

8-2016

Hispanic bilingual learners' perceptions and educational experiences of Spanish-speaking in South Texas

Isela B. Stephens

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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HISPANIC BILINGUAL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCES OF SPANISH-SPEAKING IN SOUTH TEXAS

A Thesis

by

ISELA B. STEPHENS

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2016

Major Subject: Experimental Psychology

HISPANIC BILINGUAL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCES OF SPANISH-SPEAKING IN SOUTH TEXAS

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ISELA B. STEPHENS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Amy A. Weimer
Chair of Committee

Dr. Frederick Ernst
Committee Member

Dr. Francisco Guajardo
Committee Member

August 2016

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ABSTRACT

Stephens, Isela B., Hispanic Bilingual Learners' Perceptions and Educational Experiences of Spanish-Speaking In South Texas. Master of Arts (MA), August 2016, 38 pp., 4 tables, 4 figures, references, 34 titles.

The present study focuses on a subset of data obtained from a larger interdisciplinary project, *Proyecto Posible*, which investigates how sociocultural and instructional factors predict positive outcomes among Spanish- and English-speaking Hispanic bilingual learners. As one part of *Proyecto Posible*, interviewers asked learners to speak in their language of preference about their experiences in school and feelings developed during interactions with others, as bilinguals. This study examines the qualitative component on bilingual learners' perceptions of their own language proficiency in English and Spanish, perceptions of language use across a broad range of contexts including school, home, and community, and perceptions about the importance of Spanish and English language use. Descriptive data on the emergent themes from across learner's responses are reported. Results from this study can inform theory and practice, as well as provide the basis for further research that focuses on showcasing the strengths of Spanish-speaking and bilingual learners.

DEDICATION

The completion of my thesis for my master's degree has been possible due to all the love and support from my family, friends, research assistants, faculty, and staff. My daughter, Mia Serenity Ramirez, has been my number one supporter, from accompanying me to classes to late nights at the research lab! I would also like to mention that this would not have been possible without the unconditional love and support from my mother, Blanca E. Martinez Cavazos, who was the one that motivated and inspired me to begin this journey of education. My sister, Stella Stephens, my family members, and friends have motivated me and supported me and have been instrumental in helping me accomplish this milestone.

This work has also been possible due to all the support and aid from the faculty at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley. Thank you for the support, guidance, and patience Dr. Amy Weimer. Thank you for always believing in me. Thank you to Dr. Ernst, Dr. Guajardo, and Dr. Gasquoine for your support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was possible thanks to a grant that was awarded to Drs. Weimer, Esquierdo, and Guajardo by the Faculty Research Council, UTPA. This research has also been possible thanks to the extensive hours of laborious work put in by ALL the research assistants involved, including Daniela Kuri, Luis Correa, Melissa Leon, Cindy Gonzalez, Yuridia Munoz, Melissa Garza, Renata Garcia, Lucila Lopez, Alejandra Ballesteros, Deanna Pollard, Arnold Amador, Francisco Sierra, Gustavo Martinez, Liliana Flores.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today, English language learners (ELLs) represent a large number of learners enrolled in the United States PK-12 education system (Flores, Btalova, & Fix, 2012). From the year 1998-99 to 2008-09, there was a drastic increase from 3.5 million to 5.3 million enrolled learners as ELLs (Flores, Btalova, & Fix, 2012) and participation in Bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs has increased in the last decade from 14.4% to 17.8% in 2014-15 (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Hispanic learners constitute the largest percentage of ELL learners; Garcia et al. (2009) state that three out of four households of Hispanic minority learners have family members in the household that speak Spanish regularly. Research is needed that focuses on discovering how schools can best serve this growing population of learners.

Statement of Problem

Though bilingual learners have many assets, they also face challenges when they enter the school environment (Martin & Stuart-Smith, 1998). Drop-out rates for language minority learners are higher and they are more often placed in low achievement groups, compared to non-language minority learners (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). Bilingual learners also run the risk of being detained two or three more times than monolingual learners (Kempert, Saalbach, & Hardy, 2011). Many of these learners come from families that speak their first language (L1) at home and come to schools where they not only have to learn the content for academic achievement, but also learn a new language (L2). These learners have to

adjust to new communities and environments that might be quite different from their cultural contexts at home (Kim, Curby, & Winsler, 2014). Building a proficiency in a second language can take between five to seven years for bilingual learners; however, studies have shown that bilingual learners can achieve the same or higher levels of competency compared to English monolinguals when placed in supportive educational environments (Genesee, 2015; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, & Borsato, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2002) Thus, it is important to investigate how bilingual learners experience their school environments and which instructional approaches produce the most positive outcomes for these learners.

Statement of Purpose

Hispanic bilingual learners make up a large and growing percentage of school age learners within the United States. Understanding factors that affect academic development among this population is essential not only to promote Hispanic learner academic success, but to advance career possibilities for Hispanic individuals that can then diversify scientific thinking and advance society at large (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2010). Despite the few studies focused on parents, peers, and the school environment for bilingual learners, there are still many unanswered questions about how these interrelate to impact learner's experiences and perceptions of bilingualism in general. Thus, the present study examines bilingual learners' personal accounts of speaking two languages across a broad range of contexts including school, home, and community, and perceptions about the importance of Spanish and English language use. Commonly emergent themes and the emotional tone (positive, negative, or neutral) of bilingual learners' experiential accounts of experiences are identified in order to ascertain how bilingual learners are impacted by school, home, and community contexts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Some studies have revealed cognitive advantages among bilinguals, as compared to monolinguals, attributed to the constant switching between and monitoring of languages. This requires exercise of executive control, which strengthens the executive control system (Rubio-Fernandez & Glucksberg, 2012). For example, bilingual learners have been shown to have neurocognitive advantages in comparison with monolinguals on tasks that require selective attention, focused attention, inhibitory processing, and code-switching during the developmental time periods of early childhood to adulthood (Genesee, 2015); however, results have not been well-replicated and likely differ across levels of bilingual proficiency (i.e., balanced bilinguals, those who have high proficiency in both languages outperform language-dominant individuals, those who have a demonstrated stronger proficiency in one language). For example, Genesee (2015) states that, cognitive advantages are detected in bilinguals that master advanced proficiency levels in L1 and L2. Other researchers have found that negative cognitive effects of bilingualism are exhibited by learners classified as semibilinguals or weak bilinguals; however positive cognitive effects have been linked to dominant bilinguals or bilinguals who are proficient in both languages (Kempert, Saalbach, & Hardy , 2011). Thus, it is important to identify educational contexts that best build a mastery of proficiency in both languages in order to bring about the cognitive advantages of bilingual learners.

