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Acquiring English as a Second Language for Mexican American Students

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## Abstract:

Acquiring English as a second language takes time, dedication and guidance from family, peers and most importantly from teachers. Many Mexican American students become effective bilinguals after they acquire English, while others slowly lose their native language. Through use of literature review, surveys and interviews to Mexican American college students and elementary teachers, this capstone examines how Mexican American students acquire English both at home and at school and find ways to improve their classroom learning experiences. Research reveals that the students' language spoken at home determines whether they could be placed in a bilingual or English-only classroom. In addition, various effective teaching methods could be used to enhance their learning, including their interaction with their siblings at home. It is important to note that students' needs must be met in order for them to acquire the English language effectively while maintaining their native language.

Acquiring English is essential in terms of being able to succeed in America. Many people belonging to a minority where they acquire their parents' first language and then as years pass by, they begin to gradually bring the English language into their lives. Among these minorities are the Mexican Americans who account for approximately 31 million of the United States population (Ennis, 2011, p.8). As the Mexican American population continues to grow in America, it is ideal for educators to be able to integrate an adequate curriculum for students who are English language learners. The majority of Mexican Americans use Spanish as their first language and English as their second language. Over 75% of Mexican Americans speak a different language other than English (Ramirez, 2004, p.10). It is important to investigate how Mexican American students acquire English as their second language in order to facilitate and improve their learning experience.

For many years, second language instruction has been shaped by various policies. It all began in 1968, with the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) (Title VII), which gave minority groups an opportunity to receive equal instruction in their native language (Wiese et al. 1998). The reason for bilingual instruction was to give students the ability to use their native language for English instruction (p. 7). The BEA was the beginning of instruction looking at Spanish as the first language and of English as the second language (Ehlers-Zavala, 2011). According to Gutierrez et al. (2000), the California Proposition 227 mandated schools to have English learners in English immersion instruction (p. 1). In other words, bilingual instruction was eliminated, and students had to learn English in California through English instruction only (p. 4). It was in 2002, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Title III replaced the BEA, also authorizing English-only instruction and assessments in the schools (p. 358). Currently, English learners are required to be a part of English-only classrooms with the exception of having parents and their

school district sign a waiver that would permit bilingual or necessary special instruction for the students in need of assistance in language or some other special area (Stritikus & Garcia, 2005).

Learning a second language takes time as it is challenging for various people. According to Flores & Drake (2014), acquiring a second language may take a person about four to five years or more (p. 4). In other words, Mexican American students who learn English as a second language face challenges in order to become bilingual, “students who possess fluency in more than one language” (Brice, 2002, p.36). According to Lightbown & Spada (2013), having to acquire a second language through the assistance of the first language “may be an advantage in the sense that they already have an idea of how language works” (p. 36). In other words, implementing the teaching methods that could assist students acquire their second language through the use of their native language could be an advantage for them to succeed. On the other hand, according to Lightbown & Spada (2013), students may trigger challenges where they could make “errors that first language learners would not make” (p. 36). It is important for teachers to learn about the best methods to teach their students. According to the California Department of Education, English language learners are about 22.3% of all students in California (California Department, 2015). By making this statement, Cook (2001) highlights that currently in the twenty-first century, there must be effective instruction to guide people to acquire a second language (p. 1). In addition, people must have “diverse motivations for learning the second language”(p. 9). Once students are well motivated with their own thoughts, it is essential for various teaching methods to be applied. One of them is, having interactive communication with their peers such as;

“Communicative teaching methods [that] require the students to talk to each other because they see L2 learning as growing out of the give-and-take of

communication” (Cook, 2001, p.9).

More and more students are using English as a second language and teachers must find effective and inclusive methods to teach them.

My interest in conducting this research comes from my experience acquiring the English language. I was a bilingual student from kindergarten to third grade. It was not until fourth grade when I was a part of an English only classroom. My transition to English was very sudden but I was able to acquire more English language. At home, I have never had any English instruction. One of my parents does not speak English while my other parent speaks at a basic English level. As a result, I learned Spanish as my first language and spoke very little to no English. I have always spoken Spanish at home. As a child, I spoke English in school and Spanish at home, this is how I became bilingual. In addition, I have always had an interest in learning about the experiences of how students acquire the English language. There are students who acquire the English language in a bilingual setting with some instruction with their native language. Other students simply learn the English language in a school setting while at home they master their native language. Others learn the language at home. It is very interesting to see if students learn the English language with their peers, parents or simply working hard on their own. I want to learn about different experiences Mexican American students had as children when they were acquiring English. Did they have to face challenges while acquiring English? I want to hear the opinions and experiences that Mexican American students have in regards to the process of acquiring the English language because it will show me ways in which this process can be improved by future teachers and even parents dealing with young students acquiring English.

We begin to examine the acquisition of English as a second language with the following five research questions:

- Primary Question: How do Mexican American students acquire English as a second language?
- Secondary Question 1: Are there advantages or disadvantages for Mexican American students to know their native language well in advance before acquiring English? How does knowing their native language well help them acquire the second language, such as English?
- Secondary Question 2: What types of effective teaching methods are being implemented for Mexican American students in the Monterey Bay area according to teachers? If so, how do teaching implement them in the classroom?
- Secondary Question 3: On the other hand, how do Mexican American students describe their experiences when acquiring English as a second language? In other words, what types of teaching methods have maximized their learning of the English language?
- Secondary Question 4: Are there resources available for teaching Mexican American students to acquire English?

