trinity's resident colleague for the Asturias region, Manuel Vidal, and his team for feedback. The data collection instruments were piloted by Manuel and two staff members from the Asturian Education Ministry, whose agreement was required before proceeding to the administration of the survey.

For the teachers, the survey contained 16 questions spread over five pages. Questions were a mix of quantitative, usually Likert-type scale items, of between four and five options per item, plus optional space to add comments. The teacher survey was written entirely in English, both instructions and items. For the students, a similar survey format was used, with 11 Likert-type scale items of between four and five options spread over six pages, but the entire survey was written in Spanish, both the instructions and all items. The final Spanish version of the survey was a translation by Manuel Vidal from the English original into Spanish. Care was taken, especially with the student survey, to ensure that no complex or abstract concepts were included and that all instructions were transparent and unambiguous.

#### Administration of the survey

All respondents were assured that all data would be collected anonymously and that they could leave the survey at any point. They were also advised who to contact if they wanted further details about the data or data security. Since the students were below the age of legal maturity, permission for them to complete the survey had previously been sought from a parent or guardian. A copy of the explanation to the parents can be seen in appendix 1.

After taking their GESE exam, the students were asked to complete the survey at a nearby computer in the school. A set of instructions was given to the students on-screen before they began. This can be seen in appendix 2. The survey took the students an average of four minutes and 30 seconds to complete. The teachers accessed the survey via an email link sent to them from their school administrator. Thirty-two teachers responded to the survey, from all 10 schools. The survey took the teachers on average 10 minutes to complete. As is common with most surveys, some respondents did not complete every question, leading to slightly uneven response data in the findings presented below.

#### Follow-up group discussion with teachers

Following the closure of the survey, early statistics were calculated and prepared for presentation. The researcher then travelled to Asturias to join a scheduled meeting organised between the Asturian Education Ministry and local teachers with an interest in bilingual education, including the 32 who had completed the survey. When asked, the teachers indicated that approximately half of them had taught in a bilingual programme.

After the education officials had spoken, they left the room, leaving the researcher and the teachers alone to discuss the initial findings of the survey and their views. This hour's discussion was recorded and once again, teachers were advised who would have access to the recording, what it would be used for and how it would be kept secure. They were provided with an email address for all enquires. Teachers were given the option to not participate and to leave the room at any point during the recording. The discussion walked the teachers through the data question-by-question, highlighting elements of the data, inviting comment and feedback.

## **1.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Trinity College London would like to thank all of those who facilitated and participated in this research study, especially in Asturias: El Servicio de Evaluación Educativa, La Dirección General de Ordenación Académica e Innovación Educativa, La Consejería de Educación y Cultura del Principado de Asturias, and all the teachers and students who kindly gave their time and thoughts.

## 2. Results: teacher backgrounds, views and attitudes

In this section, data from the teacher survey and focus group interview are reported. The data are reported in thematic questions and a short discussion of the data is included within each section. It must be noted that with such a small sample of teachers (n=32) the analysis is limited, and we cannot make large-scale generalisations from the responses gathered. We cannot employ inferential statistics (such as correlations, factorial relationships and reliability measures) to further explore what the data may be telling us and indeed, we cannot, with such a small sample, make claims regarding strongly held differences of opinion or attitudes towards what is taught and how teachers from each school level feel about it. We can, however, use the data as preliminary indicators of opinion. The responses can serve as an initial indicator of areas where teachers may differentiate between ideas and concepts and what value they may put on them. We can align the teachers' responses with the responses from the larger sample of students to see where one view may corroborate another. Finally, the data collected here may inform further, more in-depth research with a larger sample population on a larger scale in the future.

### 2.1 THE TEACHER RESPONDENTS

The first part of the survey asked the teachers about their experience over the last five years of teaching in a bilingual programme. The teachers that responded to the survey were connected to the 10 schools from which the students were drawn, and 32 teachers responded to the survey. The teachers were from a mix of both bilingual and non-bilingual school types, having taught different ages and roughly half having taught students in a bilingual programme:

|   |    |
|---|----|
| In the last five years, I've taught in Primero de la ESO        | 20 |
| In the last five years, I've taught in Primero de Bachillerato  | 18 |
| In the last five years, I've taught in 'Other' (please specify) | 23 |

Where teachers indicated 'Other', they indicated that they had also worked with higher years 2, 3 and 4 in ESO and Bachillerato, with a mix that aligned with the 20/18 split for their first-year teaching.

|   |    |
|---|----|
| In the last five years, I've taught students in a bilingual programme     | 17 |
| In the last five years, I've not taught students in a bilingual programme | 15 |

### 2.2 CURRICULUM LEARNING PRIORITIES FOR ENGLISH

Teachers were asked to identify what they felt were the learning priorities for the Primero de la ESO and the Primero de Bachillerato curricula, choosing between grammar, vocabulary and the four traditional skills. They were invited to provide their judgements using an 'importance scale' created for this survey. When asking teachers to put a value on traditional contents of a language syllabus, it is unlikely that teachers will believe grammar, vocabulary and the teaching of the four skills to be totally irrelevant. For this reason, the importance scale did not include 'of no importance' as it was anticipated that such a point on a scale would not match respondents' opinions. Instead, the lowest point on the scale was *not so important*.

In the survey, the teachers scored each of the options differently, suggesting that the scoring of *not so important* to *really very important* is meaningfully different to teachers. While it cannot be assumed that these options are perfectly equidistant from each other in the minds of respondents, they appear to be sufficiently and consistently distanced that teachers were able to use them to express meaningful degrees of opinion. The scores are given in figures 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 below, in columns in ascending order, according to the weighted mean (calculated from weighted scores of 1 to 4). Within each option, the distribution of scores from *not so important* to *really very important* are indicated by respective column size.

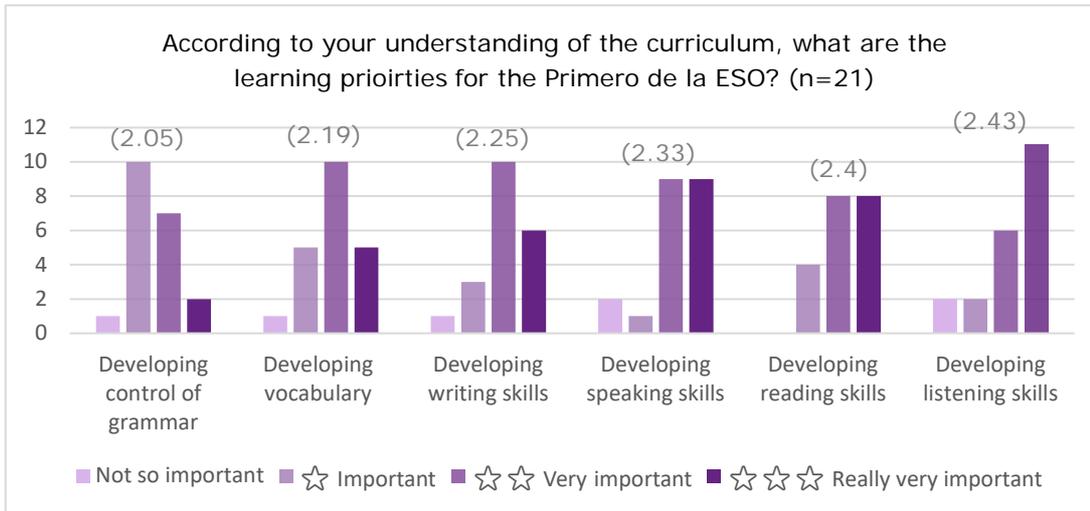


Figure 2.2.1: Learning priorities for Primero de la ESO

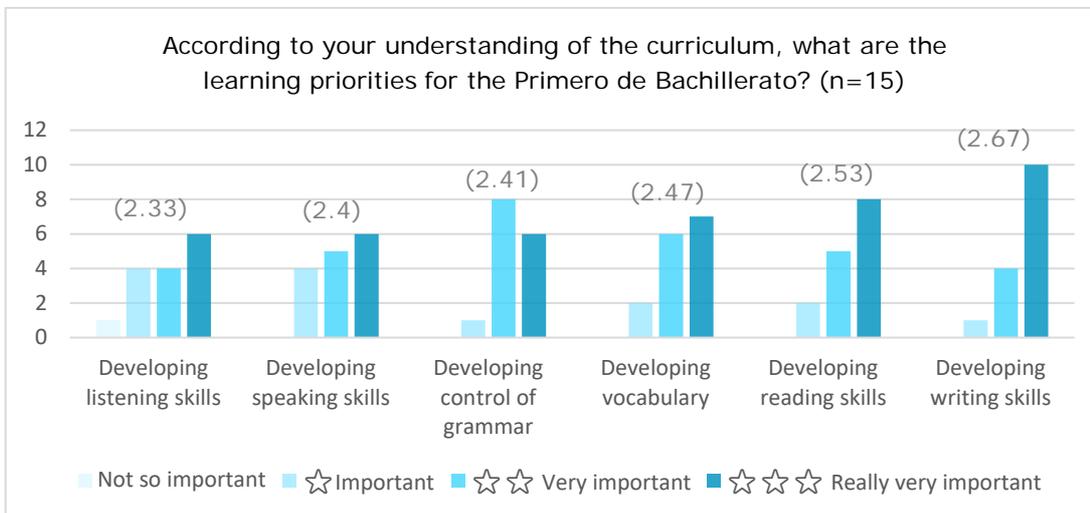


Figure 2.2.2: Learning priorities for Primero de Bachillerato

The data for the Primero de la ESO curriculum suggests that teachers feel the ESO curriculum prioritises listening, then reading and then speaking over grammatical control and vocabulary. An additional comment on the survey from an ESO teacher illustrated this view:

TC1: Being able to communicate is what is really important.

There is an identifiable contrast in the data between the views of the teachers' of ESO and those of Bachillerato, the data for which indicate that the teachers feel listening skills and possibly speaking skills are lowest priority within the curriculum, with writing and reading taking top priority. The suggestion here is that as students mature in the school system in Asturias and change school, the curriculum priorities for learning English may be changing with them. Teacher comments from the focus group support this point:

TC2: Bachillerato is only two years. It used to be four. At the end of it you have an exam which everyone wants to pass to go on to university and that has a lot of weight. It's a written exam. No oral skills or anything.

TC3: Students don't get any recognition for the ability to speak in the PAU/EBAU<sup>2</sup>.

TC4: Students realise in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Bachillerato that they won't need oral skills.

TC5: At the end of Bachillerato you have a test and oral skills are not tested so reading is popular with my students in Bachillerato.

<sup>2</sup> PAU/EBAU is the university entrance exam in Spain

TC6: In 2<sup>nd</sup> year, we start providing them with sample papers, etc. The message is, you need to improve your writing skills.

TC7: As the months go by, the focus starts to shift to what they're going to encounter.

The survey did not investigate whether teachers feel the change is suitable or warranted, but from the survey data and the comments, it appears that teachers are aware of a shift of priorities in the Bachillerato. One final point raised in the focus group came from a teacher commenting on the continuity of the bilingual system in Bachillerato:

TC8: At least in my school, Bachillerato is no longer bilingual. So, you have all sorts of students mixed together in the classroom and some of them did go to some bilingual classes, but others never did.

### 2.3 STUDENT-TEACHER TALKING TIME IN ENGLISH CLASSES

Teachers of the two school types were asked to express how often they feel they and their students speak in their English classes. In the survey scale presented to respondents, four options were offered. Provision was made for teachers to state that their students *never* spoke. Even though this would be unlikely, in certain circumstances, such as when inheriting a class or forming a new class, teachers may experience a period when they feel like their students never speak, and thus this scale option was provided. Above that, conceptually discrete notions of *some of/a lot of/most of the time* were provided and this completed the scale. There was no provision for students to indicate *always*, as it is highly unlikely that students would always be talking in a formal learning situation. Likewise, in the modern communicative language classroom, it is highly unlikely that a teacher would admit to always speaking. It is good survey practice to always exclude redundant options.

The results of the survey are given in the scales below, one each for ESO and Bachillerato. The data are presented in stacked columns, showing the frequency counts for how often the teachers felt they and the students speak.

The response data here show how for both age groups in English classes, most of the teachers surveyed feel that the learners are speaking some of the time, with fewer indicating a lot of the time, and just a few indicating most of the time. Teachers in both school types reported that they spoke a lot or most of the time. The sample size is too small to read too much into the apparent difference between the two school types, but it is fair to summarise that in this survey, Bachillerato teachers report speaking more in class than ESO teachers. These data have a possible connection to the data in 2.1 which indicate the teachers' belief that the teaching of speaking and listening is a lower priority in the Bachillerato curriculum. Several views on this difference were expressed by teachers in the focus groups. First, there was a view that students generally don't like speaking or may have difficulties speaking, or there may be issues of motivation:

TC9: Students try to avoid the use of English in class. They do it if you make them speak.

TC10: Whether or not it's a bilingual class, students resist speaking English.

TC11: Sometimes the students don't have the tools to express their ideas in English. They change to Spanish. For example, when they work in groups, they talk to you in English, but they use lots of Spanish. Common experience. I try not to force them (3<sup>rd</sup> year of ESO). I try to include games to motivate them. I prepare cards, so that they could use Spanish when working in groups, but they must use cards to use English.

TC12: Each group is different. Each year is different. It depends on their own attitude and willingness.