Bilingual Education Programs

There are various types of bilingual education programs to serve bilingual learners in the United States. In particular, dual language bilingual education programs are becoming more prominent (Babino & Gonzalez-Carriedo, 2015). The goal of dual-language bilingual education programs is for learners to learn content in two languages, while building proficiency in both languages (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Unlike subtractive bilingual education programs, which slowly subtract the native language, dual language bilingual education programs enrich the learner with a second language, while building their academic knowledge. Ideal bilingual education programs develop biliteracy, college readiness, and high academic achievement (De Jong & Howard, 2009; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013). Not all bilingual programs are ideal, though. Babino and Stewart (2015) has found that learners are not always provided effective instruction that allows learners to achieve academic success. Some bilingual programs have been criticized for being poorly designed, poorly staffed, under-resourced, and even misrepresented or mislabeled on official reports (Cahnmann & Varghese, 2005; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). This leaves educators, parents, and learners a lot of room to question the benefits of not just bilingual education, but also bilingualism in general.

Perceptions of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism

Current studies show that dual-language or bilingual programs have a general positive connotation in the U.S. because of the enrichment they provide for middle-class Anglo-American learners who already speak English (Mora, Wink, & Wink, 2001; Ovando, 2003). However, bilingualism has not always been valued in the United States, nor is it valued equally across regions of the U.S. For example, Harklau (2000) states that multilingual learners are often framed negatively in the classroom, and many times asked to discontinue the use of the native

language. Unfortunately, Spanish bilingual learners in Texas are often stereotyped as poor or low achieving (Smith et al., 2002; Toppelberg, Tabors, Coggins, & Burger, 2005). This affects the way bilingual learners perceive bilingualism and develop as bilinguals (or not). For example, Weimer et al. (2015) interviewed teachers, school administrators, and parents in a bilingual community and found that some doubted the effectiveness of bilingual education programs. A long history of anti-bilingualism, ignorance of the benefits of bilingualism, and misguided beliefs about how bilingual children are best prepared for academic success have led to many children to experience ineffective educational services. This complicates efforts by educators to gain community support for bilingual education programs.

Bilingual learners also experience discrimination (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). For example, some bilingual learners feel they should fake monolingualism (Hinton, 2016); thus, creating a worrisome situation within the Hispanic population. Even dual language bilingual education programs do not always foster the development of proud bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural citizens (Babino & Steward 2015; Potowski, 2004). Thus, even as programs teach two languages, they do not always instill a value for both within the learners. Previous findings have reported that learners are not encouraged to practice the Spanish outside of the school environment and in turn must choose one language over the other across contexts (Coady & O'Laoire, 2002). Yet this is not the case everywhere.

Thomas, Apolloni, and Lewis (2014) explored the perceptions and attitudes of bilingual learners towards bilingualism and their own abilities and found that these attitudes varied across schools and region. Thus, the location of a school and general school atmosphere might affect learners' interest in becoming bilingual.

Home and School Community Impact on Bilingual Learners

Bilingual learners' academic achievement is affected by perceived support from parents, teachers, and peers (Chen, 2005; Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2010). Hwang and Vrongistinos (2010) found that parental perceptions impact bilingual learners, as well as intrinsic, extrinsic, and personal motivation, social and future career goals. Parental involvement and focus is important because it has been shown that parental involvement affects learners' self-confidence, self-esteem, and academic achievement positively (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2010). Hispanic parents focus on their children's self-fulfillment and enjoyment rather superimposing their own interests on their child (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2010).

The school context is an important factor in learners' success. Kiuru et al. (2015) found that learners who perceived a positive attitude and support from their teachers and classmates and/or peers tend to excel more than those who do not receive such support. Yet the school may not provide a welcoming and supportive atmosphere to learners from language minority backgrounds or their parents. Thomas, Appolloni, and Lewis (2014) found that learners' language of choice was impacted by their peers, parents, and teachers, as well as demographic characteristics, legal status, and linguistic proficiency. If the school environment is supportive, however, families feel more welcome; Durand and Perez (2013) examined the parental involvement beliefs and practices among a small sample of Latino families and found that all parents sampled attributed supportive relationships with school personnel and a bilingual climate as the most important source of feeling welcome at school. Thus, it is possible that a school's commitment to supporting a bilingual environment affects learners' and their support systems.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Method

Participants

The study consists of 51(25 female, 26 male) learners enrolled in 5th grade in various types of bilingual dual-language educational programs located in South Texas. Participants' age ranged from 10 to 12 years. Of the 51, language proficiency scores revealed that 6 were monolingual learners. Since these six were currently enrolled in dual language bilingual education programs, their responses were retained as part of the sample. The household income varied among the participants' families, from less than \$10,000 ($n = 12$; 23%) to more than \$100,000 ($n = 1$; 2%), with 31% ($n = 16$) having an income of \$10,000 to \$20,000.