### **Literature Review**

Now that we have learned about the purpose of my capstone project, and received an introduction about policies involving Mexican Americans and their acquisition of English as a second language, I will briefly discuss my research regarding how Mexican Americans acquire English. My literature review looks over English instruction made at home and in school, as well as how students use their native language to acquire English.

To begin, Mexican Americans students who acquire English as their second language become successful bilinguals. Language is used to communicate and express needs. Nowadays it is very common for students to have a second language, and it is more common for minority

students to have English as their second language. Becoming fluent in any language consists of being able to read, speak, listen and write in the language (Brice, 2002). Bilinguals are able to do that with both languages. Students who are acquiring a second language are more “cognitively mature,” know Spanish as their first language and, “have different motivation for learning a second language” giving them starting skills to acquire the language (Cook, 2001, p.76). For Mexican Americans students, it takes time, dedication and special instruction both at home and in the classroom for them to acquire English.

Language acquisition begins at home since parental or family education is key. A Mexican American student begins the majority of the time learning Spanish at home. In some rare occasions, the students will learn English and Spanish at the same time. Although in most Mexican American homes, there is a lack of un-supported English development from parents since some might not know the English language. Many Mexican American homes may consist of having parents that only speak Spanish. According to Rumberger (1998), Mexican American students tend to come from “non-English speaking households” (p. 69). Therefore, outside of the classroom, students have less instruction. Although what happens when students have siblings that know English? Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain (2007) state:

“Older siblings, especially siblings who have had successful experiences with the U.S. school system and are proficient in English, may help bridge the gap between home and school”(p.182).

In other words, siblings may be a way to ease their transition into the English language from a home environment. Older siblings serve as role models for the younger Mexican Americans siblings (p.182). A different study shows that the birth order of a student may be in coherence with their ability to acquire a second language. Keller (2015) found that children without siblings



obtained more skills for second language acquisition. Additionally, older siblings seem to also have the advantage of developing their native language since parents tend to pay more attention to their first-child's development. In Mexican American households, Mexican American students are able to acquire English language skills among their community, interaction with peers and family members (Keller, 2015). Although in situations where parents are non-English speakers then the English acquisition must happen in the classroom.

Mexican American students acquire English in various instructional fields, such as in an English-only classroom, bilingual classroom, or a new common style dual-immersion classroom. Each of these school style classrooms addresses differently the native language of the students and their acquisition of English through instruction.

To begin, in an English-only classroom students will be given instruction in English with no native language reference. Some may refer to English-only instruction as submersion where students are not given any language support (Stritikus, 2002). According to Stritikus (2002), it became illegal not to provide necessary programs and assistance for English learners (p. 2). Nowadays, English only instruction is given with a combination of English as a second language (ESL) or structure immersion. ESL consists of having English-instruction with individual instruction with the student by pulling the student out of the class (Stritikus, 2002). It helps second language learners by giving them one on one instruction in vocabulary, reading skills, and at times word pronunciation in the second language. In regards to structure immersion, students are also given English-only instruction but more at the level of the English learners. To put it another way, students are learning English along their zone of proximal development. With scaffolding instruction, students are able to understand and learn English at their level. Consequently, once English learners are placed in instruction with English-only speakers without

no ESL or structured immersion and teachers do not modify their instruction then “the results can be disastrous” since students will not be able to understand the teacher and their instruction (Adams & Jones, 2005).

In addition, according to Iddings (2005), English language learners have a disadvantage when placed in mainstream classrooms with English speakers because both students may be in different levels of language understanding. In other words, ELL students are expected to do work that is not at their level and they are not able to show their “full potential” (p.181). Furthermore, English-only instruction prevents students from attaining the needed second and first language skills. In agreement with Padilla & Gonzalez (2001) students who receive more bilingual education or ESL become more successful in school. It is important that students receive some sort of assistance in school with their acquisition of English instead of being submerged into the English-only instruction.

At another point, it is suggested by Hoff (2013), that students should develop their English language skills at school and simply add on to knowledge they have acquired at home. Hoff (2013) brings up the point that as students are acquiring their native language at home, and English instruction is given with a small reference to their native language then students will be successful in acquiring English as a second language.

Bilingual education is another path available for Mexican American students learning the English language. Bilingual instruction is given with the combination of the primary language and the second language and slowly having students transition to English-only instruction after a couple of years (Stritikus, 2002). It is said by Conger (2010) that Spanish-speaking students are among the very few students who receive native language instruction through bilingual education. With regards to bilingual education, Duran et al. (2010) state that a benefit of

bilingual education is it supports the learning of Spanish without having a negative impact on the acquisition of English.

However, there are still some people who disagree with providing bilingual education to students. Conger (2010), conducted a longitudinal study were bilingual students and non-bilingual students were observed in their respective pathways for around four years. In his study he noticed that only 23% of the English Learners students who were in a mainstream classroom given ESL instruction did not reach English proficiency after four years. While 52% of EL students in a bilingual classroom continued to be English Learners. According to Conger (2010) “students who enroll in bilingual education learn English less quickly” (p. 1). In summary, students are able to maintain their native language while acquiring English through a bilingual education.