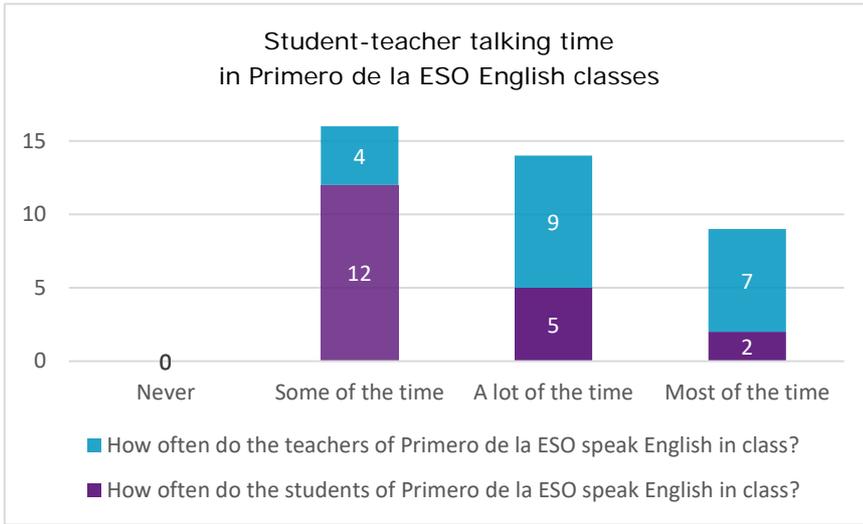


Figure 2.3.1: Student-teacher talking time in Primero de la ESO

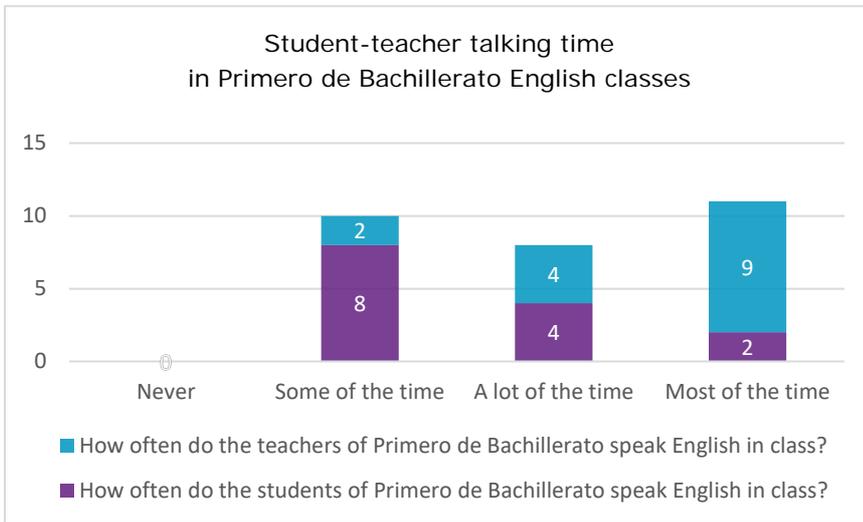


Figure 2.3.2: Student-teacher talking time in Primero de Bachillerato

One teacher distinguished between the nature of the younger ESO classes and the older Bachillerato classes, which may hint at the explanation for teachers possibly talking more at the higher age level:

TC13: There's more pair work and you can play games with students in ESO. But when they get to Bachillerato, it's also the age, social prestige; playing silly games which they used to find funny is not on any more.

TC14: They enjoy speaking activities less in Bachillerato because they become more shy. When they are in ESO, they're more extroverted and like talking about everything. But in Bachillerato, they think they're going to say something wrong. I don't know how to say this thing, so I'd better not talk or the rest of the classmates are going to think that I don't know how to speak English. On the one hand, they are more mature, but on the other hand, they are more shy to talk. They're afraid of making mistakes.

One teacher commented on the use of language assistants in the classroom:

TC15: You can't say in general. It depends on the student, the activity, the teacher, but especially if you have a language assistant...

Teachers also commented on the difference bilingual classes make to the amount the students speak:

TC16: Regarding any difference in students, they tend to ask much more in English, automatically, without thinking. They have been in bilingual programmes since primary, so they're used to responding in English.

TC17: The students are more motivated, and also the teachers. As a bilingual teacher, you feel like it's ok to speak English all the time and you're getting constant feedback. It's less of a fight sometimes - but not always!

TC18: In the bilingual context it's relatively 50/50 writing and speaking.

## 2.4 SELF-SUPPORT: SELF-CORRECTION AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING

In this section, teachers were asked to give their views on their students' abilities to self-correct and learn independently. These are two qualities that have been widely promoted in modern classroom teaching. However, evidence of them happening can be hard to quantify without large-scale observations of classes. In this research, teachers were asked to give their impression of the frequency with which their students can self-correct and learn independently at the two age levels. The data are presented in two sections, first, self-correction in ESO and Bachillerato, followed by learning independently in ESO and Bachillerato. Four options were given to the teachers to reflect no ability to very good ability. The frequency data for the teachers' views of the students' abilities are provided in figures 2.4.1 to 2.4.4.

The data indicate that, in the view of the teachers, the older students are more independent and better equipped to deal with and correct their own mistakes. This would of course align with common sense expectations of a modern curriculum and teaching that older students are better able to self-correct. Teachers indicated that at the level of Primero de la ESO, students were not only weak at self-correcting or learning independently, they did not have the ability to correct their mistakes or learn independently at all. This is in contrast to the students in Primero de Bachillerato, who teachers felt could at least perform some self-correction and have some ability to learn independently. A few comments from the teachers in the focus group enrich the picture: first, regarding the students' age:

TC19: When young students are being spontaneous and speaking, they don't care about the mistakes.

TC20: Spanish students tend to say 'I have 6, 12, etc' I prompt them orally when they make mistakes. Sometimes when they are talking, they correct themselves, but they don't see the mistakes at young ages.

TC21: Older learners they get more confidence.

TC22: Older students have more language for doing.

There were also teacher comments on the context of bilingual learners:

TC23: Bilingual students are much more autonomous in their learning process.

Finally, there were comments on teacher attitudes to mistakes:

TC24: They realise their own mistakes when you make them aware of them.

TC25: I'm not very interested in their oral mistakes, I just want them to communicate and understand.

TC26: I'm not interested if he makes a mistake like 'He have'. All I want is for them to communicate.

TC27: We're listening for fluency and pronunciation. We check clarity of expression. That's more important than grammar mistakes. The message coming through is more important than the grammar being correct.

**Self-correction**

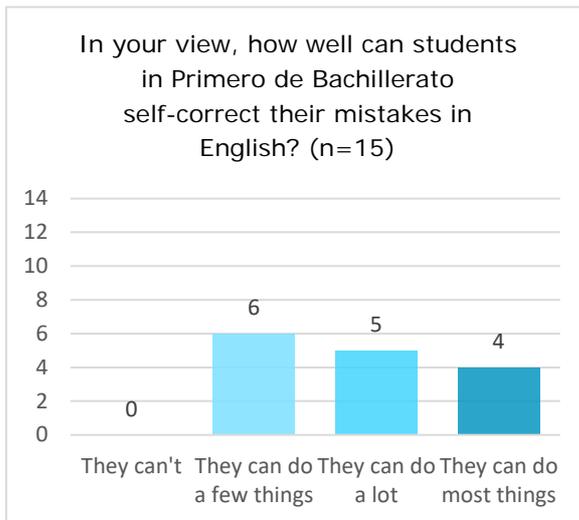
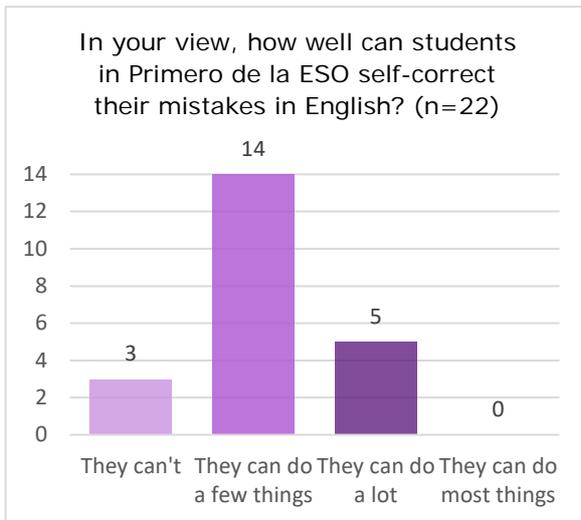


Figure 2.4.1: Student self-correction in Primero de la ESO

Figure 2.4.2: Student self-correction in Primero de Bachillerato

**Learn English independently**

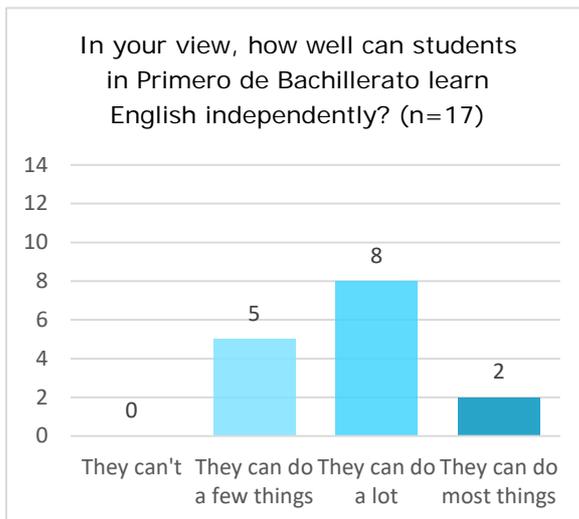
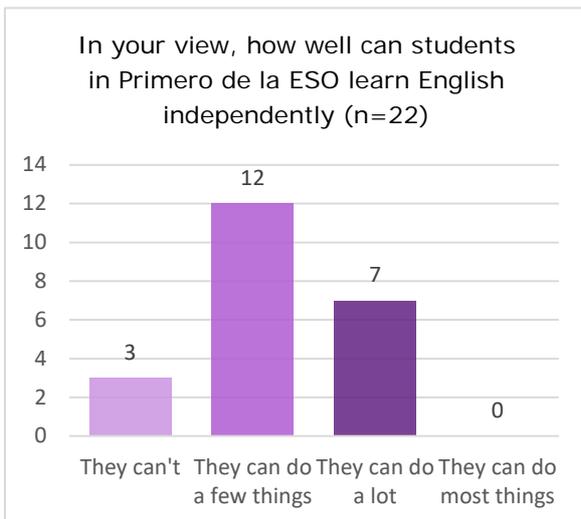


Figure 2.4.3: Student learner independence in Primero de la ESO

Figure 2.4.4: Student learner independence in Primero de Bachillerato

**2.5 WHAT DO STUDENTS ENJOY/NOT ENJOY DOING IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM?**

The modern language classroom can contain an array of activities covering the four skills as well as grammar and vocabulary practice. Increasingly, multimedia in the form of music and video is used. This research aimed to explore teachers' views on the activity types students might enjoy more, or less. In the survey, teachers were provided with options ranging from:

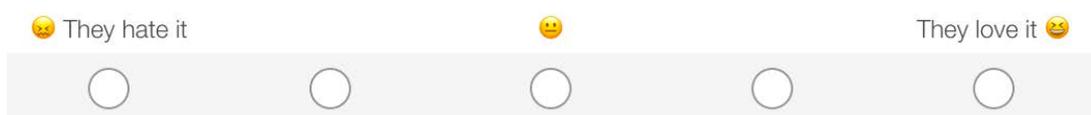


Figure 2.5.1: Love-hate scale used in the survey

The survey did not include a range of graded emotive words, as these can be subject to relative interpretations, and may also not represent conceptually equidistant steps in a respondent's mind, leading to unreliable results when one response is compared against another. For this reason, a five-point semantic differential scale with two opposites of hate and love was used, with representative emoticons, within which, a midpoint was included, marked with a neutral emoticon to conceptually represent neither love nor hate. These scores were weighted 1-5 and the weighted means calculated. The weighted means are the basis of figures 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 below, which represents teachers' views of the least popular and most popular activities for students, in ascending order. The weighted means are given above each column.

The results, even with a small sample, indicate a range of rankings and suggest that the options were meaningfully different to the teachers. At the lowest end, we see what we might term 'traditional formal language learning activities', with *tests, writing, grammar* and *applied studying* seen by the teachers to be the least popular with their students. In the middle range we see *reading, vocabulary, listening* and *classroom speaking* activities with increased popularity. And in the top range, we see the less formal *doing speaking activities, talking to native speakers, listening to English language music* and *watching English language videos, films, TV* taking top spots. The teachers appear to suggest that their students enjoy 'passive English' – watching films and listening to music, which require no productive output. Teachers rate listening to films and music over doing more traditional listening activities, and speaking to native speakers over doing classroom speaking activities. We cannot comment here on the relative learning value of these activities, and we must of course read these data with caution, drawn as they are from a small sample. There is no opportunity here to further explore the statistics to check independence of concepts, any factorial relationships and overall reliability. However, these data indicate what we might see if a larger scale study were conducted as well as how teachers may be deciding what to teach and how to teach it.

The responses from the teachers teaching Primero de Bachillerato were remarkably like their colleagues teaching at younger ages, with teachers differentiating between the activities in an almost identical way, seen in figure 2.5.2. Teachers added several additional comments in the focus groups that explained what is occurring in their classrooms.

#### **About writing:**

TC28: They only do small writings, daily routines, describing pictures. All isolated activities. They don't like to do more.

#### **About reading:**

TC29: Reading activities being higher is related to the exam.

TC30: All the coursebooks provide lots of reading materials and exercises. We use most of them.

#### **About listening:**

TC31: We check listening with stuff from the coursebooks.

#### **About speaking:**

TC32: Students like doing pair work when speaking.

TC33: They like role plays.

TC34: They like simulations, eg making a phone call.

TC35: We do oral tests with our language assistants. For example, a role play, which they perform in front of a class. They like it because it's not themselves. They can pretend, and they don't have to talk about their personal life or tastes or whatever. They just can speak English not worrying about other contents.

TC36: I assign them homework as a speaking skills test that they can do at home. They record themselves and send me an MP4 recording via WhatsApp. They like that. Usually when they want to raise their grades, they say "Hey, can I do that again? Can I give you another recording?" They prefer that to doing a lot of writing like doing essays. I don't know if they find it easier. But they say, "I can do this over again until I'm satisfied with the results and then send it." Whereas in the classroom, and they're doing a written test, they can't do that. And they think they can ask a friend who speaks better English than them who can help them to improve or figure out the pronunciation of certain words.

TC37: I did the same, but I got them to send a video so that they couldn't just be reading. Even though with an MP3 you can distinguish when someone's reading or not.