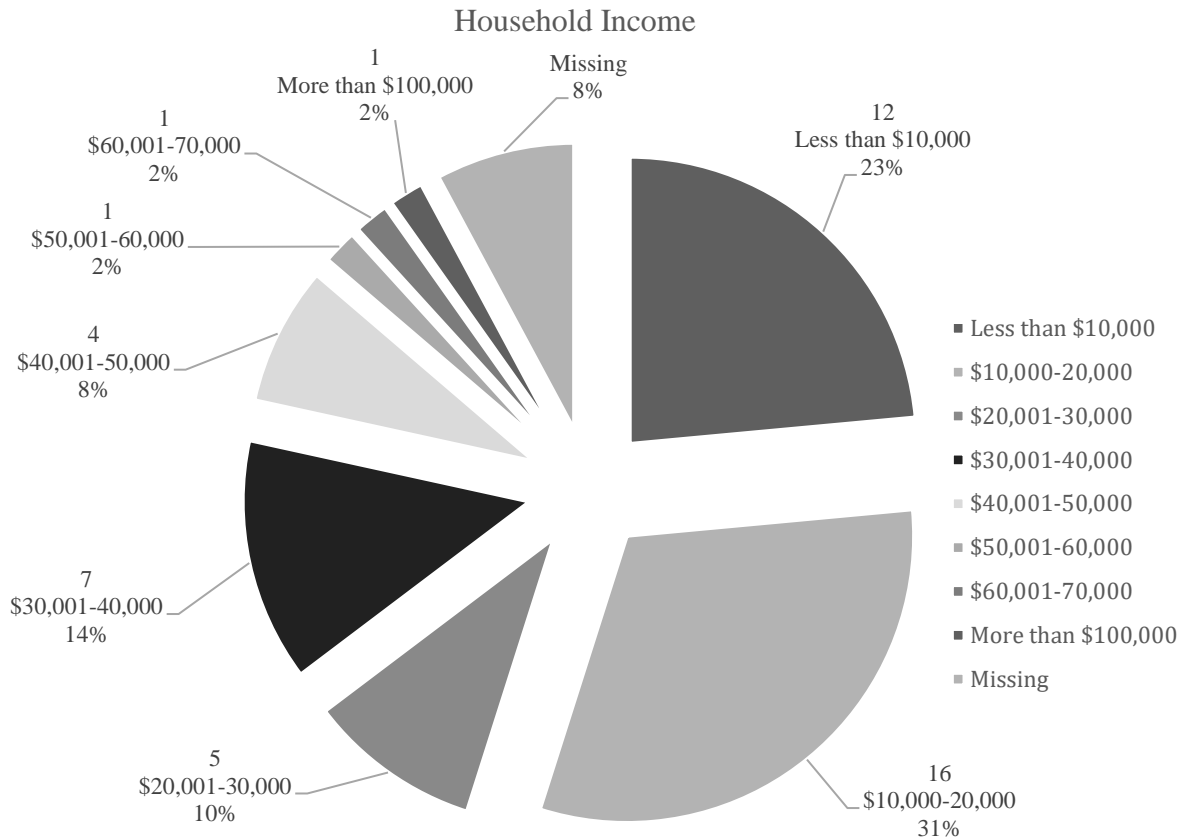


Figure 1. Household Income

Procedure

Parents provided consent and completed demographic surveys. Learners were assessed in their school by research assistants with a demonstrated proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing both Spanish and English. The assessments measured learners' language proficiency and video-recorded interviews provided qualitative data. As incentives, parents received a small gift, learners received a bilingual book, and teachers received a small office supply.

Measures

Demographic Surveys. Socioeconomic status was determined using parental reports of yearly total household income.

Language Proficiency and Dominance. Learners were administered English and Spanish versions of the Picture Vocabulary subtest of the Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey-Revised (WMLS-R; Woodcock, Muñoz-Sandoval, Ruef, & Alvarado, 2005). Raw scores were converted to standardized scores with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15, according to standardized procedures.

Using scores from the WMLS-R, learners were classified into one of the following categories: Monolingual, Weak Bilingual, Balanced Bilingual, or Strong Bilingual. Out of all the bilingual learners, 37.3% ($n = 19$) were categorized, according to assessment, as strong bilinguals, 47.1% ($n = 24$) as bilinguals; totaling 84.3% ($n = 43$) were classified as strong or balanced bilinguals. A small number of learners ($n = 8$; 15.8%) enrolled in the dual-language programs were classified as Monolingual ($n = 6$; 11.8%) and/or weak bilinguals ($n = 2$; 3.9%). Overall, most were balanced or strong bilinguals, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Learners' Bilingual Dominance Classification

	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Monolingual	6	11.8
Weak Bilingual	2	3.9
Balanced Bilingual	24	47.1
Strong Bilingual	19	37.3
Total	51	100.0

Perceptions of Bilingualism and Educational Experiences. Qualitative data were obtained via video-taped interviews. Semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended

questions designed to generate narratives from bilingual learners. Questions asked learners to speak in an open-ended fashion about their experiences in school with special attention focused on instruction, feelings developed during interactions with teachers, school staff, and peers at school. The semi-structured interview included questions such as: “How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish at school?” “What else can you tell me about your teachers, your experiences at school?” Appendix A lists all interview questions.

Research Questions

Question 1

What are learners’ perceptions about classroom language practices and opportunities to use the English and Spanish languages in other contexts such as home and the community?

Question 2

What are learners’ perceptions about the significance of the Spanish and English languages?

Results

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine how frequently learners chose to speak in Spanish versus English. Of the learners who chose to speak English in the interview ($n = 26$), 10 were female and 16 were male. Of the learners who chose to speak Spanish in the interview ($n = 24$), 15 were female and 9 were male. Two chose to speak both languages in the interview. Not surprisingly, learners who preferred to speak English in the interview ($n = 26$) had higher English Standardized Scores ($M = 94.96$, $SD = 13.69$) than Spanish Standardized Scores ($M = 80.25$; $SD = 15.45$). Similarly, learners who decided to speak Spanish on the interview ($n = 24$) had a higher Spanish Standardized Scores ($M = 86.38$, $SD = 21.35$) than English Standardized Scores ($M = 78.21$; $SD = 11.50$). Overall, learners who chose to speak English had higher

English Standardized Scores ($M = 94.96$, $SD = 13.69$) compared to those who chose to speak Spanish ($M = 78.21$; $SD = 11.50$). Table 2 shows that learners who chose to speak Spanish ($n = 24$) showed bilingual dominance in the Spanish Language and those who chose to speak English ($n = 26$) showed a dominance in English.

Table 2

Language Preference by Standardized Vocabulary Score

	<u>N</u>	<u>Spanish</u>	<u>English</u>
Prefer Spanish	24	86.38 (21.35)	78.21 (11.5)
Prefer English	26	80.25 (15.45)	94.96 (13.69)

Critical Analyses

Question 1: What are learners’ perceptions about classroom language practices and opportunities to use the English and Spanish languages in other contexts such as home and the community?

Learners’ accounts about language practices were analyzed to address Research Question 1: What are learners’ perceptions about classroom language practices and opportunities to use the English and Spanish languages in other contexts such as home and the community? These accounts were first organized by theme and then the emotional valence (positive, negative, or neutral) of that experience was determined.

While learner’s responses varied broadly, three themes surfaced most frequently. Most described experiences (1) serving as a translator, (2) feeling discriminated, and (3) having a connection to family. Emotional sentiments about these experiences varied across contexts (e.g., school, with peers, at home, and in the community).