Similar to bilingual education, in dual immersion education students also receive appropriate skills to use their native language. In contrast, their acquisition of English is reduced significantly compared to students’ fluency in Spanish (Garcia, 2005). In some occasions Lightbown & Spada (2013) state that teachers tend to communicate with students through the use of their native language that students end up not using the second language in a more realistic communication. This can prevent the students from gaining enough second language skills. In other occasions, students first language is used in order to make connections with the second language learned (Cook, 2001). Especially among Mexican Americans students, they tend to acquire English as they find similar relationships with the wording and style with Spanish. It is essential for students especially among the Mexican American culture to maintain their native language and apply the skills of their first language with their acquisition of English.

Besides having special classroom styles such as bilingual education, ESL, dual immersion or English-only instruction to enhance students second language acquisition, it is important to notice the various abilities Mexican American students use as they learn both languages. Students acquiring a second language tend to develop their language through the constant interference of these “abilities or inabilities” (Stritikus, 2002, p.39). Language transference discussed by Stritikus (2002) is when students have the ability to make connections between their native language and English. This means that Mexican American students are able to transfer their knowledge of Spanish to their English acquisition. Fossilization is another form used by many students acquiring English as a second language. As a result of the use of fossilization, common words in English like “reduce” are said inappropriately in Spanish, such as “reducio,” when the right form to translate the word in Spanish is “redujo” (p. 40). Stritikus (2002) emphasizes that as students are acquiring English, they will end up fossilizing words grammatically incorrect. Another very common one is silent period, where students may remain silent for a couple months and listen to the second language being learned (p. 42). Sometimes it is best to allow second language learners to keep silent until they are ready to communicate (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Students learn the second language through “natural communication,” where they are learning the academic content through the use of the second language and “incidentally” they acquire English skills (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). In other words, as students are interacting in class students without noticing are acquiring the second language. On the other hand, second language learners use code switching as they are switching between both languages. Students who are code switching would mix both languages in their sentences by saying sentences such as “Me voy a subir en un bus” (“I am going to go on a bus”)

(Stritikus, 2002, p.42). As a result, second language learners use these “language alterations” to enhance their language development in both languages (p.43).

For the purpose of having Mexican American students acquire a second language, teachers must implement scaffolding of students through their teaching methods. In addition, it is important to enhance students learning of the second language through classroom methods implemented by the teacher. Activities, such as, group work, peer-tutoring, adding visuals and going over topics before a lesson are techniques teachers can use to assist second language learners in their classroom. Gibbons (2015) mentions the various activities that may enhance student learning. One is called “progressive brainstorm” where the teacher gives groups of students a word and students add in information they know about the topic. This technique is best used before or after a lesson. As a result, students acquire more knowledge and vocabulary about the topic of the lesson (p. 68). Another activity is called “What did you see?” and students use vocabulary to describe what they see in a visual (p. 73). In all his activities, Gibbons (2015) mentions the importance of cooperative learning. He states, students who work in groups “often work at higher cognitive and language levels” (p. 76). In the end, it is important to implement these activities in order to enhance Mexican American students and others to acquire English as a second language.

In the end, Mexican American students become bilinguals through various classroom styles of English instruction. In addition, Mexican Americans learn English through the implementation of code-switching and other techniques as they slowly learn to fully use the English language. Based on the information acquired through the Literature Review I have decided to form a study that will look in more detail to Mexican American experiences in

acquiring English as a second language which will be discussed in the next section; Methods and Procedures.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This study consisted of gathering information from a few websites, books and articles. Making sure the information is relevant and accurate to my research questions. In addition, I conducted three anonymous surveys. The first general anonymous survey was directed to Mexican American college students (See Appendix 3). The goal was to see how their general basic environment and experiences were when they were acquiring English as a second language. With this survey, I would obtain a general idea of how students acquire their second language both in school and at home. Next, I conducted a focal long-response survey with one Mexican American student (See Appendix 1). I used information researched to make my questionnaire. In this longer survey I acquired information about the student's experiences in acquiring the English language; as well as the level of confidence in speaking Spanish and English. In addition, I asked the student to give suggestions for future teachers dealing with Mexican American students attempting to acquire the English language. On the other hand, I conducted my last anonymous survey with one teacher (See Appendix 2) in regards to obtaining information about students acquiring the English language. I surveyed a teacher to view both perspectives of teaching methods to facilitate students learning of the second language.

Twenty-seven college students from two universities participated in my first anonymous survey (See Appendix 3 and Graph 1). Table 1 contains a summary of the students' background (See Appendix 4 Table 1). Everyone except one student were Mexican American students. The first language of my participants was Spanish and their second language was English. My participants ranged from ages seventeen to twenty-four.

Selection of student participants was based on three criteria: a) being a Mexican American b) being a college student c) and having learned English as their second language.

On my second focal student questionnaire, I had one Mexican American college student as my participant.

On my third teacher questionnaire, I had one teacher as my participant. The teacher is an elementary teacher who has been a teacher for 10 years and has taught kindergarten and first grade.

