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The Achievement Gap: How Are English Language Learners Being Impacted By The U.S. Education System?

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The Achievement Gap: How Are English Language Learners Being Impacted By The U.S.
Education System?

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LS 400 Senior Capstone

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Abstract

This capstone paper explores individual experiences of English learners in a South County Monterey academic environment in order to better inform future teachers. This qualitative case study explores seven English learners' individual experiences and focuses on addressing the following questions: What experiences impact English language learners' (ELLs)

academic development in the U.S.? What are the primary factors that contribute to the achievement gap ELL's face? How does society's views impact ELL's? What factors can provide a better academic experience? In order to further investigate the experience of ELLs in U.S. schools, this study sought research and gathered information through different peer-reviewed articles, websites, books, journals, magazines, and interviews to gain a better understanding of the factors which impact the academic development of ELLs. After examining the factors contributing to ELLs' achievement gap, this study encompasses different experiences of ELLs and approaches which may provide ELL students with a richer learning environment.

Observing my own, relatives and friends' experiences, I began to wonder how these reflected in the larger studies of English learners in the U.S. I came into the South County in CA, as a new learner of English back in 2003 from Mexico at the age of six. I had no experience with the English language and struggled with school once I started. When I entered elementary school promptly after arriving, I was very lost and could not comprehend what was going on in the classroom. The teachers would not stop to explain the content to me, or had anyone aid me in class. I was not learning anything and would just be left on the desk with a worksheet to fill out with the rest of the class. Eventually, a teacher who worked at a migrant program in the school took the initiative to work with me herself everyday after school for two to three hours to work on my English reading, writing and pronunciation. As my school journey continued, there were times where I would get confused on how to complete some assignments. I would have asked my parents, but for one they did not understand English, my translation skills were not that great, and they would get home really late since at that time they worked long hours in the strawberry fields. There were instances in both elementary and middle school where I was told I could not

speak Spanish in class since it was not allowed and I had to only speak English. So outside during break, lunch or recess I would speak English, Spanglish and Spanish. Having had to assimilate into an English speaking environment, my native language and bilingualism was seen more as an obstacle and not a strength. Thereafter, things started to feel less difficult since I could keep up with the lessons, but I still had difficulty in testing, reading and the pronunciation of some words. I feel this was especially so since I could only speak English at school, since at home it was all in Spanish. Although this made it hard to improve my English skills at home, I was able to develop my bilingualism in both Spanish and English to a certain degree. When it came time to take exams and standardised testing, I would test below basic since everything was in English and some parts were hard to comprehend. This would discourage me since everyone around me was getting proficient or above proficient. I felt that I had to work twice as hard than my peers who were fluent in English in order to catch up. As I made my way through higher education, I realized that my Spanish had become limited due my inability to use higher vocabulary, as I had for English. This made me think about how my bilingualism was seen when I was younger versus when I was in highschool. Thus, I wondered why students in the US are asked and even encouraged to learn a second language in highschool, but when ELL's speak their native language and are learning English, they are looked down upon. For example, I decided to take Japanese in highschool instead since I was already fluent to some extent in Spanish, although Spanish was also a choice. This experience made me grow linguistically as I became an intermediate Japanese speaker. To this day I still struggle with my English skills in terms of pronunciation. This is especially so at the high academic level where English takes on different levels. Like myself, I saw many other similar students who were ELLs, fall behind in their

academic studies. Thus, through this and the impacts of my major in teaching, I wanted to see how personal experiences of former ELLs reflected on the larger studies of English learners in the U.S.

Literature Review

Numbers of ELLs and Evidence of Achievement Gap

As the percentages of both immigrant people and families in the US increase, so have the numbers of enrolled students who are non-English speakers. The fall of 2017, in US public schools, had the highest percentage (10.1%) of students were ELLs, than in the Fall of 2000 (8.1%) (IES & NCES, 2020). In a IES & NCES 2020 report, California (19.2%), Texas (18.0%), and Nevada (17.1%) showed the highest percentages of ELLs among its public school students. In fall 2017, of the ELLs, it showed that there were about 3.8 million Hispanic ELL (76.5%), 530,900 students were Asian ELLs (10.7%), 327,300 White ELL students (6.6%), and 211,000 Black ELL students (4.3%) (IES & NCES, 2020). With this diverse group of English learners, there is a possibility they will experience some sort of difficulty with the English language (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). In correlation to such diverse groups of ELLs, there is also a connection to the achievement gap that these students face.

The achievement gap has become one of the most difficult challenges in school reform. Although the gap has existed for the past few centuries, it is in recent times that educational practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and legislators have begun to refer to it as a major challenge in the 21st Century (Bressler & Howard, 2011). The term, achievement gap, usually refers to the academic disparity in outcomes between Black, Native American, and Latinx(e) students, with those of their White and most Asian-American counterparts (Bressler & Howard,

2011). This gap is most notable because these students have low GPAs, low standardized test scores, lower high school graduation rates, and lower advanced placement courses (Bressler & Howard, 2011). But these students also show higher placement in special education, and higher suspension and expulsion rates (Bressler & Howard, 2011). The primary source used to examine current achievement outcomes across the multiple spectrums of student performance in U.S public schools, is derived from data collected from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Bressler & Howard, 2011). NAEP is the only ongoing and nationally representative assessment that shows what students in the U.S know and can do in the different academic areas (Bressler & Howard, 2011). For instance, the NAEP includes two categories of language proficiency for ELLs to be tested to see if they fall under ELs and non-ELs, based on their test results. Once ELs demonstrate the English language proficiency that coincides with their states' and districts' established criteria, they then are reclassified as fluent English proficient (RFEP) (William & David, 2013). When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was still active, EL students in CA were identified based on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The CELDT scored the overall proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing, in order to determine where the students were within the five levels ranging from beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, and advanced (Saunders & Marcelletti 2013). As a result, NCLB required all students to make yearly progress within the impossible goal that all students achieve a proficient score by the end of that given year (Menken, 2010). NCLB also terminated the Bilingual Education Act and replaced it with the English Language Acquisition Act that emphasized English learning; which in turn required ELLs to participate in the exact same statewide assessments their native English speaking

counterparts were taking (Menken, 2010). Such actions made the achievement gap more prominent since ELL students could not keep up with the complexity of English that was being used in these exams. As a result, it is very crucial to be as well-informed of the impacts that the education system has on ELLs in schools. In this case, language plays an important aspect of this awareness.