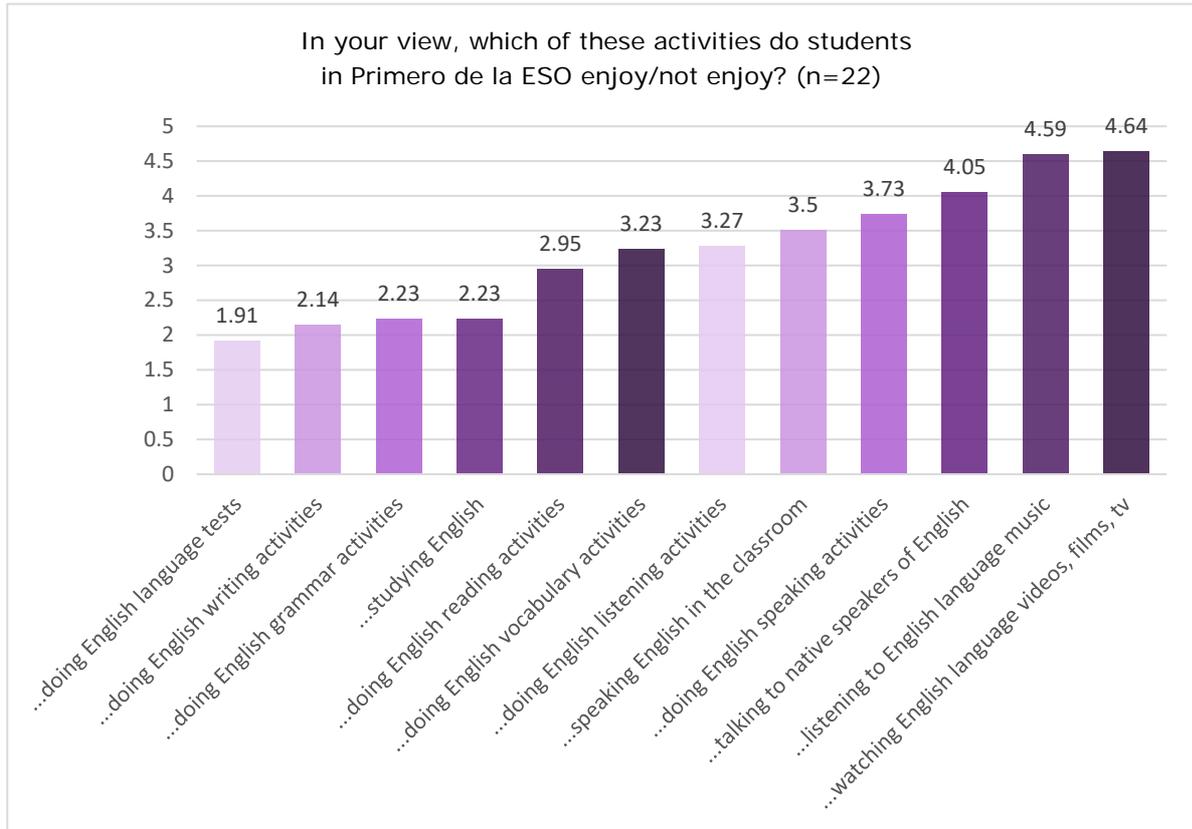


Figure 2.5.2: Which activities do Primero de la ESO students enjoy?

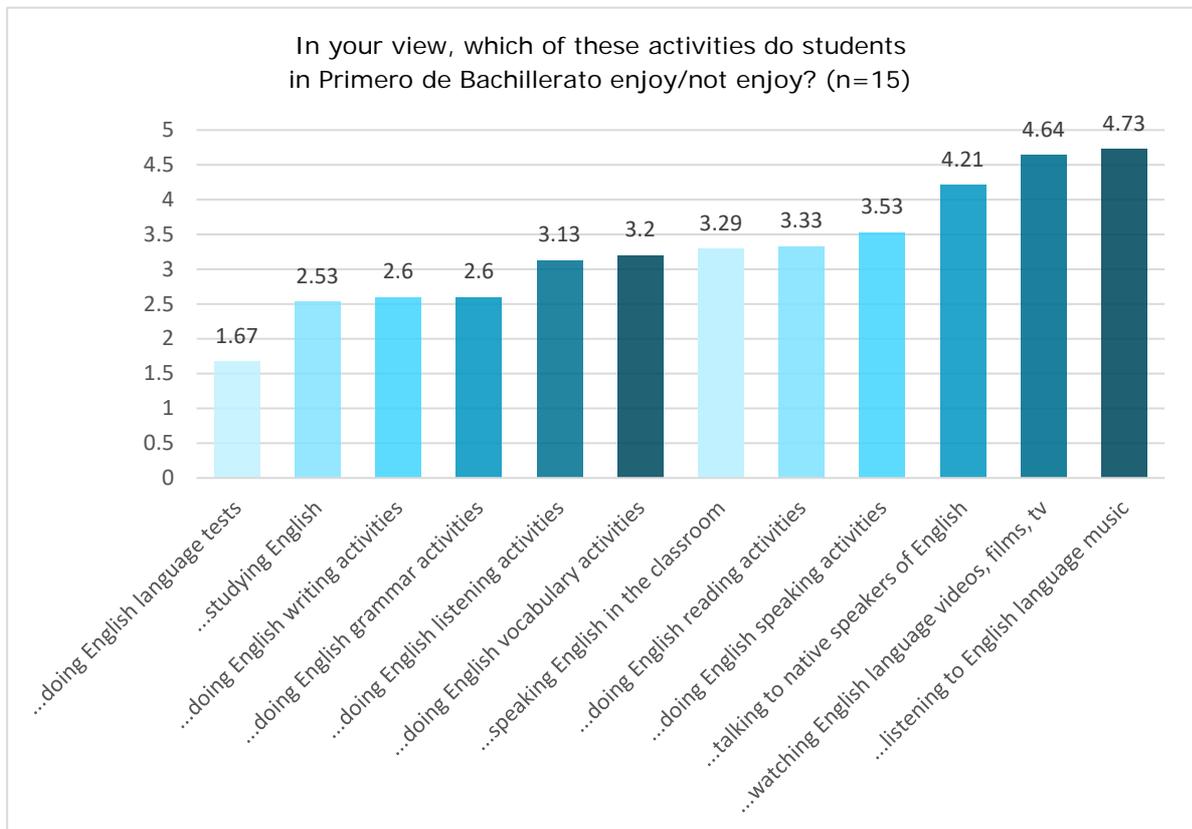


Figure 2.5.3: Which activities do Primero de Bachillerato students enjoy?

TC38: You have proof and it's stored on your computer. And if they ask "how come I got this lousy grade" I'll play it back for you and I'll tell you.

TC39: As much as they like making MP3 tracks for me, they don't like speaking in the classroom, not live, not on the spot. In those years, you're very self-conscious so it's hard for them. It's harder than quiet recording at home where it's very safe.

TC40: We don't avoid doing live speaking activities. It's important for the students to do class presentations in all the subjects.

TC41: Every time, the students in Bachillerato have a speaking exam with me. It doesn't mind that they are not going to have a speaking exam at the end. During the course, I give them an individual speaking exam. It's very, very important.

TC42: Keep in mind that part of the grade for university is the grade that they got in Bachillerato and that's added to the college entrance exam grade. Speaking is still a way of putting a foot in the door.

### **About watching films:**

TC43: I've got a daughter and since she was 12, she started watching the original version of films and TV. She wasn't conscious she was learning English at the same time, it was just something she liked doing. Lots of children are exposed to English in a natural way and it doesn't feel like studying.

TC44: Watching videos is still studying.

## **2.6 REASONS FOR STUDENTS USING ENGLISH**

Teachers were asked to provide a judgement on possible reasons students may have for using English. Four reasons were suggested, and teachers had a binary yes/no choice to indicate whether they believed a purpose existed for their students.

Figures 2.6.1 and 2.6.2 are, for the most part, strikingly similar in trend. Every teacher except one in the survey believes that their students (even those in the lower age group) are using English to understand and use the content of the internet. Given how recently the internet came into being and how long it can take to orient people to learning things independently online, this is remarkable. One ESO teacher commented:

TC45: My students use the internet for listening to music and watching films in English.

We have long known that young people, digital natives, are switched onto using the internet as a resource for everything, but it is worth noting that now language does not appear to be a barrier to accessing the internet. In fact, students are skilling themselves with English to access media. If the teachers' beliefs are true, English is the access point and it has taken on a new instrumental role for young people.

Also remarkable at the opposite end of the scale, is the teachers' view that very few students of either age group choose to use English for communicating with other students or adults. Several comments illustrated this point:

TC46: In cooperative learning groups, students will sometimes revert to Spanish with their peers.

The view that students do not talk among themselves in English contrasts with the teachers' reported view that the students will use English to talk to teachers and to speakers of other languages. Teachers clearly believe that students can and do speak English. Nevertheless, the teachers are reporting an issue well known in language teaching, that learners with the same first language tend to use that language among themselves in informal and unstructured activities. If the results of this research have any wider generalisability, it seems that the current teaching context in Asturias, both bilingual and non-bilingual, has yet to find a way around this problem:

TC47: As I mentioned earlier, some students revert back to Spanish with their peers and a few of the weaker ones tend to speak Spanish most of the time.

TC48: They only speak when you're watching.

TC49: I was surprised the other day because in a bilingual group, they were doing an exercise and you had to find someone who went on holiday this summer, find someone who has pets. And I was explaining everything, they asked everything in English, and they were talking English all the time, but then, when they had to work together, they all of a sudden started saying "Hey, tienes un animal en casa?" It was very, very weird. It was surprising.

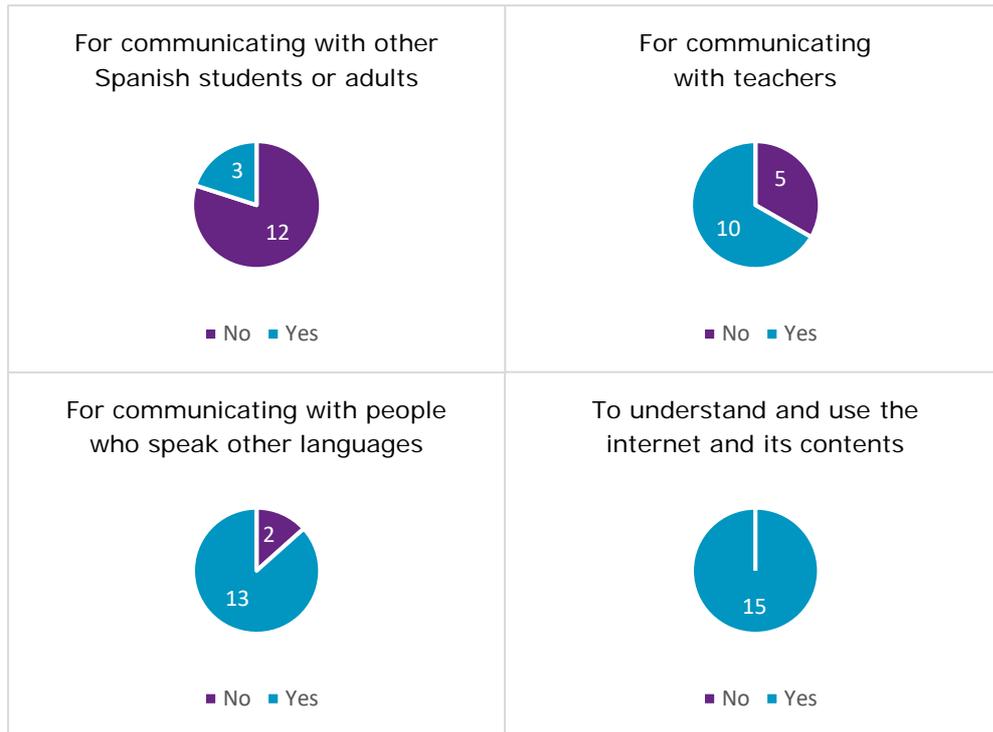


Figure 2.6.1: Reasons for students using English: Primero de la ESO

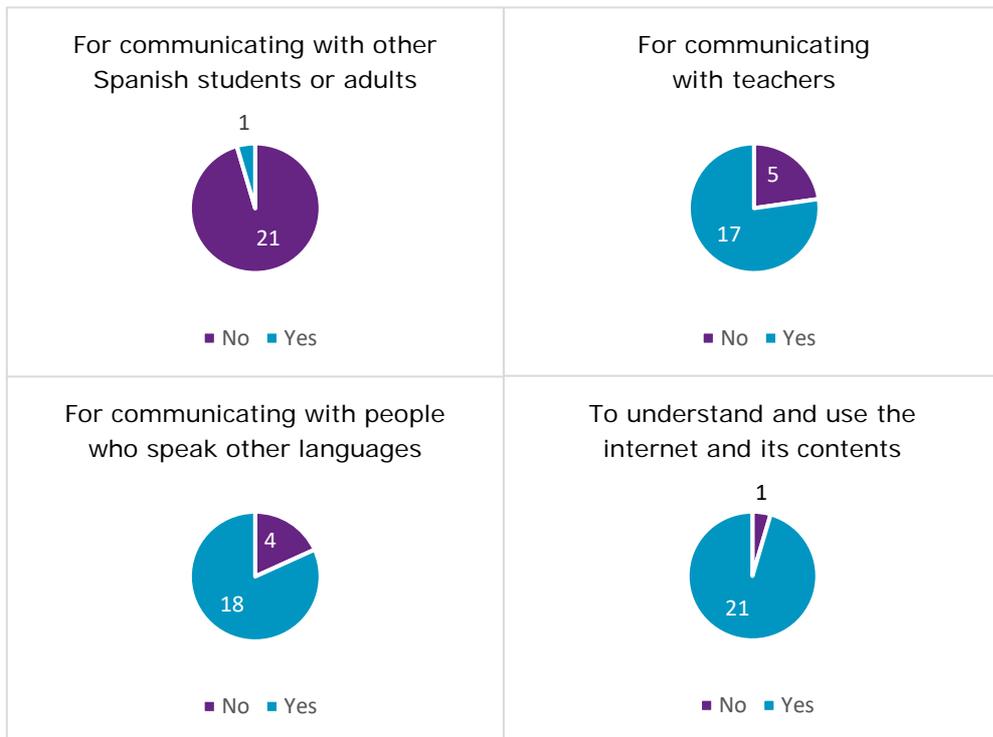


Figure 2.6.2: Reasons for students using English: Primero de Bachillerato

## 2.7 FUTURE LANGUAGE NEEDS

To complement the questions about what teachers do, what learners enjoy and how learners respond, a question was included inviting teachers to express their beliefs on what students will need once they have left school and join the 'real world'. The question asked teachers once more to use the importance scale that they had used in earlier questions. The scale acknowledged that all the options have some importance by giving the lowest point as *not so important*, in preference to 'not important', which would in all likelihood be a redundant option. Additional layers of importance were then added, scaling up to *really very important*. It was felt that this scale would be a closer representation of respondents' mental models and ways of thinking about importance. The response data were calculated into a weighted average which are provided in figure 2.7 and used to sort the options into ascending order of importance. Additionally, within each option, the relevant frequencies of the levels of importance attributed by the teachers are indicated in the coloured bars.