Procedures involve a combination of random and purposive sampling where I identified known teachers, Mexican American peers and their friends. I sent an email to each of them requesting for their participation with this study. I emphasized that the studies will be conducted anonymously; in other words, I and no one else would know who conducted the survey. I was only given their responses to the surveys. Students and teachers were able to voluntarily and at their own time complete the survey. They were allowed to view and edit their own responses. The surveys were formulated and given online through a Google form. It became a more effective way to reach to Mexican American students and busy teachers.

### **Results**

Through the application of my methods and procedures I have acquired enough data from the Mexican American participants and teachers. In this section I will mention and discuss the results of my findings.

In this union capstone research project, I examined how Mexican American students acquired the English language as their second language. The following results are organized based on my secondary research questions with findings from my three anonymous surveys.

***1. Are there advantages or disadvantages for Mexican American students to know their native language well in advance before acquiring English? How does knowing their native language well help them acquire the second language, such as English?***

In the anonymous survey (See Appendix 3), students were asked to number their confidence in writing, speaking, and understanding Spanish and English. Their confidence was rated in a scale from 1 to 5, 1 equaling least confident and 5 representing very confident. With writing in English, 11.1% felt they had the confidence of a 3; 29.6% had confidence of a 4 and 59.3% had confidence of a 5 (See Graph 11). Speaking in English, 14.8% had a confidence of a 3; 18.5% had the confidence of a 4; and 66.7% had confidence of a 5 (See Graph 12). Listening or understanding in English 7.4% chose a 3; 18.5% chose a 4; and 66.7% had a 5 (See Graph 13). Students were also asked about their confidence with speaking their native language, Spanish. With writing Spanish, 7.4% felt a 1; 18.5% had the confidence of a 2; 18.5% felt like a 5; 22.2% had a 3; and 33.3% felt like a 4 (See Graph 14). On the other hand, with speaking, Spanish Mexican American students felt a little more confident than writing. 11.1% felt they had the confidence of a 3; 14.8% had the confidence of a 2; 37% had the confidence of a 4; and the rest of the 37% had the confidence of a 5 (See Graph 15). In the end, listening and understanding Spanish, 3.7% of students had a confidence of a 1; 7.4% had a confidence of a 2; 29.6% had a confidence of a 4; and 56.3% had the confidence of a 5 (See Graph 16). I also asked them; Do you have a fear of losing your Spanish language? 11.1% said maybe; 37% said yes; and 51.9% said no (See Graph 3).

In focal survey (See Appendix 1), I asked the student, Did you use your native language to learn English? And the response from survey said, I did use my native language to learn English. Another one of my questions was, What language do you speak the most at home? Tell



me about your experience growing up with the language and survey response said, I speak mostly Spanish at home and its always been that way because my mom and dad mostly speak Spanish. In addition I asked, What advantages are there for those who speak a second language? Disadvantages? Again, the response from survey said, the advantages to speaking a second language is that there is more opportunity to find a job because a lot of jobs now a days prefer that the employees speak two languages, especially Spanish. To end this section I finished with the question; Were there advantages or disadvantages due to knowing another language well before acquiring English? The response from survey said, I did not find any disadvantages to knowing another language before English because I picked up on it fairly well at 8 years old.

***2. What types of effective teaching methods are being implemented for Mexican American students in the Monterey Bay area according to teachers? If so, how do teachers implement them in the classroom?***

Do you have special instruction in the classroom for English Learners? The survey response said, making sure students answer in complete sentences and also I don't take for granted the kids experience of lack of vocabulary. I can't assume they know a certain word or words (See Appendix 2). Also, I asked in the survey, Do you use special teaching methods for them? What are they? How are they being implemented in the classroom? The survey response said, sentence frames are great for beginning a sentence-also lots of pictures and hands on experience for the kids! Towards the end, I asked By the end of the year, how do your students improve on their acquisition of English? The survey response said, they know more vocab, speak better and clearer and are more confident learners.

In the focal college student anonymous survey (See Appendix 1) I asked students, Were you ever taken out of class or separated from some of your peers in order to learn English or be

given more practice? (ELD ect.) Did it help? Did it not help? Why and How? And the survey response said, I believe I did get pulled out of class occasionally to have small ELD tests. These tests included being shown a picture and trying to name what it was in English.

***3. On the other hand, how do Mexican American students describe their experiences when acquiring English as a second language? In other words, what types of teaching methods have maximized their learning of the English language?***

To answer this question, I asked in the anonymous survey (See Appendix 3) Mexican Americans students answered How did you acquire the English Language at School? and 44.4% of students had English-only instruction and 51.9% of the rest of the students had bilingual education (see Graph 4). I also asked the questions What language/s do you use with your mother? (see Graph 6) and 7.4% of students use English, 18.5% use both languages and 74.1% used Spanish. In similarity with the question, What language do you use with your father? again 7.4% of students used English, 18.5% used both and 74.5% used Spanish(see Graph 7). With big difference I asked students What language/s do you use with your siblings? and the results were 7.4% English, 33.3% Spanish and 59.3% used both (see Graph 9). I also asked Mexican Americans students What language/s do you speak the most at school? and 74.1% spoke English and the rest 25.9% used both Spanish and English (see Graph 10). Students were also asked to state their role as a child at home whether they were the eldest child, young child, middle child or only child (see Graph 2). 11.1% of the participants were the youngest child in the family. 33.3% were the middle child and 55.6% were the Eldest child in their family.