Translation. While translating, learners reported a large percentage (23/31; 74%) of positive experiences, as shown in Figure 2. Learners were asked to describe accounts of when they had to translate or give examples of what the learner would do if someone did not understand the language others were speaking. Many of the reported translating experiences were accounts of when the learner had to translate for a family member, like the learner's mother, father, or other family member(s). For example, learners who experienced positive translating experiences stated, *"It helps me by talking to other people that my mom doesn't know how to talk English and also to my dad, like people come to my house and tell us if we want to buy something, but they talk in English...so I help my mom translate and I translate it to her to Spanish."* Further examples follow.

"Well, I do have one...it's 'cause there is...there is...we were at a store and there is one woman and, um, and a man they were...the woman talk in Spanish and the other one the man talk in English and the woman was trying to trans...like to trying to find something and the man wanted her to help her, but the man didn't know how to talk in Spanish. So me and my sister went to go help and we ask her what she needs so we could translate and, um, we translated the man thank us."

"Umm I help my mom umm to understand...and it helps me by talking to other people that my mom doesn't know how to talk English; and also to my dad, like people come to my house and tell us if we want to buy something, but they talk in English so I help my mom translate and I translate it to her to Spanish."

"Hay si pasa un señor me preguntan que dijo, [y] pues les ayudo en lo que entiendo."

"I explain it in Spanish...No, [I don't want her to learn English] ...Yeah, [I like to translate when she doesn't understand something]."

“Like she tells me what does that word say and she goes like that. Like all the words she doesn’t know in English she tells us.”

“When we went to, we are migrants, we went to Wisconsin and then we were at Walmart then they were... they were talking to them in English and that’s when I helped them out in English.”

“Y tu mamá no le entiende al doctor, y eso ¿qué? ¿Te hace sentir mal?” “bien para... porque... yo le puedo explicar a mi mamá que le dice”

“I help her... [and I do like it].”

"...learn English... [I don't mind helping him]."

“Cuando voy a algún lado con mi abuelita y le hablan en ingles] Yo le digo a la señora o señor...pues lo que sea que le pregunten yo se lo contesto en inglés...me gusta traducirle y me gusta me gustaría que hable inglés porque la otra vez mi primo fue a la casa y el nada más habla inglés y luego mi abuela le pregunto algo y él no sabía cómo decirle y yo le traduce por mi primo. [A mi abuelita], le gusta que le traduzca, o sea cuando estoy arriba o en algún lugar; something like that, me dice, me grita, ‘Ven a traducirme esto o ven a leerme esto,’ o something like that.”

“Bueno es porque mi mamá es de México...y vino acá, so le tengo que ayudar a[traducir] cosas en español...fuimos a la Academy y una señora, mi mamá le pidió [ayuda] a la señora, pero estaba hablando puro en ingle... so, me llamo y le [traduje] todo.”

Bueno, allá donde me fui en vacaciones [a México y] tenía que hablar puro español...mi abuelita no sabía que andaba diciendo...Me decía que ‘transmítelo’ en español, solo le [traduje] y dijo ‘ah ok’.”

“Well when we... when we go to Mexico my mom didn’t know, like, how to say, like.... I don’t know, but I remember I helped them with something.”

“[Cuando van a algún lugar y alguien les habla en ingles] mmm... Yo les ayudo junto con mis hermanos...Si...me gusta ayudarles...No [preferiría que hablaran ingles].”

“Hablan un poquito de inglés, uhm, aunque a veces no le entiendo; mis hermanas y yo tenemos que traducir... [Traducir me hace sentir] pues bien, aunque a veces no sé cómo decirlo en español, como traducirlo; pero si, me siento bien con las palabras que si se.”

If learners’ described a translating experience, they were asked a follow up question about whether they would like family members to learn English. The responses varied and some negative aspects of translating surfaced. Among the learner that reported to have experienced translating for others or family; the learners (5/31; 16%) who reported having negative experiences serving as translators stated that some would like their family member to know the English language and/or that it was not enjoyable to translate for anyone. For example, some learners reported, *“Si...quisiera que hablara bien [el inglés] ...pa’que si vamos a una tienda, como cuando vamos pa’ McDonald’s le preguntan, like ‘what meal do you want?’ y luego le dice a la señora que en español; que diga en español.”*

“She tries to tell me, ‘what did he say? ¿Que dijo?’ and I say, and then I tell him... and I tell he-she...her what he said...no, [I don’t like translating] ...Because I get, like, confused... [like when] something I can’t translate them into Eng-Spanish.”

“Cuando voy al algún lugar y como mi papá no habla inglés, yo] le digo lo que dijo y [traduzco]...No [me gusta]...me da mucha vergüenza.”

“Sometimes; sometimes it gets boring [to translate] ...’cuause I do it a lot...I get tired”

Some learners (3/31; 10%) had neutral experiences while translating. For example, one learner stated, "Yeah, I try to use different words and then and my mom help like translate. He either tells my mom, 'what is she saying?' or something like that."

"Si alguien le pregunta algo en inglés, ella me dice que yo responda lo que quiere decir lo [traduzco] a español."

"Les traduzco lo que le entiendo y es como me siento que yo les digo y... [Y cuando alguien les habla en ingles], Me preguntan a mi [y] Les digo lo que dijeron en español... En Espa... En ingles."

"Si, les digo que significa."

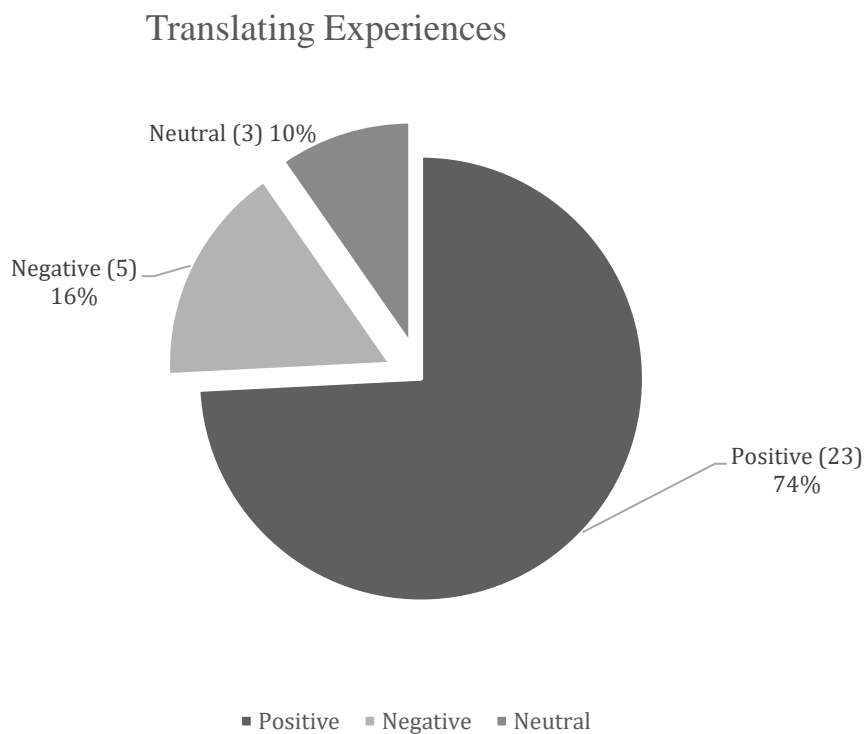


Figure 2. Translating Experiences

Overall, positive translating experiences were more impactful than negative translating experiences. Despite the fact that some learners reported that they would like their family