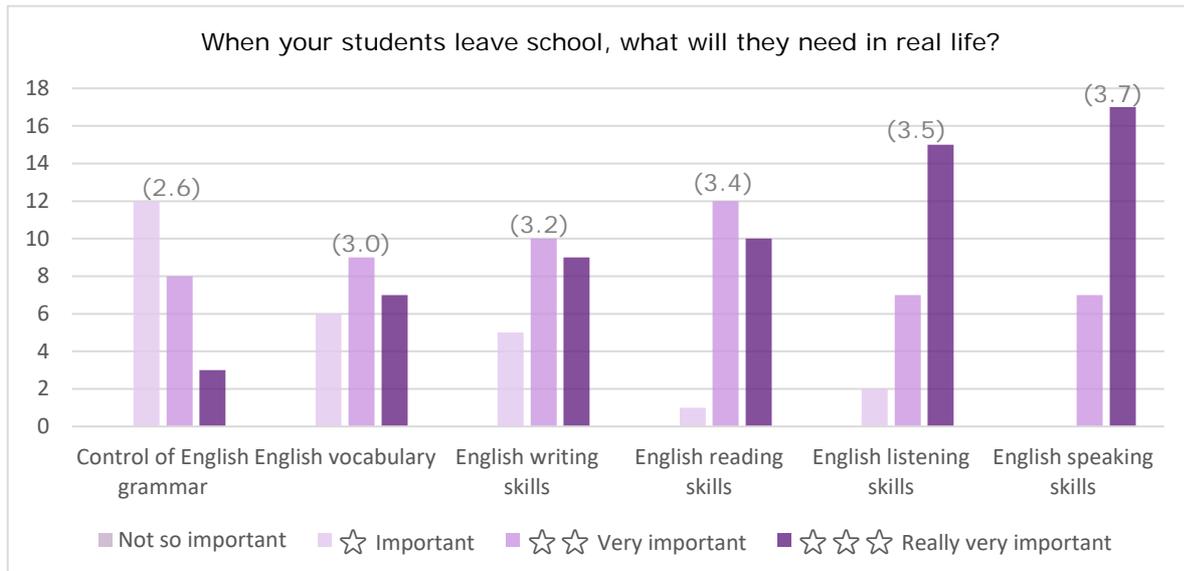


Figure 2.7: What will your students need when they leave school

The responses above indicate that even in this small survey, the teachers distinguished between the options available to them. Most notable is the high valuation of speaking and listening skills, which take primacy over reading and writing skills. This is an important point, not least because it contrasts with the teachers' views in section 2.2 on the learning priorities in the Bachillerato versus the ESO. In the 2.2 survey figures, the teachers reported a demotion of importance in the curriculum for speaking and listening skills as students matured from ESO to Bachillerato. This demotion of speaking and listening was also reported in the teachers' comments regarding which skills students need to pass their EBAU university entrance exams (TC3), which focus on reading and writing and do not include any assessment of speaking and listening. Teachers also place the control of English grammar at the bottom of the list of importance. These ratings align with comments in the earlier sections from teachers' regarding their attitudes to mistakes (TC25, TC26 and TC27).

In terms of servicing future needs, some teachers made comments regarding access to real-life materials and experiences:

TC50: I think that writing skills are important. I have family members who are doctors. They're continuously coming to me because they want to publish in the academic world. Students need training in these skills.

TC51: We need to expose them to the language as much as possible, in as many different forms as possible. Watching videos, series, listening to music, reading.

TC52: They don't get a book and start reading, but they do read the internet in English.

TC53: I think they read a lot on the internet. They still need good models. Not everything you read on the internet is well written, or even appropriate.

TC54: Each level has a different activity, doing trip, etc. Sometimes, just going out and being in London, for example. They realise this is for something. Not like other subjects where I have to take notes. They see it's real.

## 2.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

In the final line of investigation in the teacher study, the teachers were asked what more can be done to help students learn the English skills and knowledge they are going to need in adult life (eg changes to the aims or content of the school curriculum, additional resources, different priorities...). The intention behind this question was to give teachers the opportunity to express their imagination and to also connect points related to their previous answers. The following written comments were given:

### Language assistants:

TC55: It's very important to have language assistants in class. They make the language real. We lie to the students and say the assistants can't speak Spanish. That way, they're curious and they want to speak. It really works. It's funny because they become really concerned. "If he or she doesn't speak Spanish, how can they shop?"

TC56: Language assistants in the class are a very useful tool for English teachers.

### Problems related to the Bachillerato and EBAU exams:

TC57: I think the students should practise speaking and listening skills more in Bachillerato, but there is not so much time for that, as we have to practise the reading and writing skills for the EBAU (University entrance test).

TC58: Exams such as EBAU should have a part of oral skills test because 2nd Bachillerato curriculum focus more on this test. Therefore, we don't have enough time to prepare oral communication.

TC59: In my opinion, the EBAU exams to gain admission to university are an important barrier to effective English learning as they focus on written reception and production and forget about the oral skills which are essential. As a consequence, during the non-compulsory Secondary Education period, the teaching of English tends to focus a bit too much on written skills.

### Class size:

TC60: The classes in Bachillerato are too big (sometimes 30 students) and therefore there is no time for the students to practise speaking skills individually.

TC61: Additional resources and not so many students in class.

TC62: Smaller class size.

### Methodology:

TC63: We should improve the speaking skill, learning in smaller class groups.

TC64: Use of speaking and listening skills in a more practical way.

TC65: More skill integrated & holistic activities.

TC66: Communicative teaching methods, more authentic communication via exchanges or internet.

TC67: There should be more project-based learning, participating in international projects, such as eTwinning.

TC68: We should do our best to make the subject respectable. Lots of students don't make a real effort to learn because they know they are going to pass anyway.

TC69: Maybe English classes should be adapted to their abilities rather than their age.

### 3. Results: student backgrounds, views and behaviours

In this section, data from the student survey are reported. A total of 224 students participated in the survey. Sections 3.1 to 3.5 provide details of the students' ages, language backgrounds and experience. The students' self-reports of behaviours, attitudes and orientations are detailed in sections 3.6 to 3.10.

#### 3.1 RESPONDENT AGE

The respondents were all students in Asturian schools, with a range of ages, but as one would expect for Primero de la ESO and Primero de Bachillerato, students that completed the survey were predominantly 12 or 16 years old.

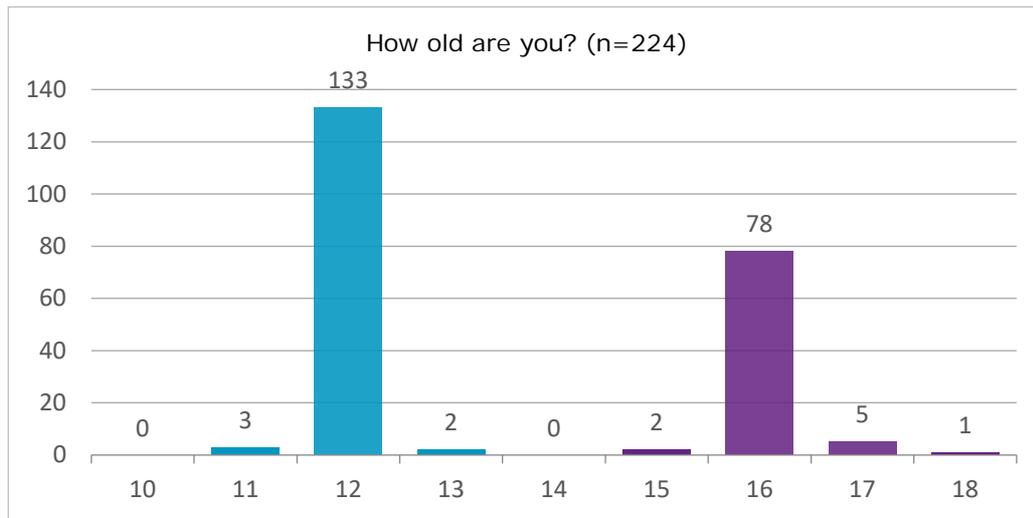


Figure 3.1: Student respondents' age

For the analysis, the response data were treated as 'all student data', and also segmented into ESO (the 11, 12, 13-year-olds) and Bachillerato (the 15, 16, 17, 18-year-olds).

#### 3.2 LANGUAGES SPOKEN

The questionnaire was administered through the medium of Castilian and it should be safe to assume that those who responded had sufficient language to be able to understand the questions they were responding to. The language profile of the students indicated that most students considered themselves to be Castilian speakers, although 4.5% did not indicate this, perhaps for political reasons (language identity is a hot topic in Spain, particularly when there are other regional languages present), or perhaps simply through respondent typing error.

A high number of respondents indicated that they knew or spoke English. Since they had been selected to take an English language exam on the same day they completed the questionnaire, this is to be expected. Nearly 70% of students also indicated that they spoke or knew French, most likely as a second or third (or possibly fourth) language at school. Almost 60% of students indicated that they also knew Asturian, the local language in Asturias, broadly like Castilian, which is experiencing a revival among school-age learners. Very low numbers of students also indicated that they spoke other Iberian languages such as Galician (the geographical neighbour of Asturian, close to Portuguese), Portuguese, Catalan or Basque, and a few students also indicated that they knew German. A comparison between the ESO and Bachillerato cohorts indicated that there was no difference in linguistic profile between the two age groups. The data from all the student respondents are given in figure 3.2.

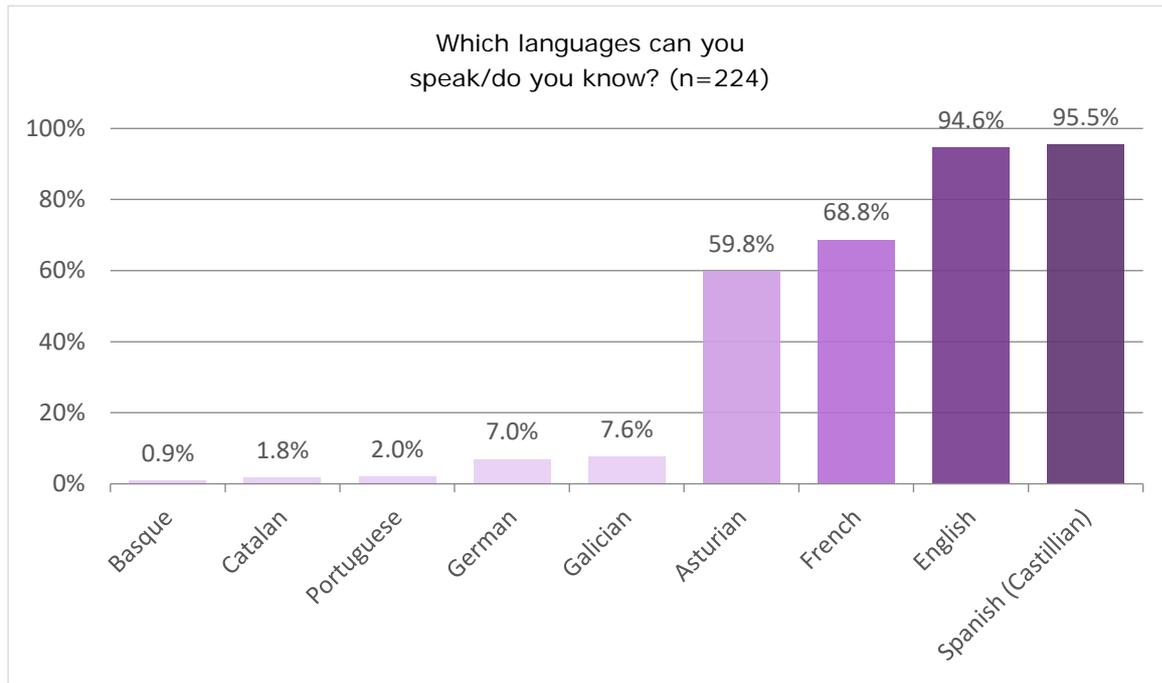


Figure 3.2: Language that all students can speak/know

### 3.3 FAVOURITE LANGUAGES

The survey also sought to assess how students felt about the languages they spoke or knew. It can be seductive to assume that students who use a language have positive attitudes towards it. However, cultural motivations, popular culture, classroom experiences, encounters with a language when travelling to name just a few factors, may also exert an influence over students' attitudes towards a language.

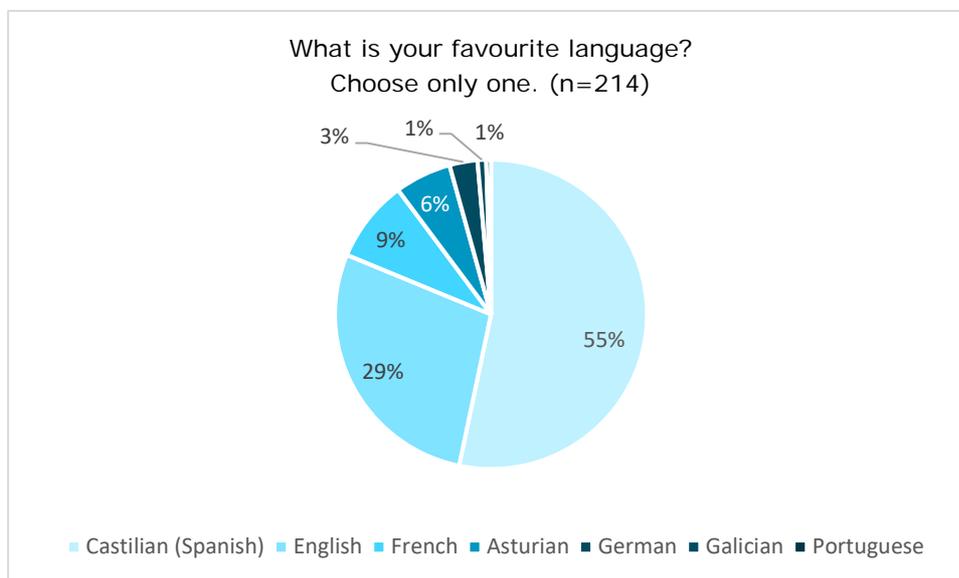


Figure 3.3: Students' favourite language

In the survey, any differences between the views of the ESO and Bachillerato groups were minimal and they are not reported here. Overall, 55% of the students reported Castilian to be their favourite language, which given that it is the default medium of instruction in state education in Asturias, most likely represents students expressing a preference for the language in which they are most proficient or comfortable. It is, however, remarkable that this figure is not closer to 100%. Other languages were provided in the poll to cater for the large proportion of the students that have been exposed to bilingual education (and, with the inclusion of the local language of Asturian, trilingual education) and any other

languages that have been taught in school. The survey questions allowed students to make their own choice between whether a favourite language could mean a mother tongue or a learnt language that they used daily in school, or even a separate foreign language. It appears from the responses in this survey that a large minority of students express very positive attitudes towards a non-native language which they have been taught in school – English<sup>3</sup>. In contrast to English, French, which is also taught in school, but not in bilingual contexts, was not popular (only 9%) despite nearly 70% of students having studied it. It appears that being a native/non-native language and being formally taught in school are not consistent predictors of popularity.