To answer the second part of the question I asked in the anonymous survey, What types of teaching methods maximize your learning? (group work, ect.)(See Appendix 1) The survey

response said, the type of teaching methods that maximize my learning is visual. I like being able to see examples on the board when I'm learning something new.

***4. Are there resources available for teaching Mexican American students to acquire English?***

I asked the teacher; Are there any resources that you would like to share with other teachers regarding teaching students to acquire English? The response from survey said, YouTube has become my friend with lots of videos!! (See Appendix 2).

In the student focal survey (See Appendix 1), I asked the students; What resources are there for other Mexican American students to learn or improve their English? The response from surveys said, a good resource to improving your English would be surrounding yourself with friends who mostly speak English.

### **Discussion**

Based on the results, Mexican Americans students are acquiring English as second language through a combination of bilingual education and English-only instruction (Conger 2010). I can assume that Mexican American students who are in an English-only classroom are being taken out of their class to test them through ESL which was mentioned by one of the college students. Stritikus (2002) also mentions the fact that through ESL, students are being pulled out of the classroom resulting in a way to assist English-only instruction students.

About half of the participants in my study were the eldest in their family and around the same percentage felt confident speaking Spanish. Looking at this, I notice that being the eldest child in the family means those students will have more contact with their parents and their parents' native language. In other words, Mexican Americans students acquire their first language through their parents. Most importantly, 74.1% of the participant said they spoke Spanish with both of their parents. This demonstrates that students are acquiring their native

language with their parents but not the English language. This data emphasizes the idea that Mexican American parents are non-English households (Rumberger, 1998). The interesting part is that the students used both the English and the Spanish Language with their siblings. Does this mean part of the students English acquisition comes from the interaction between siblings? We can assume that lots of the practice happens with the interaction of siblings. In accordance, Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvain (2007) state that the eldest child becomes a role model for his younger siblings. Mexican American students acquire English as a second language and become bilinguals students who are using the language at home with their siblings.

Although based on the data, the number one place where students acquire English as a second language is at school. Whether it is with their teacher or peers, students are using the English language in school. In other words, the acquisition of English for Mexican American students is happening in the classroom through the teacher's instruction.

At a different point, around half of the students felt comfortable understanding Spanish. In other words, the communication of the native language is given at home and with some students in school. Although why did students' confidence in speaking and writing in Spanish drop tremendously? I can assume that students who had English-only instruction most likely lost the skills necessary to effectively speak and write Spanish. In correlation with Adams and Jones (2005) who state that English- only instruction may be "disastrous" for English learners since they can slowly lose their native language. Although Mexican American students who had bilingual education most likely transition into English-only instruction after a few years of school. As a result, those students did not have constant practice speaking and writing Spanish in the classroom that they lost confidence in their ability. Mexican American students mentioned that it was fairly easy to pick up English as a second language since they had Spanish as their

first language they used those skills to acquire English. Therefore, it is important to have English instruction with Spanish language for students who might be struggling a little more with their acquisition. Making connections with their native language is key in learning a second language but not essential since some Mexican Americans students acquire English in English-only classrooms.

Having instruction through the use of students Native language was discussed in the results. Many of them notice that it was beneficial for them and it became an advantage in terms of being able to understand parts of lessons when acquiring English. Having the opportunity to learn Spanish way before they acquired English allowed them to implement skills they obtained through learning Spanish into English. On the other hand, based on the literature review, at times some students might end up mixing both languages and make errors that students whose first language is English do not make. As a result, they may fall behind throughout their English acquisition. Therefore it is necessary for teachers and parents to pay close attention to their students and notice any confusion and make interventions if they are needed in the students' instruction.

Through the results, a recommendation was given that students learn as they practice sentence formation. Having students form sentences through the use of sentence frames is key to have a student acquire English as a second language. In addition, implementing lots of pictures or visuals and having hands-on-activities may be essential to enhancing Mexican Americans' language development. A Mexican American student mentioned that visuals and being given examples helped enhanced their learning. In other words, as a teacher giving examples of problems and what is expected of students can prevent students from being confused in the classroom and learn the necessary content in the second language.

A resource that teachers could use to better instruct students who are learning English as a second language is implementing YouTube videos in the lesson with visuals and interacting videos. As a student, the best form to acquire English as a second language is by surrounding yourself with peers who speak English.

In the end, my study focused on Mexican American college students experiences in acquiring the second language which summarizes that schools are doing a great job in implementing teaching methods and instruction to assist these students acquire English.

### **Problems and Limitations**

Through my research, I had a difficulty acquiring information specifically about how Mexican American students acquire English as a second language. Most of my research was based on general information on the acquisition of a second language. In addition, some resources were about studies made on other cultures' second language acquisition.