Language as the Medium and Point of Instruction

Language is important for ELL students as “language itself is both the medium through which school subjects are taught and studied as a subject itself” (Garcia, 2009, p.22). In the U.S, English is the dominant language, and monolingual English speaking students are seen as the norm. This norm is the predominant ideology that is associated with English monolingualism on its dominance over other languages spoken within the U.S. In fact, English is considered more natural, efficient and more productive in the U.S. (Garcia, 2009). As a result, students who do not have the privilege of a bilingual school are often educated in a language other than the one they speak at home. Similarly, there might be instances where ELLs are asked to not use their native languages, be it in school or otherwise, while at the same time, non-ELLs are encouraged to learn another language later on in their educational path. This trend that has its historical roots that continue to this day, describes how native speakers of languages, such as Spanish, are more often than not discouraged from using their native languages (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016). While, on the other hand, nonnative speakers are most often encouraged to learn foreign languages (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016). This apparent difference has to do with the ideas created about and around language, the role(s) that languages should play, and the communities that use them (Fredericks & Warriner, 2016). Thus ELLs may begin school behind students who

understand the dominant language, English. English in this case is seen as the standard language that is valued for teaching, learning and assessing what is being taught in school (Ofelia 2009). Consequently, without proper acquisition, language minority children will continue to fall behind and will not get to have equal access to resources and opportunities (Ofelia 2009). While ELLs are working hard to acquire English and, most often, falling behind, native English speakers are continuously progressing in their acquisition of the academic content (Murphy, 2014). Due to the importance that the acquisition of English proficiency has placed on ELL students, any diversion from that can be seen as less than or incorrect. As Garcia described, “racism that is associated with language is what has been termed ‘linguicism’ (2009, p. 39). The English language standard regulates the ways in which language is used in the U.S. and establishes language hierarchies where some languages or ways of using them are more valued than others (Garcia, 2009). Seeing as to how important language can be, it is also important to take it into consideration in the topic of bilingual education. In the same vein, because language is so familiar, some might create a series of assumptions about language that then have to be questioned in order to think about bilingual education (Garcia, 2009). Considering that language is always evolving and fluid, ELL’s who, for example, are Hispanic/Latinx(e), utilize their bilingual abilities, code-switching and translanguaging when conversing through a variety of media, forms, people and on through their academics. Here bilingualism refers to the ability to speak two languages (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015). Code-switching is the “dynamic and creative fashion [of] expressive transgression by bilingual speakers of their two separate languages, [that includes the] act of switching elements of linguistic mastery and virtuosity” (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015. pg.282). And translanguaging is described as “the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic

repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages” (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015. pg.281). Through such complexity, ELL students work harder than their English speaking counterparts. Students who arrive in the U.S during their adolescents face more challenges than those who arrived at a younger age, or that were born in the US. Although adolescent ELL’s manage to acquire and develop the necessary English for social interactions and consume pop culture at a quicker rate, four to seven years, if not more, are needed to develop academic English (Lee, 2012).

Risk Factors Which Contribute to the Achievement Gap

There are several risk factors that contribute to the achievement gap ELLs face. As stated previously, ELLs are a large percentage of students who experience challenges with English (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). Indirect evidence suggests that ELLs, and or students with limited English proficiency, have higher chances of dropping out of school, in comparison to their English-speaking peers (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). In order to address the needs of ELLs, a national effort must be made to close the achievement gap. To achieve this goal, it is important to understand the risk factors that contribute to the achievement gap (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). One consistent risk factor of dropping out of school has been limited English proficiency and poor academic achievement (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). This is because most content material in U.S academic schooling is presented in English. Although studies have identified a number of risk factors, three major factors that are characterized within the ELL population include: English proficiency, family socioeconomic status and cultural differences (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011) that characterizes this population of students at higher risks of school failure. Although these three factors are the overall typical factors that impact ELLs, it

should also be noted that all factors are interrelated and no one factor can be attributed without the other (Sheng, Sheng, Anderson, 2011).

Family socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the strongest predictors of school failure and dropping out, which is related to poverty and the risk this has on school and health failure (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). In connection to English learners, those who come from recent immigrant families are at a socio economic disadvantaged position, come from low-income families, and have parents who have less or no educational background compared to their English-proficient counterparts (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). With this in mind, it is also important to note that even within ELL SES, there are differences that can significantly impact the risks of dropping out of school. For instance, students from low SES immigrant families showed higher risks of dropping out of school, while students from high SES immigrant families did not show any significant difference between the probability of dropping out (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011).

Cultural differences are those that occur between that of the home and school. This makes it difficult for ELLs to adjust to the mainstream US school culture; since these differences in culture are intertwined with teaching methods, expectations for behavior, daily routines, and teacher-student relationships (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). Although there may be some explanation between cultural values with regards to academic achievement and the low dropout rate, the cultural values here relate to those of the family's socioeconomic status and parents' education levels (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial that the US education system begins to really make changes that will provide the proper pedagogy that will take the strengths of these students into account to build upon and expand as they assimilate into the US

culture. While dropping out of school can be seen as an individual decision, ELL students are placed at higher risks of failing school due to economic disadvantages, limited English proficiency, and different cultural backgrounds (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011).

How Culture Impacts Academic Learning

Culture plays an important role on how individuals behave, think and perceive the world and vice versa. In the case of these non-English speaking students, they are all bringing very diverse cultural and racial backgrounds which might support learning, if the teacher understands the meaning of the cultural practices. To better comprehend the role culture plays on ELL's, the importance of culture in the education system needs to be addressed first.

In 1964 a legislation was introduced that focused attention on the nation's poor, including students in schools who were vulnerable. In the 1960s the genetic explanation was created, which was an institutionalized explanation in regards to the academic achievement of students from low-income ethnic minority groups (Bressler & Howard, 2011). The social scientists and educators involved in the creation of this cultural deprivation paradigm, did so in order to provide an alternative to the genetic explanation, embedded in US educational institutions (Bressler & Howard, 2011). Thus, this explanation observed the limited cultural capital in homes and communities of low-income and minority students, as a major contributing factor to their low academic achievement (Bressler & Howard, 2011). As a result, this was taken as blaming these groups of people for their dismal educational status and social exclusion. Although this explanation was made years ago, it is still a paradigm that still lingers in the U.S educational system, as it is internalized by many teachers (Bressler & Howard, 2011). Consequently, it then leads to low teacher expectations and uninspiring teaching in many classrooms whose student

population mostly consists of Black and Latinx(e) students (Bressler & Howard, 2011).

Nonetheless, due to the negative views of the cultural deficit paradigm, pioneering scholars constructed the cultural difference paradigm in the 1970s and 1980s to critique and provide an alternative to the cultural deficit paradigm previously constructed (Bressler & Howard, 2011).