### 3.4 NUMBER OF YEARS STUDYING ENGLISH

Students were asked to provide an estimate of how many years they have been studying English. While these figures give a sense of the timescale, they should be treated with a little caution. This is because the figures rely on memory, reaching back to when the respondent was potentially very young or even too young to remember. Additionally, it is not always clear (especially at early ages) what is studying a language and what is simply playing using the language – the divide is a subjective view. Finally, there is an assumption that English instruction is continuous, but it may not have been in all cases.

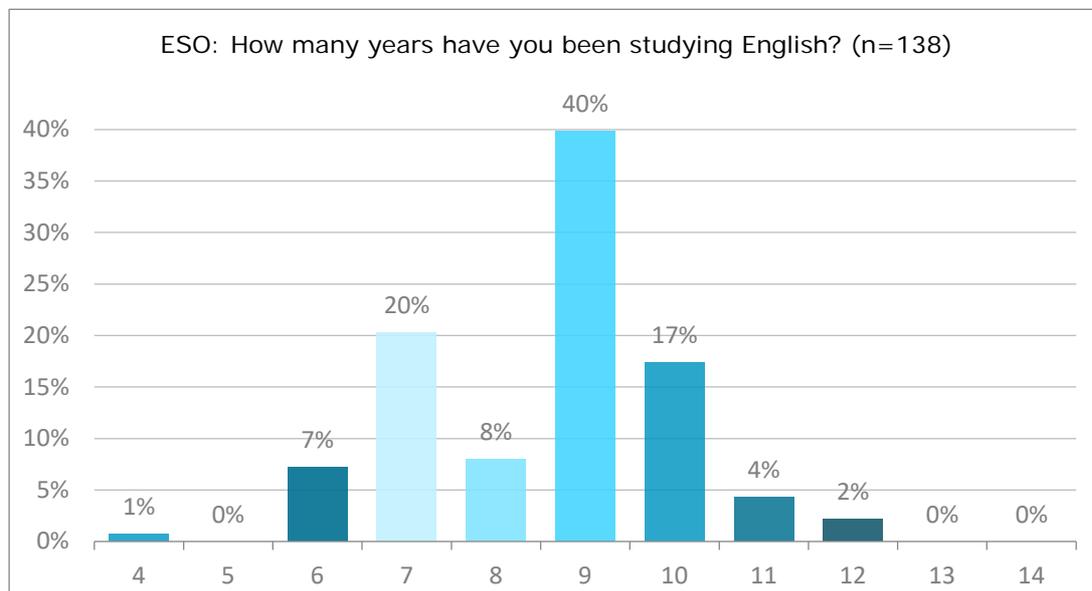


Figure 3.4.1: Number of years ESO students have studied English

It is clear from figure 3.4.1 that there is a common number that represents a large proportion of ESO students' experience – 9 years. This figure may also be augmented by those with 10 years' experience, depending on when in the school year the student's birthday falls when they count backwards to the age at which they started.

For the older students in Bachillerato, we see a similar picture in figure 3.4.2, although with higher numbers between 10 to 14 years. This is likely to be a rather nebulous estimate for many students for the same reasons outlined above.

<sup>3</sup> Occasionally in this northern region of Spain, a student will have an English native speaker parent. However, such incidences are rare and mostly confined to major cities in Spain or the warmer, more Mediterranean coastal tourist resorts. It is safe to work on the assumption that, for these students, English is not the L1.

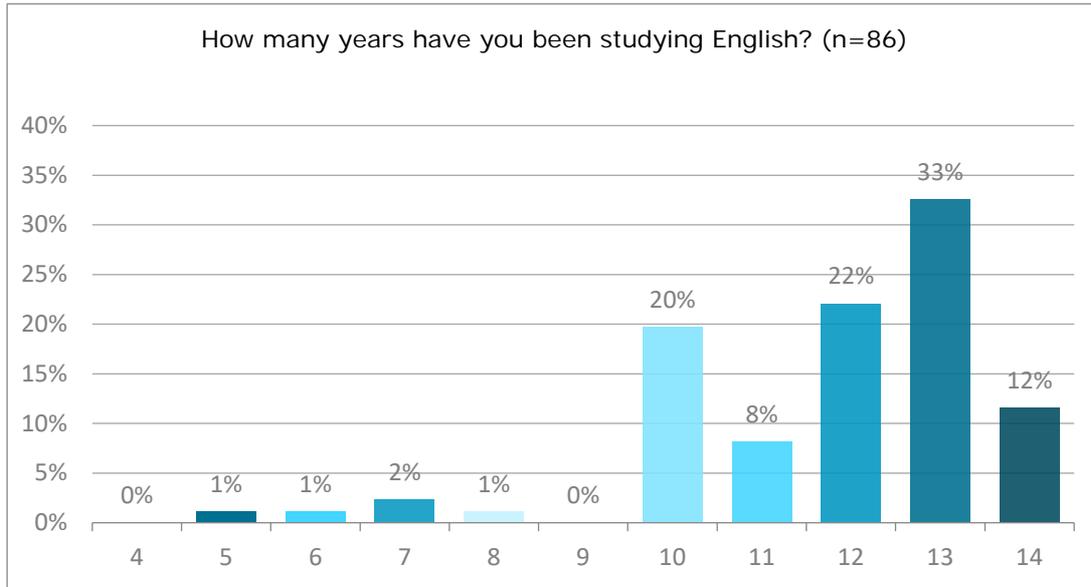


Figure 3.4.2: Number of years Bachillerato students have studied English

### 3.5 EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Students were asked if they had ever been taught general school lessons through the medium of English. Overall, the responses indicated a 52% 'Yes' versus 48% 'No' difference in their experiences of being exposed to some form of English bilingual education. However, when broken down by school age, there was a clear difference between the groups:

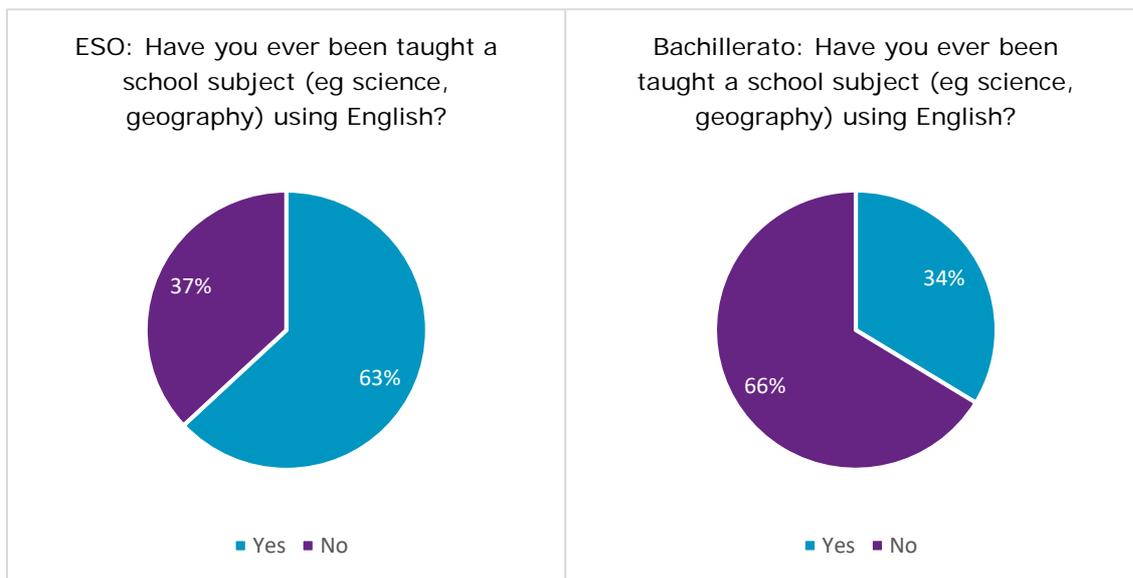


Figure 3.5.1: ESO students' experience of bilingual education

Figure 3.5.2: Bachillerato students' experience of bilingual education

In the survey, 63% of younger students in the ESO reported having experienced some form of English bilingual education. This figure drops to 34% for older students in the Bachillerato. This somewhat contrasting data could be attributed to the population sampling process. The students who completed the survey had been selected by the local education authority from schools taking the Trinity GESE exam. If the students from ESO and Bachillerato were not selected from an equal range of school types, this could result in the two cohorts reporting different experiences of bilingual education. A second explanation, however, may come from a difference of experience. The expansion of the Asturian bilingual education programme was limited by budget and the number of teachers who were able to teach bilingually and therefore started with a smaller number of schools. In recent years, the programme has grown and there are more children in bilingual education than older teenagers. The data in this study may simply be reflecting the expansion of the bilingual programme at younger ages.

### 3.6 DESIRE FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The students were also asked whether they had any desire to experience bilingual education in the future. The data indicate that the two age groups in the survey express different desires.

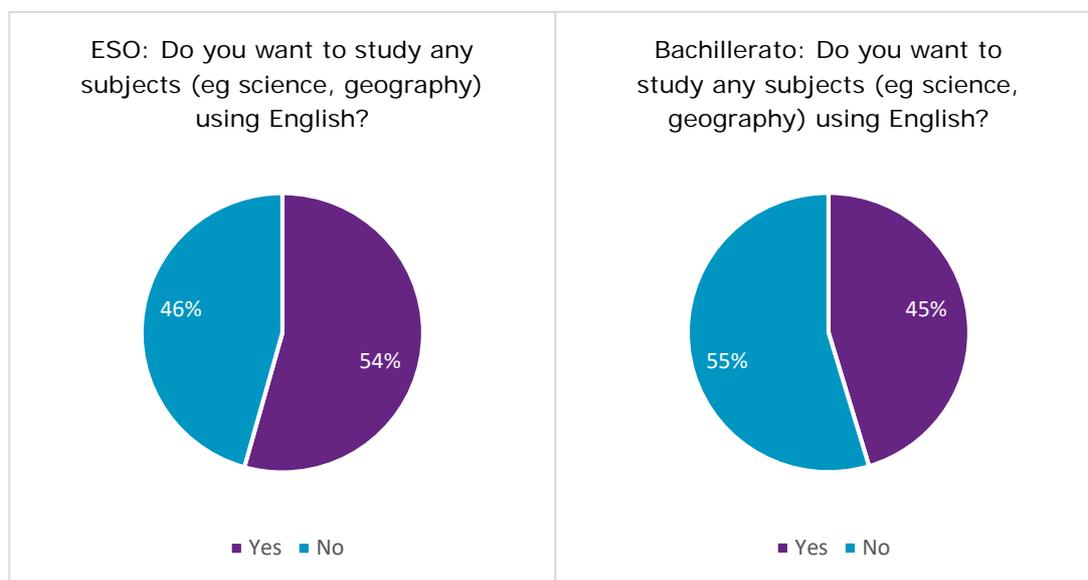


Figure 3.6.1: ESO students' experience of bilingual education

Figure 3.6.2: Bachillerato students' experience of bilingual education

The same possible explanation for the patterns of response that were discussed in 3.5 are also relevant to the data here. The differences between the groups may be attributable to sampling. However, if we review the data in 3.5, we can see that the group with the most experience of bilingual education, the ESO group, is also the group that would like more bilingual education. Among the group with the least experience of bilingual education, the Bachillerato group, the prospect of bilingual English-Spanish education still enjoys support, but at a lower level.

A further point to note in these data is that the numbers of students in the ESO group who expressed a desire to study more subjects bilingually in English is lower than the number of students who have reported having already experienced bilingual English education in 3.4. Conversely, the numbers of students in Bachillerato who expressed a desire for bilingual English education is higher than the number of students who reported having experienced bilingual education already, in 3.4. Without some qualitative data from the students in which they explain their reasoning and feelings towards bilingual English-Spanish education, we can only speculate the motives that lie behind this pattern, such as a feeling that the 'grass is always greener on the other side' or good and bad experiences with the programme.

### 3.7 SELF-AUDIT OF ENGLISH ABILITIES

The survey asked students to think about their own English language abilities and give a score from *very bad* to *very good* for their abilities to speak English, understand spoken English, read English, write English and study English in class. The term ‘understand spoken English’ was used in preference to ‘listen to spoken English’ as listening is not in itself an ability and can be done without necessarily comprehending. The question regarding the ability to study English in class was included to capture the formal process of learning English, which students may feel is different from, for example, listening to music in English or watching films and internet videos.

There is always a danger when inviting people to review their own skills that you are asking them to become conscious of processes and abilities that they have not previously conceptualised. In this research, it was felt that due to the context of formal education and the common use of the terms speaking, listening, reading and writing in the classroom context, it was worth asking the ESO 12-year-old students to attempt this task even though it may not provide the most robust data. Additionally, there is always a risk that respondents might want to present their ‘best selves’ to the researcher and produce a more positive self-audit. These response biases are necessary and unavoidable and should not deter the researcher from asking the questions but should inform the interpretation of the data collected. Figures 3.7.1 and 3.7.2 show the students’ skills audit in ascending order according to weighted average.