On the other hand, with regards to my research, I feel that I had a small sample of participants in which case my study only looks into the college students' past experiences of acquiring English. As a result, this might have become more of a guessing or trying to remember *how I acquired my English* situation with my participants. In addition, a limitation was that the students were in grade school about 10-12 years ago and education policies and teaching methods may have changed a lot since then making it difficult to have more current data. I believe my data collection was not sufficient enough to answer my questions. There were times where I based a research question with one participant's answer, when I could have had more participants answer the question. Due to the lack of time, it was challenging to acquire more participants that fell under my specific categories. Similarly, opinions given by my participants were very simple without detail. It might have been more in depth, if I would have personally

interviewed my participants, but due to, again, lack of time, I turned to survey long-response questions since my participants were busy. At a different point, in terms of my anonymous survey, since most questions were multiple choice and general questions, the participants could not take the survey seriously and could have guessed on their responses.

### **Recommendations**

For future researchers I recommend applying these questions to Elementary students. Looking at younger students and their experiences can be a good way to notice the real impact of various classroom style instructions. I believe that it is best to observe students learning and progress in their English acquisition from a young age. One implementation would be to do a long-term study that would look very closely into the main themes of how Mexican American students acquire English as a second language.

In addition, further research needs to be made on Hispanic parents' views, whether they believe their children should acquire English while maintaining their native language or simply assimilate to the American culture. Also, how being first generation, or second generation Mexican American in the U.S may impact a student's acquisition of both English and Spanish. Through the application of these recommendations future researchers can collect more detail information in regards to Mexican American acquisition of English as a second language.

Some recommendations for Mexican American students acquiring the English language as a second language are to have patience and practice. Acquiring a new language takes time and good teaching instruction. Teachers need to implement useful teaching instruction in order to facilitate students learning as they are acquiring the new language. In the end, teachers and parents must find the best ways to teach Mexican American students English as a second language.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, Mexican American students represent one of the largest growing minority group in the United States. Therefore, it is essential to notice ways in which they acquire the English language. Based on this research study I was able to answer my primary question: How do Mexican American students acquire English as a second language? Mexican American students acquire English as a second language in two main environments, their home and most importantly in the classroom. At home, students are practicing the skills of their English with their siblings. While with their parents, Mexican American students acquire their native language. As a result, being that their first language is Spanish, Mexican Americans students use the skills acquired through their Spanish language to master English. As students learn Spanish at home, they learn English in school and through the years, Mexican Americans students become bilinguals.

In school, Mexican Americans students acquire English through bilingual education or English-only instruction. Bilingual education consists of an equal instruction of Spanish and English while English instruction consists of English-only lessons. They each have their benefits and disadvantages depending on the use of language both at home and in the school. Through a combination of studies it was noticed that the majority of students acquisition of English occurs in schools through the implementation of special teaching methods such as group activities and visuals. While students are able to maintain their native language as they use it at home.

Finally, as more and more students continue to acquire English as a second language, teachers and families must learn to help their students acquire English and their native language by supporting the Mexican American students' needs.



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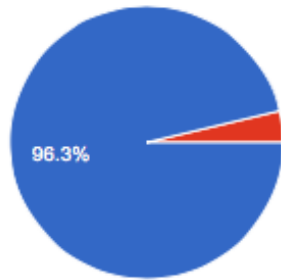
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Graph 1

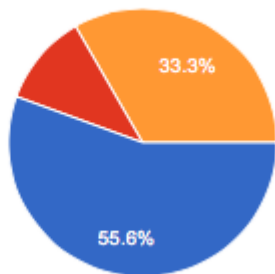
**Are you a Mexican American student**



Yes	<b>26</b>	96.3%
No	<b>1</b>	3.7%

Graph 2

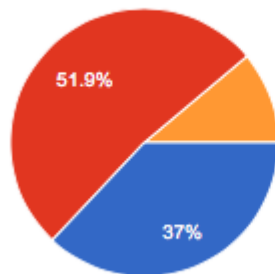
**Role as a child at home**



Eldest Child	<b>15</b>	55.6%
Young Child	<b>3</b>	11.1%
Middle Child	<b>9</b>	33.3%
Only Child	<b>0</b>	0%

Graph 3

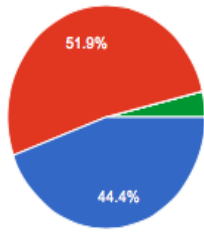
**Do you have a fear of loosing your Spanish Language?**



Yes	<b>10</b>	37%
No	<b>14</b>	51.9%
Maybe	<b>3</b>	11.1%

Graph 4

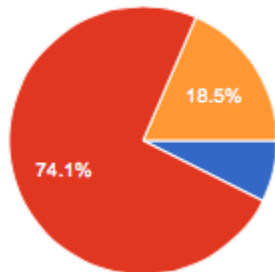
How did you acquire the English Language at School?



English only instruction	12	44.4%
Half Spanish and English instruction (Bilingual Education)	14	51.9%
Mostly Spanish instruction with a little English	0	0%
Other	1	3.7%

Graph 6

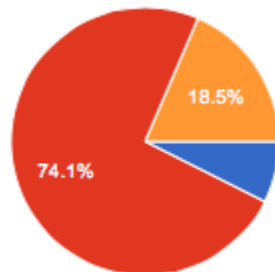
What language/s do you use with your mother?



English	2	7.4%
Spanish	20	74.1%
Both	5	18.5%

Graph 7

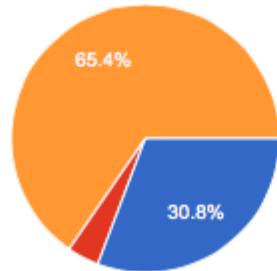
What language/s do you use with your father?