This new cultural difference explanation counteracted the cultural deficit paradigm, by depicting the strength and resilience of the families, communities, and cultures of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups (Bressler & Howards, 2011). In terms of the role of culture and learning, if teachers are not mediated by a deep understanding of how cultures are fluid, multifaceted, and complex, it can eventually lead them to creating stereotypic thinking about the cultures of their students (Bressler & Howards, 2011).

Many English learning children who come from immigrant families have to both maintain their own culture, whilst assimilating into the culture of the country they moved to. Due to the cultural difference from the dominant group where they reside, they often struggle to maintain or create their own identities (Nieto & Bode, 2012). In the case of these non-English speaking students, they are all bringing very diverse cultural and racial backgrounds that would then enable some teachers to either work with them to aid them to provide them with additional support, or will struggle and or ignore it. Most often than not, the latter option could be more common since in the US, American culture is seen as the norm. Similarly, power is implicated with culture as well. This means that the members of the dominant group in a society, who have more power, think of the dominant cultural values as “normal”, while they view the values of minority groups as deviant or maybe wrong (Nieto & Bode, 2012). The difference in power of each of these groups creates this difference in perception, rather than any inherited values of

goodness or rightness (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Differences in perceptions carry different weight, status, or power for those of the dominant and less dominant groups; which can cause dangerous overgeneralizations and erroneous conclusions concerning entire groups of people (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Relating back to ELLs, cultural differences such as teaching methods, expectations for student behaviors, daily routines, and relationships between teachers and students make it difficult to adjust to the mainstream U.S school culture (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson 2011). Due to racial disparities between White Americans and BIPOC in the U.S, culture is randomly and regularly used to explain everything from educational disparities, school failure, problems with behavior management and discipline (Gorski 2019) that is often connected with BIPOC minority groups and ELLs in schools. What can also contribute to this challenge, is the lack of cultural representation in educational settings. As a result, ELL's, who most likely come from BIPOC minority groups, do not have as much representation and acknowledgement of their culture being taught and represented in their academic experiences. "[T]he problem of culture in teaching is not merely one of exclusion, [but] also one of overdetermination" (Gorski, 2019). If so, the lack of diverse cultural representation then becomes a risk because ELL students cannot connect, get unjustly misjudged, and cannot infer and/or grow from the material they are learning. Therefore, it can negatively impact the quality of their education. What this type of pedagogy says, is that diverse experiences don't matter, it is acceptable because every student is treated the same, given the same materials and content, and taught the same skills (Osorio, 2015). Ultimately, there is no differentiation, acceptance, joy, enthusiasm, and connections being made (Osorio, 2015). Similarly, some schools and teachers, in an attempt to be more inclusive, will say they do not see color --color blindness-- and only see their students as the same without making differences.

This statement assumes that to be “color-blind”, is then to be fair because to acknowledge differences is to see “defects” and “inferiority” (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Instead of having this mindset, accepting such differences also means that ELL’s can have detailed and specific guidance and help to enrich their learning and be viewed as a strength on which to build upon. These students' cultural identities need to be seen from the perspective of assets and not a problem, burden or inferior (Nieto & Bode 2012).

How to Improve Instruction for ELLs

Considering that now in 2021, the number of ELL students has increased, it is crucial to ensure that they receive equal access to quality education. Furthermore, educators and schools need to keep in mind that these students not only have to balance the demands of the curriculums, but also be able to acquire academic vocabulary, literacy skills, disciplinary academic practices and English language structures at the same time (Perez & Holmes, 2010; Walqui, Heritage & Linqanti, 2020).

Approaches to Literacy Instruction

Another challenge that arises in improving ELLs literacy is the inadequate use of research-based instructional practices (Perez & Holmes 2010). For instance, when educators begin teaching English learners, they tend to focus on the students' acquisition of English, which is a good thing but it emphasises what these students lack rather than the assets they bring (Perez & Holmes 2010). Academic literacy skills are important for ELL students to obtain since they are essential for their success in the content areas of their education. Perez & Holmes describe how culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) ELL’s have what is called the CLD student biography (2010). This includes four interrelated dimensions of the students’ lives that include:

the sociocultural, linguistic, academic and cognitive dimensions that can be used to expand and cultivate academic literacy (Perez & Holmes, 2010). By being able to comprehend this cognitive dimensional biography and how to properly implement it in the classroom, it can equip ELL students with the skills they require in order to understand the complexity that comes with school and what they will learn (Perez & Holmes, 2010). Through this process, students will be able to gain knowledge based on the relatability and connections they can derive from what they are learning, be able to expand both their native and English language skills, get motivation and feel engaged in the subject matter, as well as the process and development of their cognitive skills (Perez & Holmes, 2010). These students are able to bring forth their own knowledge and build upon it without having to feel discouraged or afraid of “failing” due to the complexity that comes with all that makes them them.

Language: From Theory to Practice

The English for Specific purposes (ESP) approach is focused on the design and teaching of courses to develop well-defined competencies based on the use of English that students will eventually need for school and work (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). Therefore, having a clear understanding on who the learners are, what they know and what they still need to learn are crucial to the development of the design of curriculums and pedagogy. ESP courses challenged a number of assumptions about the teaching of English. Although ESP approaches have not been highly influential in the K-12 settings, they nonetheless offer K-12 ESL teachers useful ways of teaching with language need and usefulness, determining what is then taught (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). Another idea adapted from this work was the pedagogical value of employing students' first language in classes where the students and ESL teachers shared the

same language, although not a common practice, in American schools (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqunti, 2020). In the same vein, communicative language teaching is also crucial in understanding and implementing. This teaching emphasizes the learners' ability to carry out communicative functions that are appropriate for specific contexts in the second language (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqunti, 2020). Educators who adopt this approach emphasize the students' fluency in the second language as they carry out such functions in particular contexts, and view challenges of accuracy and/or correctness as secondary (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqunti, 2020). Although through this ELLs are not using proper grammar, they are able to communicate what needs to be. As detailed by Walqui, Heritage, & Linqunti, "another positive consequence of communicative language teaching, with its emphasis on interaction, has been the acceptance of learner error and a validation of students' hesitations and reformulations of necessary steps in the process of developing communicative abilities in the second language" (2020. pg. 75). Similarly, the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) approaches focus on the explicit teaching of language form as a meaning-making resource for both first-and-second language learners (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqunti, 2020). This refers to the potential in meaning within texts, not simply just having meaning because, through different forms of interactions that can then expand on how text differs through language contexts', such as through science, history, math, ect. SFL approaches help students understand how meaning relates to specific acts, logical connections, references, and interpretations (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqunti, 2020).