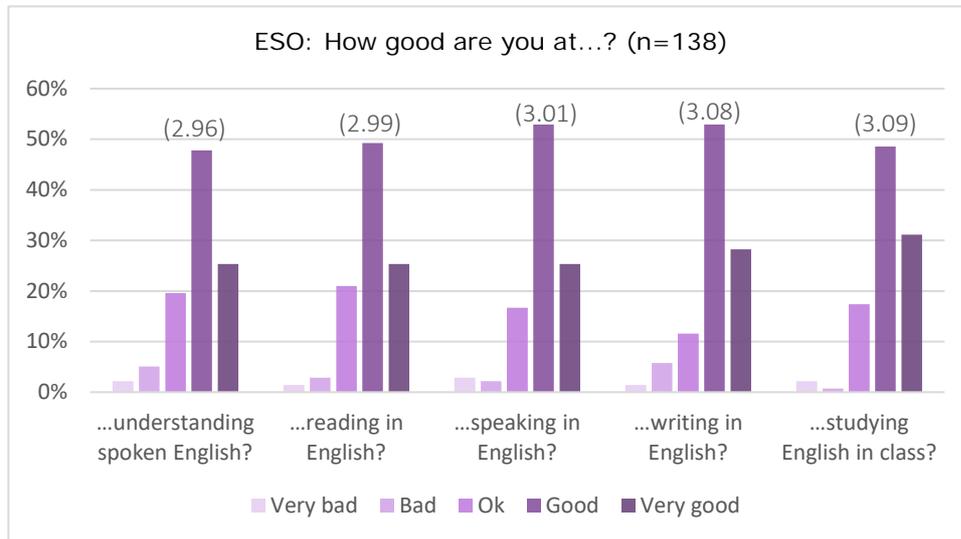


Figure 3.7.1: ESO students’ abilities self-audit

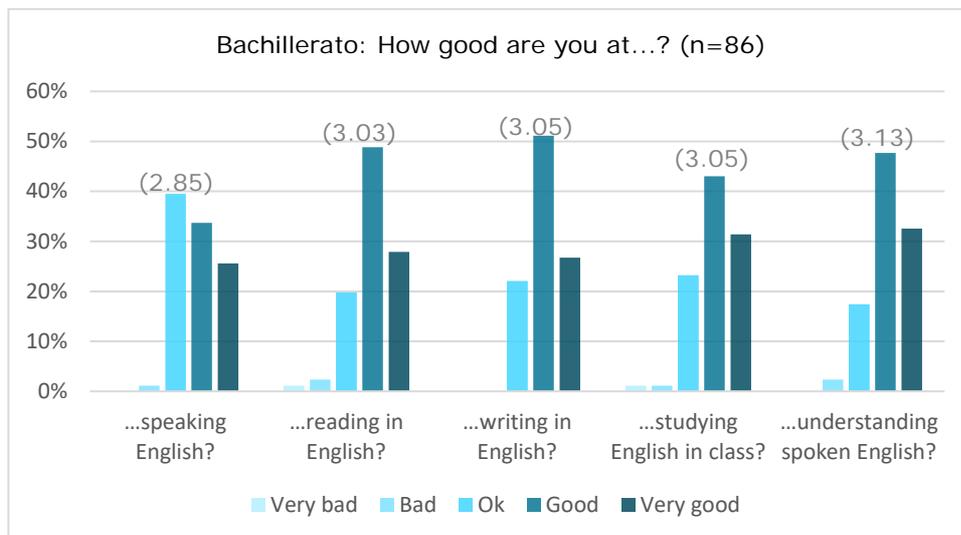


Figure 3.7.2: Bachillerato students’ abilities self-audit

The data in the figures indicate that, on average, students of both age groups differentiated between their abilities. Both age groups expressed similar audits of their English language abilities, but with two differences: i) The ESO students rate their productive speaking skills higher than the older Bachillerato students. This is perhaps not surprising, given the results from the teachers' survey regarding the low priority of speaking skills at Bachillerato level compared with the ESO. ii) The younger students rank their understanding of spoken English as their lowest of the measured abilities. This may reflect a lack of exposure to spoken English because of their age – younger people are less likely to have mobile phones and tablets and are less likely to have the autonomy to look at whatever they want. By contrast, the older Bachillerato students rank their understanding of spoken English as their strongest ability. It is remarkable that there should be such a gap between the older students' spoken production and listening comprehension, and without qualitative data we cannot be certain of the reasons for this, but it is worth keeping in mind that as students get older, they are more likely to have their own phones and other devices as well as access to the internet and films and the autonomy to watch what they want for as long as they want. As English is all-pervasive, and given the paucity of spoken English practice in Bachillerato, students may simply be reflecting in their responses a greater exposure to the spoken language in their daily lives outside school, and it is possible that the students are rating their comprehension of spoken English higher *despite* school not because of it.

### 3.8 STUDENTS' LIKES/DISLIKES

To give them the opportunity to differentiate between preferences and abilities, the students were invited to indicate which English activities they liked/didn't like. The same five concepts from the previous question were used with the small difference that the students were rating the activities not from *very bad* to *very good*, but from *I hate it* to *I love it*. Once again, the students on average differentiated between what they liked and didn't like. However, as with the responses in 3.7, the two age groups did not differentiate in identical ways. Figures 3.8.1 and 3.8.2 show the students' likes and dislikes in ascending order according to the weighted average score.

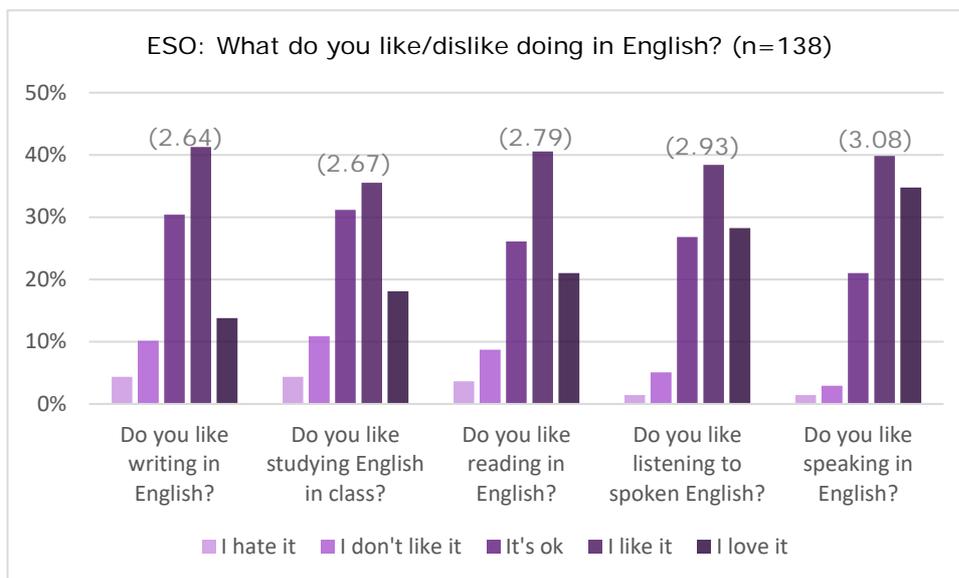


Figure 3.8.1: ESO students' likes and dislikes

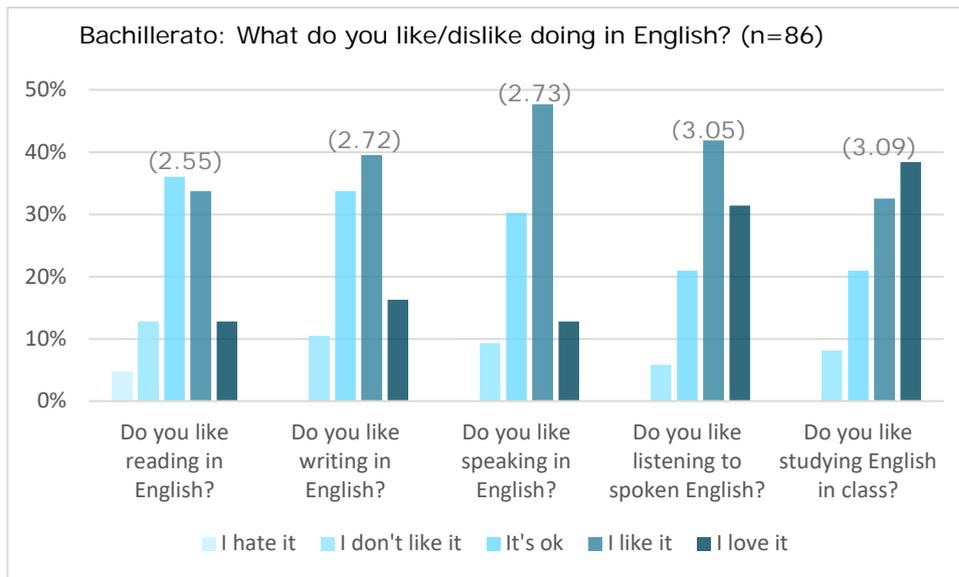


Figure 3.8.2: Bachillerato students' likes and dislikes

In figure 3.8.1 we see that in the ESO level, where more English speaking and listening practice occurs in the classroom, the positive rankings for speaking and listening are at their highest. Activities that imply more formal study, *writing*, *studying English* and *reading* are rated lowest among this age group. The older students, on average, rated listening positively relative to reading, writing and speaking, and this corresponds with the positive ratings of their abilities in 3.7. On average, for these older students, the most enjoyable activity is the formal study of English in class, contrasting with the younger age group.

### 3.9 ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH

An important element of the current research was to investigate student behaviours and what they report doing in English. As with many aspects of these types of survey research, we are relying on a level of self-awareness for students to give accurate answers. This may be expression of perceptions rather than an accurate representation of the truth. However, perception of behaviour can be informative as accurate measurements of behaviour, as they are based on what respondents believe they do, and beliefs can be compared against and correlated with other attitudinal data.

For this question, students were given a list of activities that they may do in or outside class. The location and formality/informality were not the issue; rather, it was the nature of performing these behaviours using English that was the focus of the questions. Questions focused on communicating using all four skills, in different locations, with different speakers, using different technologies. Respondents were given four response categories to indicate the frequency with which they performed these behaviours. Figures 3.9.1 and 3.9.2 report these frequencies in ascending order according to their weighted averages.

Figure 3.9.1 illustrates the variation in frequencies between the 11 suggested activities, with *making videos in English* ranked lowest at an average score of 1.31 and *listening to music in English* ranked highest at 2.68. For the ESO students, interpersonal communication in English scores relatively low marks: *talking to friends or parents in English* and *writing messages to friends in English* are all reported as relatively low frequency behaviours. Slightly more frequently occurring behaviours are in the use of reading and listening skills: *reading books in English*; *using the internet in English*; *watching films, videos, TV in English*; *using English to play video games* and *watching videos in English (eg on YouTube/Facebook)*. For the ESO students, the most popular activities to do in English relate to English language music, with *watching music videos in English* and *listening to music in English* being the highest scoring in the survey.