members to speak the English language, many learners liked helping in translating and saw it as a way to help their family or others.

Discrimination. While most bilingual learners (90.20%; $n = 46$) did not mention discrimination, some (9.80%; $n = 5$) did. Of the learners who reported experiencing discrimination, 3.92% ($n = 2$) reported the discrimination experience as neutral and non-impactful; and 5.88% ($n = 3$) of the learners described discrimination negatively. These experiences were reportedly powerful with the potential of having a lifelong impact on the learners' lives. For example, one bilingual learner who felt negatively affected by discrimination stated, "*Una niña le había pegado y mi hermano no se dejó y le dijo a la maestra, Ah, está bien y ya cuando son otros niños y le pegan a, le pegan a ellos, dicen 'ah, no' y pos lo regañan a ellos, y pues no le entiendo...como a nosotros no y a ellos si...creo que porque como somos diferentes y hablamos más el español...Es que, como vamos una escuela en [el norte] porque soy migrante y pos fuimos allá y como na'mas casi las personas siempre hablan inglés allá y una maestra nos había dicho ya para no hablar el español y que nosotros no hablamos eso...Yo me sentía incomoda porque pues no es mi culpa que yo sé cómo hablar más el español que inglés...Y pero, como casi no nos faltaba porque yo sé que pues yo, mis papás son de México y yo hablamos el español. Y como quiera lo seguí hablando porque pos pues no tienen derecho de que me tienen que decir...también en la escuela que ahorita les conté pues a veces no entienden, que como, que a veces, pues nosotros tenemos la razón, na'mas que ellos no quieren no quieren, que tener que, como [que] nosotros seamos correctos, y ellos que estén mal...es que son como maestras y a veces sus hijas o hijos vienen para ayudar a la escuela."*

Other bilingual learners stated, “... like me daba vergüenza... Que yo no sabía inglés y los otros niños si,” and “Porque la mayoría de las clases son de inglés, y las demás son bilingües, pero las bilingües no tienen mucha diferencia, solo más trabajo y ya.”

While discrimination was felt by 9.80% ($n = 5$) bilingual learners, two did not feel it affected them and felt neutral or dismissive about the discrimination experience. For example, learners stated, “I felt fine,” after interviewer asked, “Any story you not feeling good, did anybody at all make you feel bad for not speaking English?” and “Cuando estaba en la escuela donde vine primero todos estaban hablando español y yo estaba hablando ingles...como si yo fuera la única que sabía inglés.

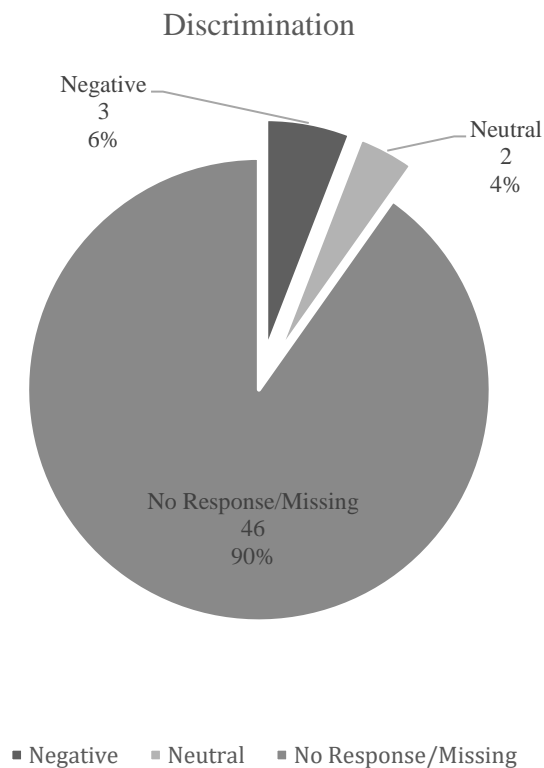


Figure 3. Discrimination

Family Connectedness. Some learners viewed being bilingual learners as an asset within the family environment. Bilingual learners viewed bilingualism as a way to connect with family

members and as a way of contributing to the household. Many of the bilingual learners identified themselves as individuals of importance within their families. Most of bilingual learners ($n = 37$; 72.5%) identified Spanish as the language of preference in the home. Speaking Spanish in the home primes them to maintain a family connection and keep the communication between the family and the learner going.

The majority of the learners (24/37; 65%) reported to speak Spanish in the home. The main reason learners reported speaking Spanish in the home was that one or more family members were monolingual Spanish-speakers. This led bilingual learners to choose to speak Spanish in the home, even though it might not be the language that they feel the most comfortable speaking. For example, some learners stated, *“[I speak Spanish] with my stepmom's mom, 'cause she only speaks Spanish. So, I kind of like talk to her in Spanish.”* Others provided the following statements.

“[I speak Spanish] with my mom, yeah; because I can't talk with her in English.”

“Porque mi familia es todos español... [y me gusta que me hablen en] español...porque como... es más fácil para ellos.”

“[Hablo español] Con mis abuelitos y mi mom y mi dad...les gusta más el español”

“Español...porque casi toda mi familia habla español.”

“Well Spanish cause I use a lot in my house, cause my parents are only Spanish.”

“A mi mamá casi no le gusta que hablemos en ingles enfrente de ella...[porque]ella piensa que nosotros estamos hablando mal de ella.”

“[With my mom, I speak] Spanish, but only with her 'cause all of my brothers and sisters know Spanish.”