Vygotsky proposed ideas on sociocultural theories of language that have been accepted and developed by both psychologists and educators all over the world for the past three decades. Two of these main ideas that influence second-language teaching and learning include: (1)

language mediates all human action, and (2) learning is an essentially social process of co-construction in the zone of proximal development, which entails areas beyond what learners can do independently but where actions can be done with assistance of those who are more able (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). This theory proposes that students learn language as apprentices through meaningful interactions (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). Teachers who are teaching ELLs need to develop structure and opportunities for students to engage in scaffolded interactions with both teachers' and peers (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). Thus, through this participation, students will be able to develop content knowledge and communicative abilities (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). The impacts on this social cultural approach to teaching can be seen in the growing emphasis on the importance of how pedagogical scaffolding and column interactions facilitate language development (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020).

Being able to teach and learn can vary and can change in context depending on those involved, and individual thoughts. Although the same principles of learning may apply across contexts, their particular instantiation will always be different (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). As explained by Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, teacher views' impact how they treat their students, the invitations they offer them to participate and grow in their learning, and specific support they provide in order to support learning; which are views influenced by societal assumptions (2020). Therefore, teachers have to engage in challenging these assumptions in order to develop more productive understandings about second language learners. Assumptions about learners must be questioned, such as the differential societal appreciation second language learning has in U.S classrooms. For example, in the early 2000's Guadalupe Valdes proposed the

idea that a second language could be learned either as a foreign language (FL) or as a second language (SL)[as cited in Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020]. Students in the first case who are learning a foreign language, have their native language valued as much as the FL, and their native language is not in danger of disappearing as a result of studying said FL (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). Additionally, “the required levels of proficiency to be acquired in the targeted language are not very demanding since the language is not indispensable to the individuals functioning in society”(Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020. p. 79). On the other hand, when students study a SL, like ELLs, the target language is indispensable since participation in society is then predicated on its use; so an individual's first language is then threatened by the development of the SL and is seldom appreciated in this environment (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). In the US, ELLs are students who are not only required to learn English, but must also learn English literacy skills and disciplinary academic practices simultaneously in situations where they are the minority with all the tensions that that entails (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). Such are the pressures to develop the level of competence needed in the second language of school-age students that are then not comparable. For instance in the US, ELLs are expected to perform on par with native speakers and take high stake tests’ using English; while on the other hand, students of foreign languages are not tested in disciplinary course work undertaken in the second language (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). After four years of studying, non-ELLs of foreign languages reach the equivalent of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages’ level of novice-high or intermediate-low, results that would be unacceptable for ELLs (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). In addition, another differential view of ELLs in US schools relates to the use of their family language, which

formal understanding of second-language learning, eliminates the use of the students native language because of fear of negative transfer (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). With all of this in mind and with better understanding of what encompasses both teaching ELLs and ELLs themselves, teachers need to be more flexible in their students' needs to create better pedagogies. Teachers in the US have very few opportunities to grow on the jobs and evolve the multiple ideas that are often superficially presented into coherent integrated theories of teaching and learning (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020). However with the pedagogical quality that comes from integrated theories of teaching and learning, teachers can be more able to provide quality learning for ELLs that will enable them to meet the new standards (Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti, 2020).

Dual Language and Transitional-Bilingual Education for Bilingual Students

As the population of ELL students in the nation's schools continues to increase, vigorous debates have been made concerning appropriate educational services for these students; which include the role of home language in the classrooms (Murphy, 2014). Some researchers and educators advocate and support dual-language (DL) programs or transitional bilingual education (TBE) (Murphy, 2014). DL programs use both the home and English language to permanently serve in class instructions, with no attempt to diminish the usage of the home language over time (Murphy, 2014). On the other hand, TBE serves only ELLs and does not include native English speakers, making interaction between both limited (Murphy, 2014). Both of these programs have slightly different approaches, but as mentioned previously, both link the proficiency in the home language with the achievement in their English language skills and content learning.

First and foremost, home language skills play an important role in a variety of learning outcomes. Home-language skills are interconnected with academic content learning, making students with strong home-language skills demonstrate higher academic achievement compared to those with weaker skills (Murphy, 2014). Research has detailed how ELLs with a strong foundation in their home language, have less difficulty in comprehending academic concepts in the second language (Murphy, 2014). Additional research explains how well-developed home-language skills are able to predict second-language proficiency and score higher on tests than those with weaker skills (Murphy, 2014). However this might be, many ELLs are not as developmentally prepared to benefit from having most or all of their academic content and instruction completely in English (Murphy, 2014).

Dual-language models come in two forms: “one-way” models where only ELLs are enrolled and the home language is used for instruction and English is taught as a second language; and “two-way” models that combine both ELLs and native English speakers in order to use both languages for instruction (Murph, 2014). Based upon research and data gathered from state tests in reading and math, suggested that dual-language programs are similarly effective across all academic subjects (Murphy, 2014). A study looked at and tested a hypothesis that, as both Spanish-dominant and English-dominant students spent more time in the DL program, their bilingualism and academic achievement would improve (Murphy, 2014). The results showed that Spanish-dominant students maintained their Spanish proficiency in their academic work, and the English-dominant students achieved a meaningful degree of proficiency in Spanish (Murphy, 2014). Another test examined the development of proficiency in the second language in a study that compared a one-way DL approach to a two-way (Murphy, 2014). The results showed that

ELLs who entered school in kindergarten, regardless of the type of program, required approximately four years to develop necessary English skills for effective academic learning in said language (Murphy, 2014). However, upon further observations, when comparing both approaches, a significant difference found in reading and writing raised the favor for the two-way DL approach (Murphy, 2014).

In many parts of the nation, TBE programs are used due to their way of implementing learning through the usage of students' home language to learn English (Murphy, 2014). Once these students obtain mastery in English, their primary language is then gradually removed until they are in primarily English classes (Murphy, 2014). Since their native language is being developed, this in turn enhances their academic skills in the second language (Murphy, 2014) by building upon what they already know, making their English stronger. This works through the transferring being done between their home language and English, which researchers have proven occurs across languages where knowledge, skills and processes take place in order to enhance the second language (Murphy, 2014). One test conducted in pre-kindergarten transitional bilingual and monolingual classes, looked at the effectiveness of supporting the usage of the primary language of children for some parts of their daily instructions (Murphy, 2014). The results demonstrated a significant statistical difference between both groups, with students in the transitional bilingual classes showing greater achievements than the children in the monolingual classes (Murphy, 2014). Another study was conducted where students' home language was compared with the performance of second-language learners in different treatment models, in connection to the amount of instruction given in Spanish (Murphy, 2014). The three models used for this were English only (immersion), transitional bilingual (early exit), and late exit for

students continuing in both languages through their academic years (Murphy, 2014). These findings demonstrated that students who continue their bilingual education will achieve greater success over time in English, similarly to the students in immersion classrooms that are English-only (Murphy, 2014).