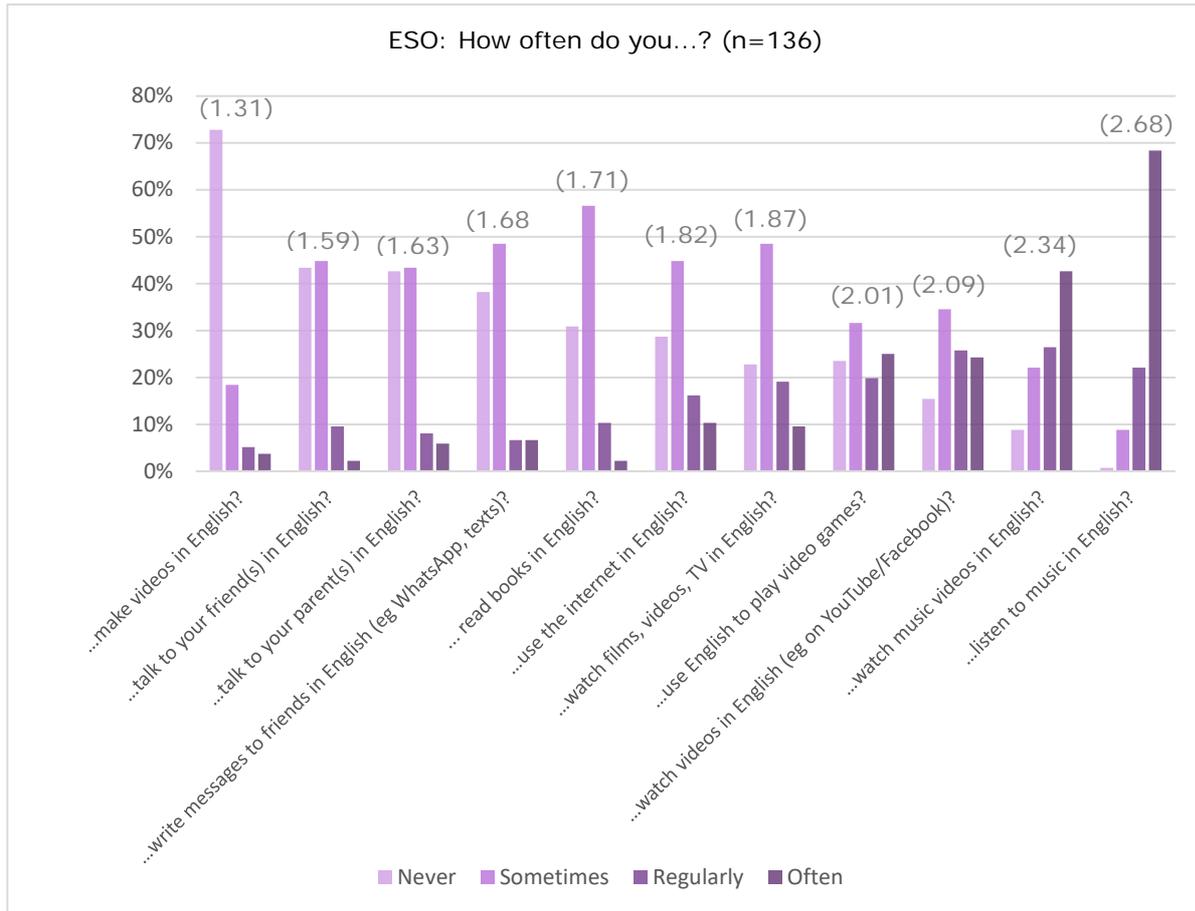


Figure 3.9.1: ESO students' frequency of activities in English

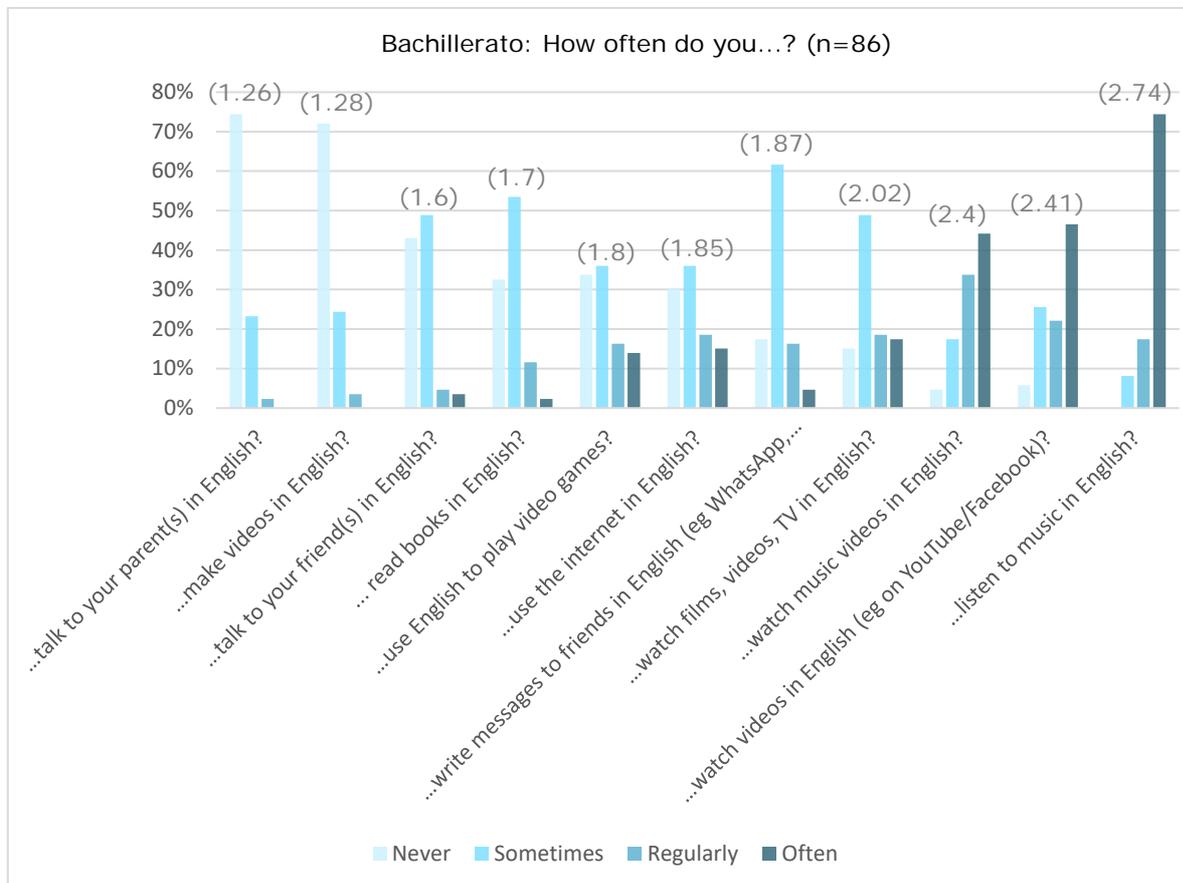


Figure 3.9.2: Bachillerato students' frequency of activities in English

For the Bachillerato students, the frequency of activities is broadly similar. Watching and listening to music in English are very popular activities; watching videos on social media in English is the second most popular activity. We can speculate that this is likely to be related to greater access to mobile phones and other devices, with older teenagers generally having greater autonomy and access to content. This may also explain why oral inter-communication in English with friends and parents is among the lowest frequency activities but exchanging messages via social media and text services is more popular with the Bachillerato students than with the ESO students. These older students are more likely to have mobile devices and a level of freedom that students who are four years younger are less likely to enjoy.

The low scores for oral communication appear to confirm the teachers' views of the amount of oral communication happening in English in their classrooms. In section 2.3, we saw in the teacher survey that students did not use very much spoken English in class. In section 2.6, teachers reported that although the students used English to talk to them, they did not use much English to talk to each other. In this section, the students appear to confirm this view, with the respondents reporting that they use English relatively infrequently as the language for oral communication between themselves. One could argue that more variation might be revealed if the sample sizes were larger. However, given that there are strong parallels here between the ratings given by the two age groups from two different school types, following two different curricula, the data in this section corroborate the teachers' point that it is a challenge for teachers to foster interpersonal communication in English between students. The question that needs addressing is: What can be done to encourage interpersonal communication in languages other than the default L1 in the classroom?

One could also argue that only a (large) minority of Bachillerato and a (small) majority of ESO students in this survey are part of a bilingual education system and that if this survey were conducted on non-bilingual versus bilingual students, it would emerge that students in bilingual education would be more likely to use English all the time. However, a large proportion of the students in the current research are part of the bilingual system in Asturias, and one might reasonably expect that if English is used between students daily this would be reflected in the survey response data. However, this does not appear to be the case. Bilingual or non-bilingual, ESO or Bachillerato, the data here suggest that there is more to be done before the concept of bilingualism in the Asturian school context extends to the use of English with everyone, not just the teachers.

One final observation in the data relates to the teachers' perceptions of the students using the internet in English and the students' estimate of their usage. In section 2.5, the teachers suggested that practically all students use the internet for their English practice. In this section, the data from the students qualifies this somewhat: they report that their use of the internet for English is not as frequent as other activities. This discrepancy illustrates nicely how questions in surveys should be carefully constructed, and response data in surveys should be carefully interpreted.

### 3.10 STUDENTS' USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND ENGLISH

The final question put to the students in this survey concerned their use of technology and English. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they used technology for different purposes. For this question, the responses between the ESO and Bachillerato groups did not vary greatly, with video messaging ranking the lowest and watching music videos in English ranking the highest for both groups. Just as we saw in question 3.9, the students use English language technology less to message their friends than they do for their own entertainment, such as watching different videos. Additionally, students of both groups report using English language technology to do their homework and for studying English in general.

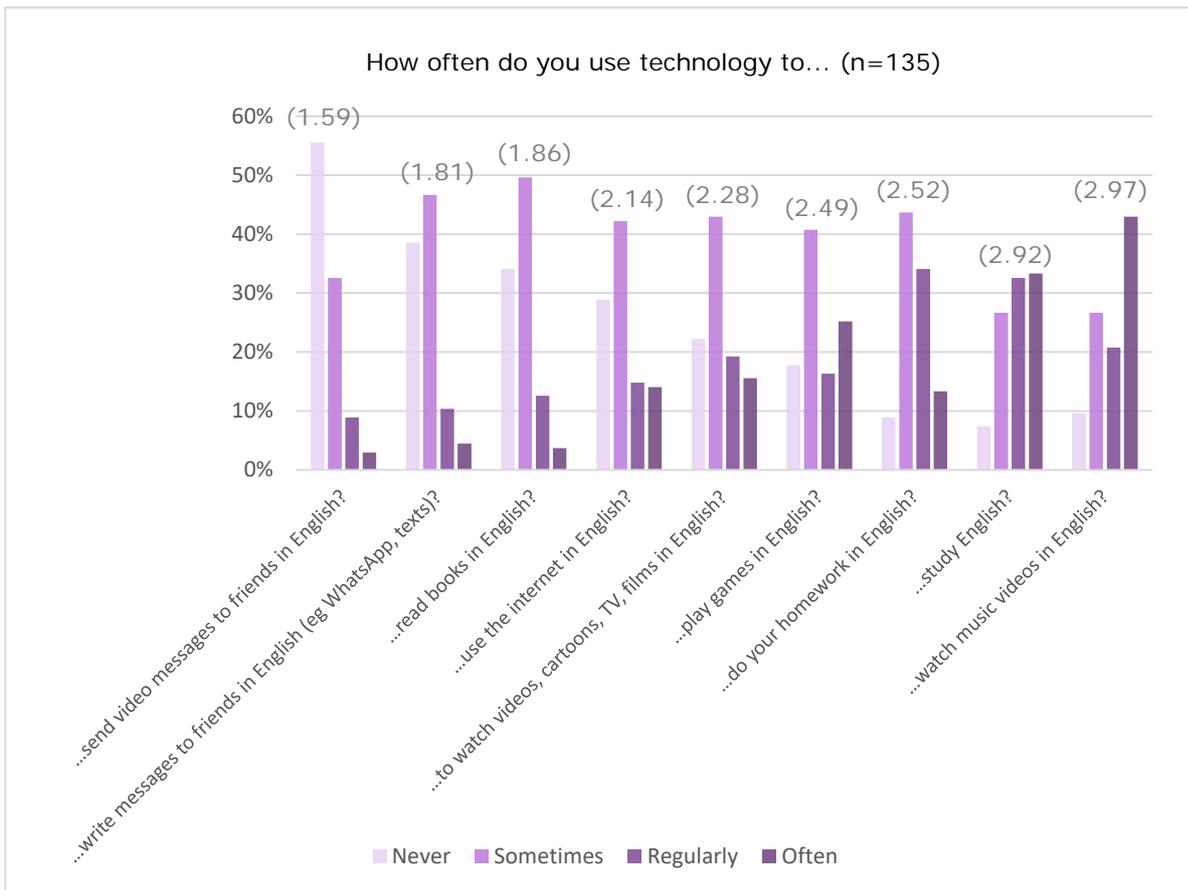


Figure 3.10.1: ESO students' use of technology and English

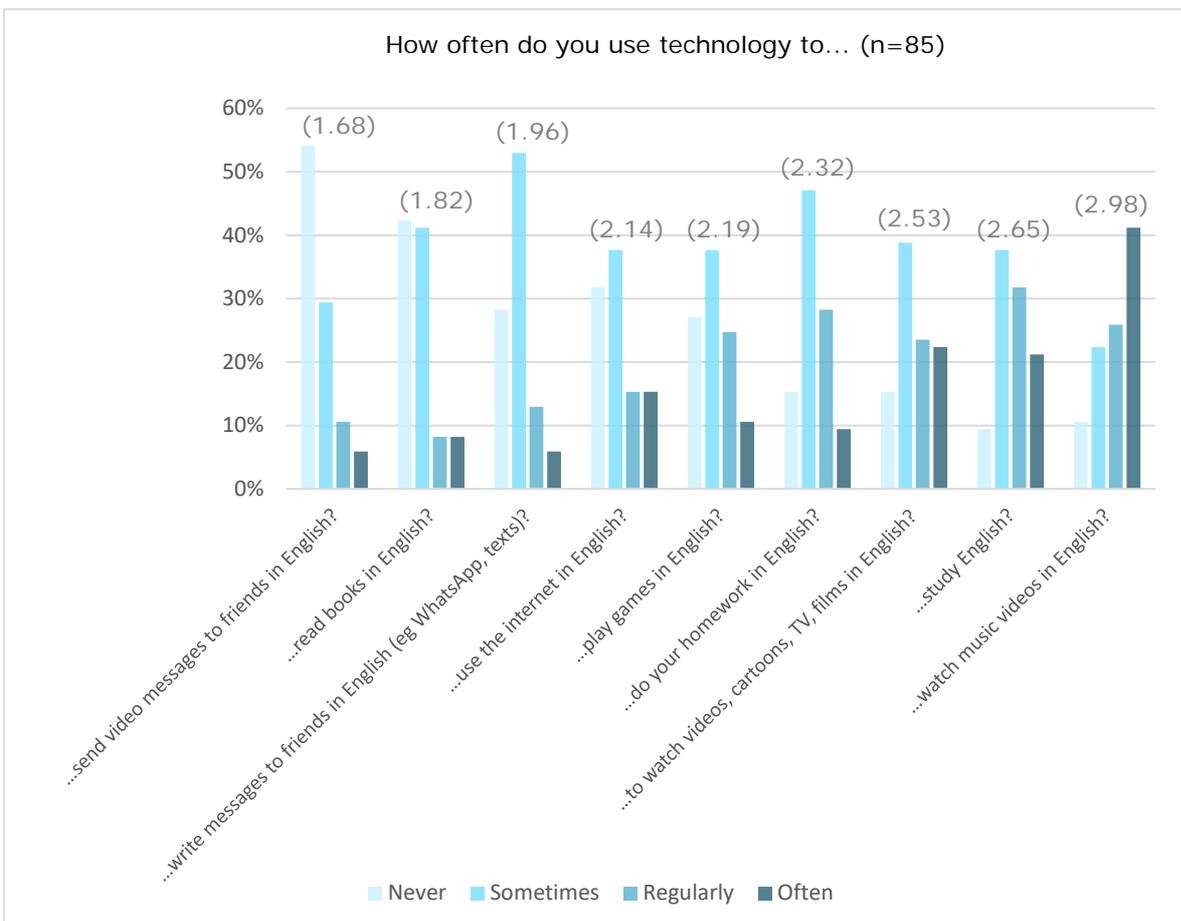


Figure 3.10.2: Bachillerato students' use of technology and English

The response data in figures 3.10.1 and 3.10.2 should be useful to teachers and education planners with regards to their expectations and beliefs around what students do with technology and how often they use it for particular purposes in a non-native language. Teachers might hope students are using technology for the most constructive learning activities in English or to enhance or replace more traditional learning tools, but the data here suggest that activities such as reading e-books in English are low on the students' lists of interests. However, educational content that has an entertainment value in English may be a fast track to engaging with students. Future research could also unpack the high frequency use of technology in English by the students, exploring if it entails different activities for different age groups.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

This study has reported the experiences, views, behaviours and attitudes of a small sample of teachers and students in Asturias. While the respondent numbers are small, and the analysis limited to discussion of descriptive statistics, the survey presents a snapshot of views from two sets of education stakeholders within the region, with overlapping interests and experiences in the same classrooms.