English	2	7.4%
Spanish	20	74.1%
Both	5	18.5%

Graph 8

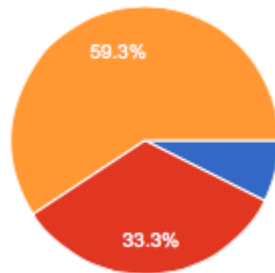
**What language/s do you use with your siblings?**



English	<b>8</b>	30.8%
Spanish	<b>1</b>	3.8%
Both	<b>17</b>	65.4%

Graph 9

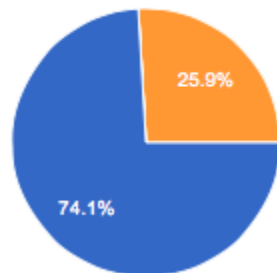
**What language/s do you speak the most at home?**



English	<b>2</b>	7.4%
Spanish	<b>9</b>	33.3%
Both	<b>16</b>	59.3%

Graph 10

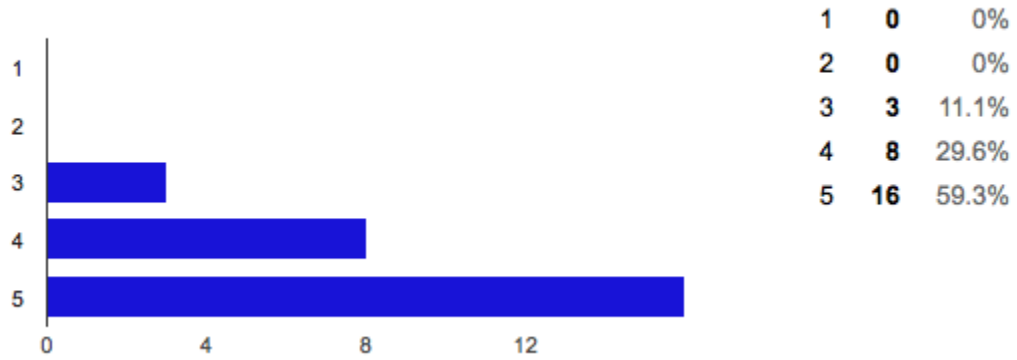
**What language/s do you speak the most at school?**