Methods

Participants

In order to see how personal experiences of former ELLs reflected on the larger studies of English learners in the U.S., I conducted a qualitative case study with seven individuals. These seven interviews included 3 fellow university peers, and 4 family relatives who reside in South Monterey County, CA; whose full interviews can be read in Appendix B. These seven individuals gave their thoughts through the interviews where they answered a total of thirteen questions, which can be seen in Appendix A. Five of these interviews were conducted either via phone call or through email due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to ensure the safety of everyone involved; and two interviews were conducted in person. On average, the interviews took between ten to fifteen minutes. Out of the seven participants, five identified as women and two identified as men. Furthermore, out of the seven interviewees, consent was asked for and received from the parents of three of the interviewees prior to the interviews since they were under the age of eighteen. Additionally, the remaining four interviewees were over the age of eighteen and were either attending college or university. All of the seven participants were of Hispanic/Latinx(e) backgrounds. With all of the participants being Hispanic/Latinx(e), their participation in the interview was a great contribution to the research. They were all ELL's whose first language was Spanish, and had experiences with learning through the US education

system, in South County Monterey in California. Not only that, but due to the diverse ages within this group, varied points of view were given to see the similarities and differences in experiences they all had as ELL's. Additionally, to see the impacts this had for them in their academics, and to see if this correlated to the achievement gap that most ELL students face through the American education system. This information can be seen in the following graph.

Table 1 compiles specific details that provides the interviewees overall information and profiles given. From left to right, the graph details the seven interviewees, their school level at the time of the interviews, their first and primary language spoken and spoken at home, their ages when they acquired English acquisition, and the challenges they faced as ELLs and as former ELLs. For a more thorough read on each individual interviewees interviews, please refer to Appendix B.

Table 1

Summary of Gathered Interview Data From Former ELLs

Interviewees	School grade level	First language/Primary language spoken at home	Age/grade of English language acquisition	Challenges
Ms. Z	University senior	Spanish/Spanish	4-6 yrs old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Speaking & understanding English ● Writing in English ● Communicating ● Completing assignments
Ms. Emily	University senior	Spanish/ Spanish	5-7 yrs old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Speaking in English ● Reading ● Homework that had a lot of academic language

Ms. Erika	University senior	Spanish/Spanish	5yrs old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trouble speaking English ● pronunciation ● Trouble reading directions in assignments
Mr. Keagen	High school sophomore	Spanish/Spanish & Spanglish	4 yrs old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● English pronunciations ● /ph/ sound ● Silent letters in words ● Reading & writing properly in English ● Developed lower skills in Spanish
Mr. Carlos	High school senior	Spanish/Spanish	9 yrs old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● English acquisition at first, but caught up fast ● Developed lower skills in Spanish
Ms. Daisy	College sophomore	Spanish/Spanish	2nd-3rd grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● English pronunciations ● Language barriers
Ms. Lola	Middle school, 8th grade	Spanish/Spanish	5th-6th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● English pronunciations ● Homework ● Language barriers ● Developed lower skills in Spanish

Findings and Discussion

The goal of this study and interview was to determine if and how personal experiences of former ELLs reflected the larger studies of English learners in the U.S and its connection to the achievement gap. This was in order to bring more awareness to future teachers who will inevitably work with students such as these and ways to best approach their learning. Through research of articles, websites, books, journals, magazines, and qualitative interviews, this study was conducted in order to address: What experiences impact English language learners' (ELLs) academic development in the U.S.? What are the primary factors that contribute to the achievement gap ELL's face? How does society's views impact ELL's? What factors can provide a better academic experience? From the qualitative data I received from the interviews, the four themes that were prevalent (See Appendix A for the case study data) included: age of acquisition, transitioning to English classes, language dominance, and studying foreign languages. In addressing the findings from the case studies, all of these students appear to have navigated the achievement gap and the primary factors that contribute to it described in the review of literature (Bressler & Howard, 2011; Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011).

From interview information, all seven interviewees' age of acquisition ranged from the ages and grades of four to nine years old, as well as from 2nd to 6th grade. This shows that for the most part, these individuals were introduced to the English language at a very young age. However, despite this, they still struggled to a certain extent since their first and home language was Spanish.

Due to Spanish being their first and home language, transitioning to English classes was challenging to different degrees to all of them. All of the interviewees mentioned that some of the challenges they faced had to do with not being able to keep up with or fully comprehend homework and in class lessons due to them being all in English. Furthermore, some struggled with being able to communicate effectively with their peers and or teachers due to language barriers. Others struggle with reading and writing in English but eventually understood it. Another factor that most of them had in common was the difficult time they had with English pronunciation, which some still have to this day. As noted in Garcia (2009), language played an important role in these interviewees academics since they had to balance the demands of the curriculums, but also be able to acquire academic vocabulary, literacy skills, disciplinary academic practices and English language structures at the same time described in the literature review (Perez & Holmes, 2010; Walqui, Heritage & Linquanti, 2020).

Since they were introduced to English at a young age, it can be assumed that this aided in their English language dominance, although this may not always be the case. As a result, all of them were able to acquire English acquisition and did not struggle as much. Since English was everywhere in their academic journeys, the dominance in English increased and was constantly developing as they progressed academically. However, due to their exposure to English, some say that this impacted their native language, Spanish, acquisition. Some interviewees mentioned that having English be the primary language used in school and with some family members and peers, their Spanish skills decreased. Although they did not lose their Spanish completely, they still have difficulties with communicating at the same level as their English. So it is safe to assume that their native language was to some extent threatened by the development of English,

while their native language was not appreciated as noted in Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti (2020).

Studying foreign languages was another theme that was seen in some of the interviewees. They expressed how their bilingualism was not appreciated growing up. Instead, they were counseled through highschool that they needed to take a second language. One thing that two interviewees stated was that, in both elementary and highschool their Spanish skills declined due to their all English classes. Now that both are about to go to and are in highschool, were told they need to take a second language. What took them both by surprise is that one of the languages provided is Spanish, their native language. As a result of their native language, Spanish, being diminished throughout their experience as English learners, both have stated that they will fulfill the language requirement by taking a different language, such as French or Japanese. As noted by Walqui, Heritage, & Linqanti (2020) superficial second language courses are privileged over the more extensive heritage language experience.