The teachers in the survey were a mix of those with experience in *Primero de la ESO* and *Primero de Bachillerato*, with more than half of them indicating that they also have experience of working in other educational settings. There was an almost 50/50 split between those with experience of working in a bilingual programme and those with no experience, which may provide for a balanced set of views. This survey, however, did not seek to contrast bilingual with non-bilingual programme teachers, and future research could consider looking into the views of teachers solely drawn from one or the other group to come to a closer understanding of any differences in the working behaviours, attitudes or views of those within and those outside the bilingual programme.

The 224 students in the study were randomly sampled from across Asturias, from non-bilingual schools and bilingual schools alike, and represent a modest cross section of the Asturian ESO and Bachillerato student population. There were no monoglot students in the survey. The students reported that they spoke both Castilian and English, with more than half also reporting a knowledge of/ability to speak at least three languages including French and Asturian. Given that Castilian is the language of administration, education and the media across the region, one might expect that the students' favourite language would be their first language (almost entirely Castilian). However, nearly 30% of the students in the study reported that their favourite language was English. Attitudinally, this is a significant finding. A third of the students in the survey felt that their favourite language was not their first language or even a language that is indigenous to the country, but instead preferred a foreign language that is used around the world and connects them to that world through the media, the internet and non-Spanish people they encounter. An inference may be drawn here that the choice of favourite language is a signifier of young Asturians' internationally oriented lives and outlooks.

The students' reported experience of learning English was, measured in school years, extensive; the 138 ESO students reported an average of just over 8 years' experience, and the 86 Bachillerato students reported an average of 12 years' experience. We do not know how many hours of formal study this will have involved, and the study did not distinguish between formal and informal learning. With regard to the students' experience of and orientation to having EMI/CLIL lessons, more than half – 63% – of the ESO students reported that they had had lessons in which English was the medium of instruction, and therefore had some experience of bilingual education. A lower number – 54% – reported a desire for CLIL/EMI lessons in the future. These figures suggest that despite the ESO students' positive orientation to English, the current methodology for using English as the medium of instruction or the CLIL methodology being used in the Asturian classrooms may not be contributing to the student experience in the way that policy makers and teachers might hope. The degree to which these differences are representative and meaningful could certainly warrant further investigation. The view from the Bachillerato students is slightly more positive, with more students – 55% – wanting EMI/CLIL-style learning in the future than have received it so far – 46%. However, these figures are also not too distant from each other and any future investigation into attitudes towards EMI/CLIL provision is likely to be revealing in both school settings regarding what students enjoy and what could improve the student experience.

One issue that the study brought to light was that of oral communication in the bilingual and non-bilingual classroom. There exists a common assumption among monolingual stakeholders outside the classroom (school administrators, head teachers, education ministers, parents and guardians) that bilingual classrooms are somehow more communicative classrooms, with English becoming the *lingua franca* not just for instruction, but also between students. This may derive from the use of the term 'bilingual education' with its implicit emphasis on language, coinciding with a general lack of 'outsider' knowledge around what a bilingual programme entails. The data in this research suggest that an increased amount of spoken English communication between students in Asturias is something of a misconception. First, a mix of teachers on bilingual and non-bilingual programmes reported in their quantitative and qualitative responses that their students speak in English at best only some of the time. When the teachers were asked about the students' purpose for using English, very few teachers indicated

that this was to talk to other Spanish students or adults. They also indicated that, while the students used English in class some of the time, this was most likely to be when talking directly to the teachers themselves. When the students were asked when they used English, they also reported that use of English with friends and even family, through oral or written mediums occurred only sometimes, with rare use of English on social media and messenger services. Students reported that they were more likely to read books in English than use the language to talk to friends. According to the research data, bilingual classrooms in Asturias are therefore unlikely to be places where students participate in large amounts of English communication among and between themselves.

Broadening the theme to the use and importance of English language skills and activities in the classroom, the teachers reported several contrasts between the ESO and the Bachillerato curricula. There was an indication in both the teachers' quantitative and qualitative data that ESO has a greater emphasis on receptive skills of listening and reading, followed by the productive skills of speaking and writing, with learning grammar and vocabulary having the least importance. In the Bachillerato curriculum, the teachers reported that the greatest emphasis is placed on writing and reading, followed by vocabulary and grammar, with speaking and listening having least importance. This emphasis is explained by teachers as reflecting the priorities of the university entrance exam that comes at the end of the Bachillerato years, with a continual demotion of speaking and listening as students progress from ESO through Bachillerato. It appears that the curricula and the content of university entrance exams contribute to the noted paucity of oral communication in Asturian classrooms as the students mature towards 18 years old.

Turning to what students in both schools enjoy doing, the teachers reported that their students enjoyed activities that involve the creative use of English, including the use of media in English – watching TV and films, and listening to music. The teachers also suggested that their students used English to understand the internet and its contents. These data aligned strongly with the students' reports of their own use of English and technology. Students reported that they regularly or often used technology to watch music videos, to study English and do homework, to play games in English, and watch videos or films. Additionally, the teachers felt that students in both schools enjoyed activities based on oral/aural engagement, such as speaking English with native speakers and doing speaking activities in the class, as well as using English for communicating with speakers of other languages. The enjoyment of these communicative activities contrasts significantly with the earlier reports of how much spoken communication happens in the classroom and how speaking and listening are demoted in priority as the students mature through Bachillerato.

Those with a knowledge of the traditional approach to non-Spanish films in Spain (which has almost always been to dub all content) may be surprised by the teachers' reports of the students' preferences for viewing English language films alongside listening to English language music. Teachers rated watching films and listening to music in English as more popular than traditional listening activities and there appears to be a recognition in these data that watching films and online media in the original language may be advantageous. This may be an indicator for a desired approach not only for students and their learning but, we may speculate, also for teachers and their teaching.

Teachers rated the formal study of English, studying English grammar and doing writing activities in English, among the activities that students liked the least. Some may take the view that this is inevitable, and it has always been the case. However, it is worth remembering that there have been a great many innovations in the teaching of grammar and writing over the last few decades and it is not impossible to foster an enjoyment of activity types that may traditionally have been considered somewhat dry. Likewise, teachers in both levels reported that the least favourite activity among their students is doing English tests. Testing and assessment have come a long way in the last few decades, and with assessment literacy programmes being developed for teachers (Trinity College London has delivered several programmes in Spain), it is possible for teachers to have available to them innovative and student-friendly ways of testing and assessing that avoid provoking such negative responses.

The study focused also on ability and enjoyment, asking students and teachers to report what they enjoyed doing and how good they were at it. Some responses were somewhat predictable while others produced contrasting data that might not have been expected. The teachers offered a view of the students' abilities to self-correct and learn independently which perhaps unsurprisingly indicated improvements in their ability to self-correct or direct their own learning as they progress from ESO to Bachillerato. However, perhaps the most surprising data came from comparisons of students' abilities and the activities they enjoy. Despite reporting that they enjoy listening to English language music and

watching English language films, the ESO students reported that their weakest ability is in understanding spoken English, with speaking English just a little better. It seems younger students know that they cannot understand a great deal of spoken English, but understanding everything does not matter to them, they enjoy it nonetheless. Contrastingly, the skills that the ESO students report they are best at – writing and formal study of English in class – are the same skills they report enjoying least. It appears from these data that ESO students do not necessarily have to be good at a skill to enjoy it and the skills they believe they are best at are not necessarily the skills they enjoy.

The Bachillerato students' data produced some different patterns from that of the ESO. The students rated the ability to understand English as their greatest skill, in complete contrast to the younger ESO students. We can presume that this is the result of greater exposure to the language in their additional four years, particularly given the proliferation of English in films and music, which the students reported they enjoyed watching and listening to so much. We can probably conclude that there is a strong relationship between exposure to English language media and an increase in Asturian students' confidence in understanding spoken English. Unlike the ESO students, the Bachillerato students reported that their strengths were in the formal study of English and understanding spoken English, and that these were also the two activities they enjoyed the most. The activities they enjoy the least, reading and writing, are the activities that teachers indicated were the priority in Bachillerato, and the activity that teachers and students reported as of lowest priority in Bachillerato, speaking English, was the skill that students rated as their weakest. Without a doubt there is scope for further investigation to be carried out here and perhaps some experimentation regarding curriculum content.

When discussing the students' future language needs, despite what they themselves identify as the curriculum and EBAU university entrance priorities of reading and writing, and despite its apparent demotion in the Bachillerato curriculum, the teachers in this survey expressed the belief that what will be most important to learners in a post-school world are the skills of speaking and listening. Teachers in this survey placed greatest value on precisely the skills that the Spanish language teaching and university systems give least value to. We do not know from this small study how widespread this view is in Asturias or across Spain in general. It may be that the elevation of speaking and listening skills is a function of introducing bilingual programmes to education systems, and the views expressed in this survey may not represent all teachers teaching English in more traditional environments using more traditional Spanish methods. However, these views merit further investigation, since the teachers who are training the students for the future real world appear to regard the existing system as not fully serving the students' future language needs.

To conclude, a number of patterns, some contradictory, have emerged from this study. The reader could use some of the findings as avenues for further research, looking at the difference between bilingual and non-bilingual programmes or school ages. There are suggestions in this study that could stimulate some re-prioritising of curriculum content or greater use of non-traditional media, many of which are international-facing. And there are perhaps image-shaping opportunities to be taken, looking at the image of bilingual programmes in the eyes of all stakeholders, including the learners. As a small-scale study, the findings cannot claim to uncover far-reaching evidence. However, it should serve as a springboard to a better understanding of the English teaching programme in Asturias.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN

### (English text)

#### To the parent/guardian:

#### Who can take the survey?

We want to hear the views of all of the students who recently took Trinity's GESE exams.

#### What's the survey about?

We would like to better understand how and when the students use English, what's important to them about English and how confident they feel with different skills in English. The reason for asking the students is that as adults, we can speculate on how students learn and feel about English, but we have a much clearer understanding if we can ask them directly.

#### Who is conducting this survey?

The survey has been made possible with the support of the Asturian Ministry of Education and is being conducted by a UK-based research team, led by Dr Mark Griffiths, a teacher, trainer and academic researcher who specialises in research in the field of language exams. If you have any questions or feedback about this survey, please contact Mark at xxx@xxx.com

#### What will happen to the data collected in this survey?

All data is collected anonymously and will stay anonymous. We do not wish to collect names of individuals and we have no way of identifying who responds to the survey. Our aim is to collect the students' views, not to collect personal data. We have no way of linking the students' views to their GESE exam results. The data that we do collect will be held by the research team and will be kept securely. Once processed, we may disseminate the findings of the research to academic and professional colleagues in verbal or written presentations or articles, but at all times the students' anonymity is guaranteed.

#### When can the students take the survey?

The survey is live now. They can take it today, or any other day until 22 December, when the survey will close.

### (Spanish text)

#### Al padre/tutor:

#### ¿Quién puede hacer la encuesta?

Queremos tener en cuenta los puntos de vista de todos los alumnos que han hecho recientemente los exámenes GESE de Trinity.

#### ¿De qué trata la encuesta?

Nos gustaría tener una visión más clara de cómo y cuándo utilizan el inglés los estudiantes, qué consideran importante en el idioma y cómo se sienten de seguros en las diferentes habilidades del inglés. La razón de preguntarles a ellos es porque nosotros, como adultos, podemos suponer cómo aprenden y se sienten con el idioma, pero tendremos una visión mucho más clara si les preguntamos a ellos directamente.

#### ¿Quién lleva a cabo esta encuesta?

Esta encuesta ha sido posible gracias al apoyo del Ministerio de Educación de Asturias y está dirigida por un equipo de investigación con base en el Reino Unido, guiado por el Dr. Mark Griffiths, profesor, formador e investigador académico especializado en investigaciones en el campo de los exámenes de idiomas. Si tiene alguna consulta o quiere información sobre los resultados de esta encuesta puede ponerse en contacto con Mark en xxx@xxx.com

**¿Cómo se tratarán los datos recogidos en esta encuesta?**

Todos los datos son recogidos de forma anónima y permanecerán anónimos. No queremos recoger nombres ni tenemos forma alguna de identificar quién responde a la encuesta. Nuestro objetivo es recoger los puntos de vista de los alumnos, no sus datos personales. Tampoco tenemos forma de relacionar las respuestas de los alumnos con sus resultados en los exámenes GESE. Los datos que se recojan serán guardados de forma segura por el equipo de investigación. Una vez procesados todos los datos, difundiremos los resultados de la investigación a compañeros profesionales y académicos en diferentes presentaciones orales o escritas o en artículos, pero en todo momento se garantizará el anonimato de los alumnos.

**¿Cuándo pueden hacer la encuesta los alumnos?**

La encuesta se puede realizar desde hoy hasta el 22 de diciembre, fecha de cierre de la encuesta.

## APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION TO THE STUDENT

### To the student:

#### **Thank you for answering the questionnaire!**

This survey is for students of English who live in Asturias. We are interested in hearing from you how you study English, when you use English, and when you use technology to learn English.

#### **How should I complete the survey?**

Simply follow the instructions on-screen. Please do not collaborate with other students or teachers when you are completing the survey, complete it alone. We want to hear YOUR views! The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

#### **And finally, a big thank you!**

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this survey. By completing this survey, you will help us to understand how you learn and use English.

### (Spanish text)

#### **Para el alumno:**

#### **¡Gracias por contestar a la encuesta!**

Esta encuesta es para estudiantes de inglés que viven en Asturias. Nos gustaría que nos dijeras cómo estudias inglés, cuándo usas el idioma y cuándo usas la tecnología para aprender inglés. Estamos interesados en vuestras opiniones, no en la de vuestros profesores o familiares. Por favor, sed honestos y decid lo que pensáis.

#### **¿Cómo debo completar la encuesta?**

Solamente debes seguir las instrucciones que ves en pantalla. Rogamos que la hagas tú solo(a), no la completes con otros alumnos o profesores. Queremos saber TU punto de vista. Te llevará unos 10 minutos aproximadamente completarla.

#### **Y por último ¡un gran gracias!**

Muchas gracias por tomarte tu tiempo en realizar esta encuesta. Al completarla, nos ayudas a comprender mejor cómo aprendes y usas el inglés.