“Mmm... con mi mamá hablo español, y con casi toda mi familia hablo español, pero nada más con mi hermana inglés... [mis papás hablan puro] español.”

“[I only speak Spanish at home because] my family doesn't know English.”

“Well, when we go to another part, like Reynosa...my parents tell me to speak in Spanish...because mi abuela habla en español allá...Pues cuando estaba mirando una película, mi abuela lo quiere en español.”

“Mi mamá español, español/ inglés y mi papá nomas español.”

“[En mi casa me siento más cómoda hablando el] español porque mi abuela, pues no entiende inglés”

Among the learners that speak Spanish in the home, some learners (5/37; 13%) used bilingualism as a means to maintain family connectedness and provide a service to their family. For example, some learners stated, *“No, [I don't want her to learn English; I like helping by translating] ...yeah...like every time we watch an English movie she's like, ‘what did they say?’”*

“[Cuando sea policía, hablar español me va a ayudar] pues en bastantes cosas...como...Mmm... ayudar a mi ama.”

“[I like to translate for my family] ...so that I could help my mom and my dad and my brother.”

“[Me gusta traducir] ...si...porque es bastante ayudar a mi mamá...y mi papá.”

“[I like translating] ...because like I never help my mom with anything, so I wanna help her.”

Some learners (8/37; 22%) described how maintaining Spanish language in the home is important for keeping relationships with family members and using language as a bonding tool. For example, some of the learners that chose to speak Spanish in the home stated, *“Si, si me*

gusta traducirles, a veces le enseño un poquito de inglés, le digo a mi mamá vamos al cuarto y te enseno a hablar en inglés y me dice que vamos a ir al cuarto a hablar inglés... [mi mamá] ...dice que es muy bonito, y le digo que si aprende los tres idiomas que agarras es una mejor oportunidad de agarrar un trabajo.”

Others provided these responses.

Spanish [is more important] 'cause, kinda, my mom speaks Spanish and how am I talk to her and tell her ...what happens and this and that?”

“[I like helping my sister when she doesn't understand English] because then she can learn English...to be bilingual”

"Well, when I was small I went to Mexico two times before, and when I was small, it was only me and my brother, my parents sent... 'cuase I have an older brother and my tía, she was over there. She was from [south-western state], so she takes us there. My parents weren't going and my little sister, my little sister was very small, she didn't go. And, like, when my brother wasn't there, I had to talk Spanish and I had to try really hard 'cause my tía was, like, taking us to school where little kids were writing in Spanish and everything. They learn and then she took me there...and it took me a couple of weeks, and at the end, 'cause it was almost the end of the school year; at the end, I had to speak in Spanish and everything. After that my tía was very proud of me; after I spoke in Spanish and had to write it down, what I wanted to say."

“En mi casa mi primo que tiene 22 años va a trabajar en un restaurante y como le dije que hay más oportunidades de agarrar trabajo porque hay muchas personas que hablan los dos idiomas y el nada más habla español, entonces me dijo que le enseñara hablar inglés”

“...estamos enseñando a mi mamá como hablar inglés, y a mi papá. Les estamos enseñando como... que significa eso, que significa eso en inglés.”

"I speak Spanish because of my dad; and I communicate with him, and he tells me in Spanish like what I do in school, and I tell him...he tries to speak English, but he mostly speaks Spanish." "I think I am fine with [my teachers not teaching me more Spanish]. I think my dad...can teach me more Spanish... [when I read to my dad in Spanish] ...he tells me what I am saying wrong and how to pronounce it and anything like that, and he like after that he gives me a snack."

"...mi mamá me enseña cosas de matemáticas mexicanas."

I want, um, like I'm doing my homework and then [my little sister] comes in, [and says,] 'read me this book' and then; but she get English so I read them."

"Well, my tía, she talks Spanish too, so I talk in Spanish too. And my cousin, her, my cousin that's my tía's daughter, she speaks English and Spanish, and sometimes when I can't say it, she tries to say it for me...what I do with my tía back in Mexico; they have this room like one on the second story and they have a bunch of crayons and a white board with markers and some papers and so, I teach my tías how to speak English and they will call me their teacher."

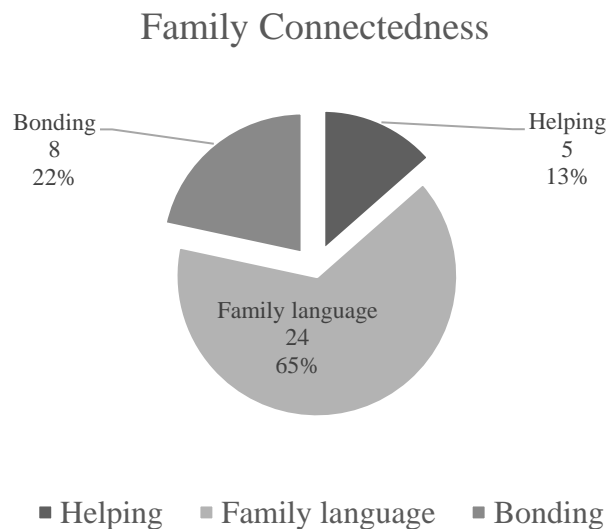


Figure 4. Family Connectedness

Overall, learners utilized bilingualism as a means to communicate with their family and sustain a relationship between the learner and other family members. It is important to note that even when some learners felt more comfortable speaking the English language, many still decided to speak Spanish in the home. Thus, keeping the Spanish language and using it at home can help the learners sustain a working and growing relationship with family.

Question 2: What are learners' perceptions about the overall significance of the Spanish and English languages?

When asked about the importance of being bilingual, 68.6% ($n = 35$) of bilingual learners reported that being bilingual is important. Despite recognizing the benefit of knowing two languages, though, many of the learners ($n = 21$; 41.2%) stated that English was the most important language in the United States and only 21.6% ($n = 11$) of the learners described both languages as equally important. It seems that timeframe (present or future) affected their responses.

An interesting finding was that the learners recognized bilingualism as an important skill for their future, but not necessarily for their present circumstances. Most learners ($n = 39$; 76.5%) describe how being bilingual would be an asset in their future professional careers. In general, learners believed that by being bilingual they would be better employees. For example, some discussed how they could translate and better serve clients or other people.

When prompted to consider the present, most learners ($n = 35$; 68.6%) then reported that it was helpful to them in some way. Some described how it could help to establish new or more friends, communicate with more people, help others, and know more words due to being bilingual. For example, some learners stated, "*Like I can make some friends that only speak Spanish and understand.*"

"It's a good thing...because when someone is talking to me in Spanish, you can understand it."