Discussion

From looking over the findings of each interviewee and seeing the relation to the literature review, I could conclude that my qualitative data came out from former ELLs who successfully navigated the achievement gap. Nonetheless, one thing that correlated between the literature review and the interviews were the challenges that these former ELLs faced and still face due to the English language through their academic journeys. However, as they were exposed to English mostly through school, they were able to adapt and progress as best as they could. Some of them lack the same high level of skills they have when using English, than with their Spanish; which makes it hard for some of them to communicate with their families, whose

primary language is Spanish. I feel that due to this, subtractive bilingualism would be another interesting topic to research and study when it comes to ELLs in the U.S. Overall, what I learned from their experiences that can inform future educators or schools, is that ELLs second language learning journey and or bilingualism should be seen as a strength to develop their English skills, not as a burden that will hinder them.

Limitations

The limitations that came along with this research project were the small sample size group of ELLs interviewed, along with the members of the group being one hundred percent Hispanic/Latinx(e). In addition, this small sample size included ELLs who navigated successfully through the achievement gap, albeit they also had additional challenges, which did not fully correlate with what this study was going to look at. I think my findings would have been different, had I interviewed additional ELLs whose academic experiences connected with the achievement gap described in this literature. Furthermore, these interviewees were individuals that I personally knew so the data, from the answers given, might include some biases and can be misleading; although this cannot really be addressed through the wording of the questions. I would have wanted to see how interviewees, whom I had no connection to, went about to differ when responding to the questions in the interview.

Recommendations & Future Direction

From what was gathered, I personally would recommend and hope that dual-language (DL) programs were implemented and put into practice in schools. DL programs are a good option to consider because both the home and English language are used for permanent instruction, with no attempts made to diminish the usage of the home language over time

(Murphy, 2014). This would provide ELLs with advantages that come with their linguistically diverse backgrounds. Even within the DL program, there are two models that are used, one-way and two-way. In the one-way model, ELLs are enrolled and the home language is used for instructional purposes while English is taught as a second language (Murph, 2014). On the other hand, in the two-way model, ELLs and native English speakers are placed together in the classroom and are able to use both languages for instructional purposes (Murph, 2014). By doing so, ELL students will be able to strengthen their native language skills and English skills simultaneously.

Through this capstone paper, I was able to meet and incorporate 3 of the 6 significant learning outcomes for students seeking a degree in this field, Liberal Studies. The 3 outcomes that correspond with this qualitative study and literature review included: MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator, and MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist.

MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar

Students evaluate their own and others' experiences as influenced by social identities, socialization practices, and societal institutions from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Students critically examine the value of diversity and multiculturalism. Students inform their educational practices and perspectives by applying concepts and theories of diversity and multiculturalism. I incorporated this in my paper by gathering qualitative data from both my own experiences as a former ELL and interviews of former ELLs. This was done in order to see how these experiences reflected on the larger studies of English learners in the U.S and its connection to the achievement gap. The diversity and multiculturalism that comes with

ELL students was reached in order to bring awareness to its importance to provide richer learning environments for them.

MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator

Students combine disciplinary knowledge, community experience, and reflective practice to become ethically and socially responsible educators working toward a just and sustainable world. Students identify and pursue paths for social change. Students collaborate with stakeholders to advocate for access, equity, and justice in public education and other societal institutions. I incorporated this in my paper by providing several risk factors that impact ELL students in the US education system. What was also included were some possible approaches that can be taken or considered to provide ELLs with the education that will further enhance the skills they have in their native languages, with those of English. To bring more awareness to this topic, personal experiences of former ELLs was collected through qualitative interviews. This is also in hopes to bring forth change in my community.

MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist

Students demonstrate competency in subject area content and complete a coherent depth of study for successful practice in California public education. I incorporated this in my paper by going over a variety of peer reviewed articles, websites, books, journals, magazines, and interviews to gain a better understanding of the factors which impact the academic development of ELLs. Through this, I was able to collect qualitative data on this topic and not only further educate myself, but also be able to present this to bring awareness to our future educators.

Conclusion

After examining the factors contributing to ELLs' achievement gap, and the different experiences of former ELLs, one factor from both that was prevalent to the review of literature was language and the challenges they faced due to this. Since all of the interviewees' first language was Spanish, they had a challenging time with the all English curriculum that was presented to them in their early years. However, all seven of them were able to navigate through the achievement gap. Thus, these cases demonstrate that ELLs have the ability to overcome the achievement gap they face in the US education system. Although these results do not fully correlate to the questions in this case study, they most certainly show the challenges these former ELLs faced in their academics and can be acknowledged so other ELLs can have a richer learning environment. Not only that, but the challenges they faced can be seen in the review of literature and gives validation to their struggles. In addition it can be seen that although they all were able to overcome the achievement gap and were able to acquire the English language, some of them had their native language compromised. With all of this in mind, I hope future teachers and those in my community can gain new insights from this qualitative data and literature review to really think about how to best approach ELL students and see the strengths that come with their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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Appendix A

1. What is your first language?
2. What is the primary language spoken at your home/ and or with relatives?
3. Was English spoken in your home as a child?
4. At what age did you learn to speak English?
5. When did you learn to write English?
6. Do you have/do you still have trouble speaking the English language?
7. Was English difficult for you to learn, why or why not?
8. Were you able to speak your native language at school?
9. Having English as your second language, how was your school experience?
10. Did your teachers at any point treat you differently due to you being an ELL?

11. Having been an ELL, what were some challenges you faced in your learning experiences in the classrooms, lessons, conversations, and/or homework?
12. From your experience as an ELL, what do you think your teachers, if any, that didn't aid you, could have done or said, to make your learning experiences better?
13. What did some of your teachers, if any, that worked with you to enrich your learning do to make sure you didn't fall behind?

Appendix B

Z:

Miss Z is a senior student at a university in Monterey County, CA. Her first language was Spanish and it was the language she would speak at home with her family at home since it's what her parents spoke. At the age of 4-5, Miss Z. began learning English as a second language. Before that, she could understand some of the language because she would hear it on the radio, TV, or when going to the store with her parents, but didn't start speaking it until around the age of six. As a child, Miss Z. recalls that her journey of learning English was difficult. She remembers having difficulty speaking and understanding it. English was always difficult for her, especially since her parents only spoke Spanish. Furthermore, she also recalls that around the age of 5 she started to learn how to write in English, but this was one of the most difficult parts for her; and states that writing has always been a challenge. From her journey as a former ELL, English was challenging and to this day still finds it difficult. Miss Z. also mentioned how when she was younger, most of my teachers only spoke English at school and she couldn't use her Spanish. Therefore, students such as her, were unable to communicate in their native language or in English and they did not understand what the teacher was saying. Being an ELL was difficult because she said she had to take a lot of ELD classes and was always placed below basic on the standardized tests. She didn't take a regular English class until she had reached high school. From her learning journey, she recalls there being favoritism from the teachers to her as an ELL, particularly in her English classes. She remembers that the students in AP classes were always treated better; while those in regular English classes were frequently forgotten. When it came to completing assignments, Miss Z. mentions that they were difficult for her to complete because

she would frequently misunderstand the instructions. Through such experiences, she came to notice that she was always too shy to speak up, and so would often remain silent even when she knew she needed help. Looking back, she thinks that the teachers who didn't aid her, should have tried to help her more. To those teachers, on the other hand, who did aid her, she remembers them staying after school to offer assistance. She found this extremely beneficial. Miss Z. also recalls having had some amazing teachers who saw her efforts and helped her by allowing her extra time to complete certain assignments.

Emily:

Miss Emily. is a senior student at a university in Monterey County, CA.. Her first language was Spanish. At home she primarily spoke Spanish with her parents while English was spoken only by her two older brothers, not her parents. In terms of her education, she recalls learning the English language when she entered kindergarten at the age of five, and learned to write in it at the age of seven. Miss Emily. goes to explain how at the beginning, she did have trouble speaking English but then quickly picked up on the basics. She further details how she had a difficult time learning English. To this day, she still remembers how she tested out of ELD before going into high school, which in her own words, "says a lot". What made it harder, according to her, was that the majority of teachers that she had did not speak her native language, Spanish. As a former ELL, she was not able to use Spanish at her schools. Thus, students' native language was not encouraged. Due to Miss Emily having English as her second language, her school experiences were not that good. She describes how she would actually get bullied by her own friends for being in ELD and would say things like, "You're still in ELD?" and "Do you not

know English?” Despite having been an ELL student, she feels that her teachers did an alright job. She never felt like she was being treated differently by them due to being an ELL. However this may be, Miss Emily. says that one of the challenges she faced in her learning experiences was with her homework that had a lot of academic language. Additionally, she feels that her teachers could have tried to incorporate her native language in the classroom to make her learning experiences better. Apart from the teachers’ that didn’t aid her much, she recalls one teacher that would take time out of her day to help her with reading, since this was something that she struggled with. Having a teacher like this really helped in making sure she did not fall behind. Having been in such a learning environment where everything was in English, she states that she thinks what was an advantage she had growing up was that everyone around her spoke Spanish, so she was always able to use her native language. However, because she was not permitted to speak in her native language during class, it affected her in a way that she began to believe that knowing Spanish was a disadvantage rather than an advantage.

Erika:

Miss Erica is a senior student at a university in Monterey County, CA. Her first language was Spanish since it was the primary language spoken at home. The only times she recalls English being spoken at home as a child was through the television due to cartoons. Miss Erika explains how she learned how to speak and write in English when she was around four to five years old, around when she was in kindergarten. As of now, she sometimes catches herself having trouble speaking English. Due to this, for as long as she can remember, learning the English language was difficult, especially when it came to pronunciations. Growing up, she

describes how she was not able to speak her native language, Spanish, at school. Teachers were very strict when it came to talking in the students native language. Looking back, Miss Erika remembers the teachers always saying, “English please”, whenever they heard her or her classmates talking in Spanish. Despite having English as her second language, her school experience was fun, especially in third grade. She had a teacher by the name of Mrs. Howard who made engaging lessons and lectures for the class. Additionally, from her experiences as a former ELL student, she does not recall any of her teachers treating her any differently than her non-ELL peers. Although she does recall going with another teacher for 20-30 minutes to work on phonological and phonemic awareness. Furthermore, despite this, she goes on to mention how some of the challenges she faces while learning English was pronunciation. Growing up Miss Erika has trouble distinguishing the sounds; and when it came to homework, she had trouble completing it. As she did not know English well, she had trouble reading the directions of the given assignments. She recalls her ELA homework being incomplete whereas her math homework was completed. From her experience as an ELL, she feels that her teachers could have provided one-one time after school for 15 to 30 minutes. In that given time, her and her fellow ELL peers could have reviewed any assignment they did not understand or have a translator to provide them translation on how to do the homework. Other than this suggestion she could think of what her teachers could have done to aid her learning experiences, there wasn't anything in particular she can remember other teachers doing to ensure she did not fall behind.

Keagen:

Mr. Keagen is a sophomore at a high school in Monterey County, CA. His first language was Spanish as it was the primary language spoken at home with his parents and older relatives, while Spanish, English and Spanglish was used with his siblings and cousins. At the age of 4 he was able to speak and write English. He recalls having had trouble speaking the English language, and still to this day has some difficulty. One aspect of learning English that was difficult for him was the /ph/ sounds of words and silent sounds of letters in other words. When it came to speaking his native language in school, Spanish, he was not able to because he would get in trouble. He recalls that one time he was sent to the office for having spoken in Spanish in class, because his teacher thought he was cursing at him, when in reality he was just talking to his friend. In terms of the treatment Mr. Keagen's teachers would treat me differently due to him being an ELL, which was evident due to them getting frustrated due to him not spelling or saying things properly in English. Having been an ELL, some challenges he can remember facing in his learning experiences were when it came to writing or reading. For one, it was difficult to use some words when writing, and when it came to speaking in front of the class, he would stutter. This caused him to feel insecure about speaking English in elementary school due to his pronunciation. Thus, he did not like talking or sharing his opinion. In terms of homework, there were some words he didn't understand, and when she would ask the teacher, they would get frustrated and not help him. Thankfully, he states, he had friends who were bilingual and understood and helped him. Mr. Keagen. goes on to explain that from his experiences as an ELL, what his teachers could have done or said to make his learning experiences better would have been to have books that would show how to pronounce words correctly, He feels that this would have helped him a lot. Additionally, being more patient with him or having had teacher

aid that were bilingual to help in translations to better understand what was going on in class. What one teacher he can recall did to ensure he was learning and would not fall behind was asking him what made it easier for him to write paragraphs, To this, he explains how he would then ask the teacher to write the words with their definitions on the board, that were then going to be used in the writing he was doing. She then would proceed to go around the classroom to help other students and even tried to explain things in simpler terms so the students would get a better understanding. Later on, this teacher would then introduce more advanced words in English for the students to learn and use. According to Mr. Keagen, as he started to learn more English, he started to feel more proud of the things he would write and became more confident. As a result, he would rely on his skills on writing in English to help his grade and at the same time, this teacher also made him like reading. However, as he went into highschool and his English skills continued to improve, he started to notice that his Spanish skills were not as developed as his English. Mr. Keagen states that this made him feel insecure about his Spanish skills, especially when he would want to interact with family that did not speak or understand English. Thus, this made him wonder why now that he was in highschool, it was mandatory to take a second language, one option being Spanish, after not being able to use it much in elementary and middle school. However, he wanted to improve his Spanish, so he decided to take Spanish in highschool.