"Porque así puedo hablar con mis amigos, con mis vecinos, y maestras."

"Como a mí me ayuda español porque... como en seguir leyendo, como... si le digo casi todos hablan español me hablan, Y como si son inglés y si están hablando ingles si digo algo en español como que nada más me dicen en español."

"Well, I've been able to get lots of friends 'cause I know how to talk to them."

"Uh, it helps me cause, 'cause I can read, a, a lectura and do the lectura workbook...Because if I know both, I can talk to my friends in both languages, and I won't feel left out."

"Like I can make some friends that only speak Spanish and understand. [Also], because maybe if you go other places of the world, maybe they understand something else."

"Because like, if you are, like, right here and then you go, like, to Mexico, like, you already know the two languages and you can understand what they are saying; [all kids should know both languages] so they can learn to translate it and like to speak."

"Como, me puede, eh...siento la confianza de como preguntarme algo así...como en otro idioma que el inglés."

"Well if there is like kids, new kids coming you can talk them... with them if they only Spanish, only Spanish."

As stated above, 68.6% viewed bilingualism as important in the present time and only 11.8% ($n = 6$) did not agree. For example, learners stated, *"It doesn't make a difference."* and *"Not really... [doesn't help me]"*

Table 3

Bilingualism importance: how does being bilingual help...

		<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Now?	No	6	11.8
	Yes	35	68.6
	Missing	10	19.6
	Total	51	100
Future?	No	1	2.0
	Yes	39	76.5
	Don't Know	1	2.0
	Missing	10	19.6
	Total	51	100

When answering how bilingualism was important for their future career, most learners (76.5%) viewed bilingualism as important and as an asset to their future careers. For example, some learners stated, *“uh, when I grow up I want to be a singer and for singing you, can go sing at church and other places and, and whichever state you’re in, or whatever place, you have to know both languages”*

“Because you can translate the book.... Because some people speak Spanish or English”

“Porque agarras trabajo más rápido y puedes visitar otros países y tienes que saber los dos idiomas para saber que te están diciendo.”

“Yeah [important when I have a clinic], because maybe the people know how to speak English or know.”

“Because...if patients are in Spanish, I have to reply to them in Spanish. I have to write their notes in Spanish. I have to most of the things in Spanish.”

“[When I’m a firefighter it is going to help me] ‘cause maybe somebody is trapped and you could still talk to them in Spanish.”

“Because when I grow up, uh, and I do the little test where if I have children maybe it’s gonna be in English or Spanish and if I go to college, they’re gonna want us to know English and Spanish.”

“Uh, when I grow up I want to be a singer and for singing you, can go sing at church and other places and, and whichever state you’re in, or whatever place, you have to know both languages...because if you go touring and go anywhere and if people know Spanish or English you can do both.”

“So, like, if you work in a job where there speaking Spanish and they tell you that you had to write or how am I supposed to do it.”

“Because if you ever had a, if you ever go and have a job, and the man only speaks Spanish, you’re gonna, you don’t know what you’re gonna say

“[It is going to help me in the army], if, cause, um, sometimes if you’re gonna go like, to places you’re gonna have to know they’re language cause um you don’t know like if you’re looking for the place where you can find a battle field, well you can um, the people tell you where the other, the other team’s coming...and, so you gotta hear what there you have to learn how they speak and you have to talk, and you have to speak back to them.”

“...because well if you work [as a truck driver] some-they hire-hire people who know English and Spanish, so, um, better money, Spanish gold.”

Table 4
Language Perceptions

		<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Learners’ Perceived as More Important Language in School Setting	English	17	33.33
	Spanish	2	3.92
	Both	8	15.69
	Missing	24	47.06

	Total	51	100
Learners' Home Language Preference	English	5	9.8
	Spanish	37	72.5
	Both	6	11.8
	Missing	3	5.9
	Total	51	100
Learners' Perceived as More Important Language in the United States	English	21	41.2
	Spanish	3	5.9
	Both	11	21.6
	Missing	16	31.4
	Total	51	100

Learners recognized the importance of Spanish and English languages. Learners ($n = 17$; 33.3%) reported to perceive English as more important in the school setting, with 47.06% ($n = 24$) not stating the importance of bilingualism in the school setting. All learners ($n = 51$; 100%) reported experiences in the classroom setting about their general dual-language classroom setting. Each learner expressed at least one positive experience in the classroom setting where the experiences included feeling comfortable speaking both English and Spanish in the classroom and feeling relatively well about being in the current school. Some learners reported personal experiences related to their teachers, peers, and/or school in general. For example, among the positive experiences in the classroom setting, some learners stated, "*A veces me frustraba no entender el inglés, y fui aprendiendo el inglés cuando me lo enseñaba la maestra*"

"...que idioma te gusta hablar más aquí en la escuela?" "[Me gusta más hablar] el español [en la escuela] ...no sé, pero si me gusta más hablar el español o también el inglés me gusta más."

"Yes, [I think it's a good idea to have bilingual classrooms] because, so the kids can learn Spanish and English...if they make a friend that only speaks English, they will, they'll know how to speak in English and they'll understand what they are saying."

"Yes, [it's a good idea to have bilingual classrooms]; I think they teach them because they learn more...I think it's great."

"[When I came to this school], um, I felt like I didn't know that much Spanish so everybody was going to make fun of me... [and then they did not]."

"[Me siento cómoda en la escuela hablando el español] porque casi todos me hablan en español y en ingles no."

"[I feel] good [about my school]."

"People here are nice [in my school] ...the teachers... the students."

"[In class when working in Spanish], sometimes we have like, a partner, person who helps us with the Spanish."

"Um sometimes, like, when we read a story, we first do it in English, we write about it and then uh my teacher tells us we have to write it in Spanish but if we don't know that much of Spanish then he said we can just do a little bit about it."

"...a veces cuando me dice algo la maestra no le entiendo y le pregunto qué significa y ella me dice lo que significa."

"I like [my school] because I can be with my friends and learn and also...because the teachers are super nice."

"Me siento cómoda hablando [los dos] idiomas en la escuela."

"I think it's actually kinda good that the school has bilingual classes...so the kids who want to learn both languages can learn."