Carlos:

Mr. Carlos is a senior at a high school in Monterey County, CA. He was born in the U.S and his first language, based on outside influence, was Spanish. He learned how to speak English

in the third grade when he was 9 years old. While at home, Spanish was the primary language spoken on a daily basis. Furthermore, since the primary language spoken in his home is Spanish, he tends to talk with his cousins and siblings in English and interact with his parents in Spanish. Mr. Carlos learned to write English in the 3rd grade. Due to him having to transfer from one elementary school to another, he felt he had been catapulted into the deep end of the pool. In this new elementary school, he was enrolled in classes that focused on learning in Spanish, so when he transferred he had to adjust to an English-only classroom. Surprisingly, he states, fluently speaking in English did not seem to cause him any troubles since he caught on to it one day and started speaking it. He thought he would struggle for a long time but since he interacted with his teachers and classmates, he did not have that issue. Mr. Carlos recollects that although he couldn't use his native language, Spanish, in the classroom, he was free to speak it during lunch and recess. Due to how much he was able to use English in school with teachers and peers, his school experience was not terrible since he picked up the language daily quickly. When in class, he mentions that there was a teacher in particular that was extremely lenient with him since she knew that he couldn't really speak English and tried to help him learn it. Looking back, he says that at first he was utterly lost in the daily lessons, class conversations, homework, etc. He took his time to observe and listen to everything around him so he could progressively learn to speak the language. Mr. Carlos remembers another teacher in 3rd grade who also really helped him learn to speak the language by persistently trying to get him to interact with others and form connections with his classmates. In addition, he also had other teachers that would place him with kids that talked a lot of English so that he could learn how to interact with them in English. By listening to their conversations, he would slowly pick up how to speak the language.

Unfortunately, having pure English oriented studies throughout his academic career has put a drastic halt on his Spanish development. He states that he has a very limited range of Spanish vocabulary, as opposed to his English speaking/writing abilities. He believes that having strict English language based courses, in his case, had a detrimental effect on his development in the Spanish language. Mr. Carlos mediated this lack of progress in highschool by taking AP Spanish Language & AP Spanish Literature and Comp. These courses, apart from his family environment, nurtured his development of speaking, writing, and analyzing in Spanish. Though, he wished that he was placed in a dual language based immersive academic experience, as it would have allowed him to equally develop his English and Spanish speaking abilities.

Daisy:

Miss Daisy is a sophomore at a college in Monterey County, CA. She was born in Mexico but came to the U.S. when she was only 1 year old. Her first language and primary language spoken at home was Spanish. She learned how to speak English when she was in third grade and learned how to read and write it in the second grade. She states that English was difficult for her to learn but with constant reading she got a hold of it quickly. Furthermore, Miss Daisy recalls having trouble speaking English, but she feels that it was maybe due to her being shy, although she could understand it. As of now, she only has challenges when it comes to pronouncing difficult words and or sounds of some. From when she was younger, she remembers that she could speak Spanish in school, but only before second grade since it was bilingual teaching. Thereafter, the teaching and conversations with classmates and with teachers became in

English. Having English as her second language, her school experiences were not difficult, since she passed the test for English learners early on. Then later on in middle school she was able to pick any elective in middle school and high school. In her early years of school, she does not recall her teachers treating her differently for being an ELL, but she does remember that when communicating with the teachers, a classmate was involved in translating. One challenge she had was her inability to communicate with her teachers, but slowly as she learned English, communication was able to be done without help from her classmates. In order to help Miss Daisy, she states that her teachers, apart from having classmates translate, would communicate slower with her and send translated homework home for her to do.

Lola:

Miss Lola is an eighth grader at a middle school in Monterey County, CA. Her first language was Spanish and is the primary language spoken at home with her parents and English with her cousins. In fifth grade she started speaking English, in sixth grade she learned how to write it, and as she went into middle school, she became better at writing it. Miss Lola states that she did have trouble speaking English in terms of pronunciation, especially with high level academic English. As she thinks back on how learning English was, she remembers that due to her not being able to express herself and being shy, she unfortunately flunked second grade. She feels that her inability to communicate played a large role in her not being able to progress to the next grade. In elementary school, she states that she would speak Spanish in elementary school with her peers, if they were Hispanic, outside of the classroom since her teachers did not like it. Later on in middle school she would use Spanish a bit more often with her friends. Having

English as her second language, she recalls her school experience being alright. Throughout the years, she feels that she was able to improve her English in middle school than she did in elementary school since she had gained more experience and confidence in using it. Miss Lola then goes on to share how due to her being an ELL, she took notice that her teachers definitely treated her differently for it. She explains how her teachers seemed to have some hope on her improvement both academically and in her English improvement, and due to her being Mexican, probably made them think that she might have a hard time in learning. She stated that she had some teachers that would get mad if she did not complete some homework assignments. Since she is a slow learner, she details that she would think about asking her parents for help, but was unable to because she couldn't translate her work from English to Spanish. This was especially hard for her since for one, her parents did not have much time as they worked long hours in the strawberry fields, and two, because her Spanish skills were not advanced enough for her to translate her English homework to her parents. What made this so is that her English was then more fluent than her Spanish making it all the more challenging to ask her parents for help. This also possessed a challenge when it came to her math assignments. Another challenge she faced was having her friends correct her pronunciation when she spoke English. She appreciated it, but it got to a point where, according to her, it became "annoying". A thing that throws her off about being an ELL is that, when one learns English and identifies with a different race, in Miss Lola's case as she clarifies, Mexican, one can forget about their native language since English is everywhere. Consequently, this then makes it hard to learn it in highschool again, since it's mandated to learn another language besides English. Thus, she has decided to not take Spanish but either take French or learn Korean. She goes on to say that what some of her teachers could

have done better to help her was staying after school. Although this would have been challenging since she couldn't stay after school for extra help since her parents were busy at work and she couldn't stay after. Therefore, if her teachers would have had some other options to aid her after school, she would have appreciated it. One thing a teacher in elementary school did to give her extra support and who she, to this day, appreciates the most, was in third grade where said teacher would spend time with her during recess to give her options on how to keep up with work and her grades.