“Le decía a la maestra que me enseñara más inglés porque a veces unas amigas me hablaban puro inglés y no les entendía lo que decían, y pues le decía a mi maestra que, si me lo traducía, que me lo tradujera, y me dijo... y ya me fue enseñando más inglés para hablar con mis amigas.”

“I ask if somebody can help me [when it is a Spanish day].”

“Yo me siento bien con el inglés porque todos casi todos en mi clase saben inglés y el español; y si hablamos bien...con los dos hablamos bien y cuando mis amigas hablan el inglés, like, casi hablamos ingles...casi todos los nos hablan español.”

Among the experiences in the dual-language school setting, some ($n = 12$; 23.53%) learners reported negative experiences where they identified that the classroom setting was difficult and gave them feelings of shame, nervousness, fear, and/or embarrassment for not knowing the English or Spanish Language in the classroom setting. These negative experiences in the dual-language classroom setting included feelings of fear, shame, and uncomfortableness for not knowing either the Spanish or English languages. For example, a learner stated, *“Mi primer día de escuela [me sentí mal por no saber los dos idiomas] ...Tenia vergüenza de hablar en español...No sé, es que casi todas mis amigas hablaban en inglés.”* More learners' experiences follow.

“No mucho, [no me siento cómoda hablando español en la escuela o no me gusta hablarlo en la escuela]...porque casi todos hablan en el inglés.”

“[Cuando llegue a esta escuela, me sentía] preocupada porque todos los otros niños saben inglés y yo no.”

“...me daba vergüenza [no saber inglés y mis compañeros sí].”

“[In second grade, when I didn't know English, I felt] Scared...”

“Estaba nerviosa [de no poder hablar inglés].”

“Well when I first came here I only knew Spanish, but then I started learning English. So when I didn't know how to speak English and the other kids only knew how to speak English I couldn't communicate with them.”

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

The present study addressed two important research questions to investigate learners' perceptions about using Spanish and English in and outside of school, and the value learners' placed on being bilingual.

Results revealed that while bilingual learners have many different perceptions about being bilingual in and outside of the classroom, three themes emerged across most accounts; most learners described experiences of translation, family connectedness, and discrimination. Learners readily recalled positive accounts of serving as a translator and maintaining connections with family, and negative accounts of perceived discrimination.

These results suggest the importance of two, at least, issues for bilingual learners. Bilinguals would lose two important aspects of themselves if they do not maintain both of their languages. If these bilingual learners lose the ability to speak Spanish, there are other aspects of their lives at risk. Losing bilingualism means that they lose a skill that they feel is positive, that of translation. Perhaps more importantly, though, they perceive that speaking Spanish creates a connectedness to family. This highlights the importance of providing effective bilingual education programs that facilitate language development in both languages. Because by not practicing the Spanish language, many of the learners may lose their ability to communicate with

only Spanish-Speaking family members and therefore lose important family support and a connection to their heritage.

Though not reported frequently, the accounts of discrimination by even a few of the learners reveals a disturbing reality and fit with past findings that bilinguals do not experience the same type of school environment as other learners. Umaña *et al.*, (2015) examined perceived perception of discrimination within the young adolescent Latino(a)s and found that discrimination by adults at school was perceived as a greater threat if connected to the learner's ethnic group. Further research should identify more details about when and how discrimination occurs in order to develop methods to combat it and provide equity in education. Nevertheless, this study provides the basis of work that can inform the development of outreach and educational programs for educators and community members. When the minority language has been marginalized and learners penalized for the use of the minority language limits, the future use of the language decreases, limiting opportunities (Thomas, Apolloni, & Lewis, 2014).

Dual language bilingual education programs are most effective (Thomas & Collier, 2002), but not all community members understand this (Weimer et al., 2015). The present data help highlight that learning Spanish and English can maintain family connections (keeping parents as support mechanisms for their children), increase career opportunities, and strengthen bilingual children's identity. Thus, they provide knowledge that can be showcased to educational policy makers debating the impact of bilingual programs on learners' outcomes.

The present study provides the basis for further research. Although these learners were currently enrolled in a bilingual program at the 5th grade level, some had not been enrolled in the program for 5-7 years, therefore did not show proficiency in the second language learned. Future work could examine populations of bilinguals who have been in school for longer durations.

Also, the learners were interviewed within the school environment. It is possible that learners were influenced by the school context and therefore chose to speak in English more often. This could have affected their perceptions of Spanish use or bilingualism due to English being the official and primary state testing language. Future research should utilize different settings for interviews.

Nevertheless, the present study reveals that many, but not all, bilingual learners have positive perceptions about the importance of Spanish, and easily described how they felt it would help them longitudinally, especially in their future career choice. They also could recognize the usefulness of bilingualism in the present, if prompted. This suggests that educators could work to provide more information to bilingual learners about their present advantages as a bilingual. When bilingual learners are empowered to see their knowledge as an asset, they will undoubtedly make even greater gains.

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APPENDIX A

APENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

English Interviews

1. How do you feel about your school?
2. Which languages do you speak?
3. Which language do you feel most comfortable using?
4. Which languages do you speak, read, and write at home?
5. Which languages do you speak, read, and write at school?
6. What languages do your teachers and others at school speak to you?
7. How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish at school? And English at school?
8. What else can you tell me about your teachers, your experiences at school?

Entrevista en Español

1. ¿Cómo te sientes acerca de tu escuela?
2. ¿Cuáles lenguajes son los que hablas?
3. ¿Cual lenguaje te sientes más cómodo usando?
4. ¿Cuáles lenguajes hablas, lees, y escribes en tu casa?
5. ¿Cuáles lenguajes hablas, lees, y escribes en la escuela?
6. ¿En qué lenguaje te hablan tus maestro(a)s y otro personal de la escuela?
7. ¿Qué tan cómodo te sientes hablando Español en la escuela? ¿Qué tan cómodo te sientes hablando Inglés en la Escuela?
8. ¿Qué más me puedes decir acerca de tus maestro(a)s y de tus experiencias en la escuela?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Isela B. Stephens was born in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Isela earned her B.S. in Psychology and two Minors, Spanish and Criminal Justice, from the University of Texas-Pan American in 2011. She later earned her M.A. in Experimental Psychology from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2016. During her undergraduate and graduate college career, Isela conducted research and has presented findings around the world, including South Padre Island, TX, USA and Guilin, China, P.R. She also served as a teacher in IDEA Public Schools. Her permanent address is 5425 Quail Glenn Trl. Brownsville, TX 78526.