English	<b>20</b>	74.1%
Spanish	<b>0</b>	0%
Both	<b>7</b>	25.9%

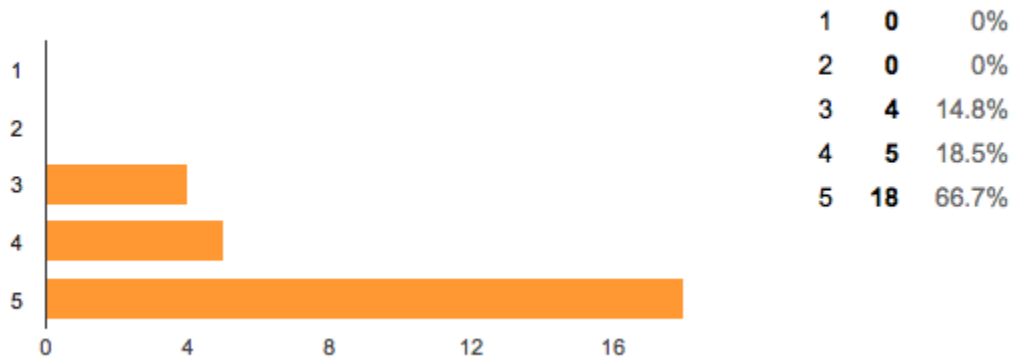
Graph 11

**Writing in English [How confident do you feel: ]**



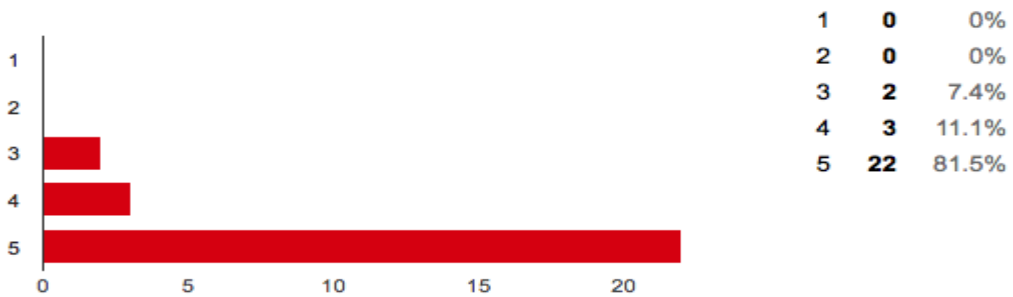
Graph 12

**Speaking in English [How confident do you feel: ]**



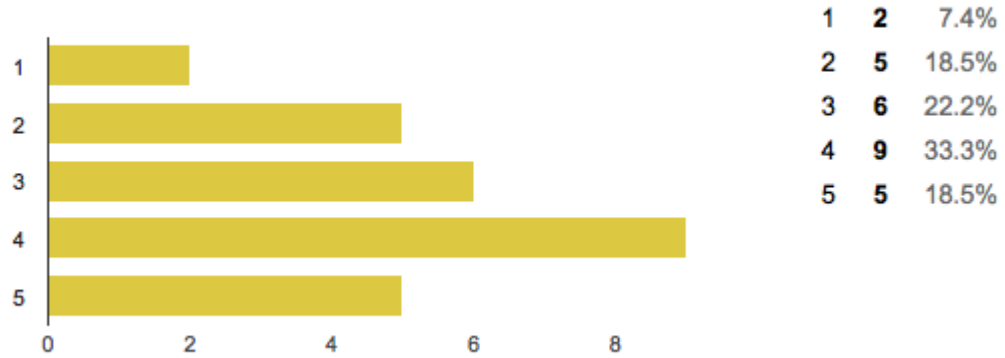
Graph 13

**Listening or understanding in English [How confident do you feel: ]**



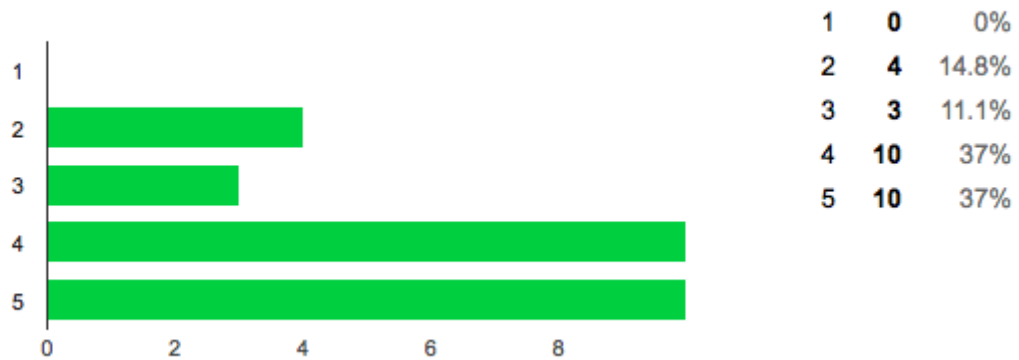
Graph 14

**Writing in Spanish [How confident do you feel: ]**



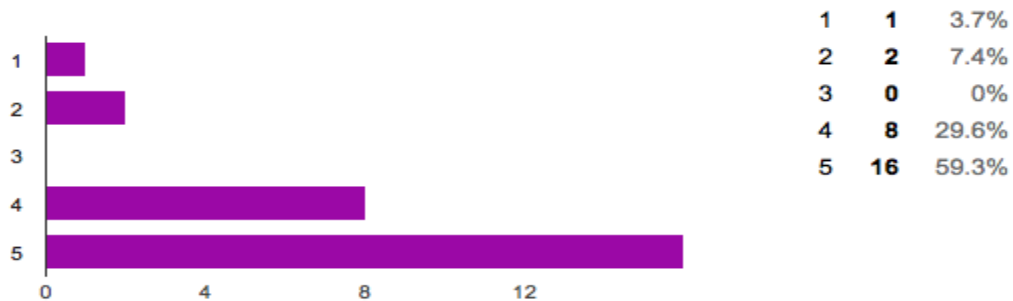
Graph 15

**Speaking in Spanish [How confident do you feel: ]**



Graph 16

**Listening or understanding in Spanish [How confident do you feel: ]**





## Appendixes

**Appendix 1: Anonymous Mexican American College Student's Experiences Questionnaire**

## College Student's Experiences and Recommendations

Hello students:

In order to complete the final requirements for my Liberal Studies Major at CSU Monterey Bay, I am conducting research to gain more insight about college student's experiences and recommendations about acquiring the English Language. It will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the long-response questionnaire.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point or skip a question. Your response is appreciated and will be of great help.

\*All submissions will remain completely anonymous\*

Thank you for helping me with my capstone.

1. How did you acquire English as a second language?
2. How was your school experience learning English? Did you use your native language in school to learn English? Explain.
3. What language do you speak the most at home? Tell me about your experience growing up with the language?
4. Did you use your native language to learn English?
5. What advantages are there for those who speak a second language? Disadvantages?
6. Were there advantages or disadvantages due to knowing another language well before acquiring English?
7. Were you ever taken out of class or separated from some of your peers in order to learn English or be given more practice? (ELD ect.) Did it help? Did it not help? Why and how?
8. What types of teaching methods maximize your learning? (group work ect.)
9. What resources are there for other Mexican American students to learn or improve their English?

**Appendix 2: Anonymous Teacher Questionnaire**

Teacher's experiences and recommendations

Hello teachers:

In order to complete the final requirements for my Liberal Studies Major at CSU Monterey Bay, I am conducting research to gain insight about teachers experiences and recommendations working with students acquiring the English Language. It will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the long-response questionnaire.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point or skip a question. Your response is appreciated and will be of great help.

\*All submissions will remain completely anonymous\*

Thank you for helping me with my capstone.

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. Which grade levels?

(Check all that apply)

K

1st Grade

2nd Grade

3rd Grade

4th Grade

5th Grade

6th Grade

Other:

3. Tell me you experience with English Learners.

4. Do you have special instruction in the classroom for English Learners? Please explain.

5. Do you use special teaching methods for them? What are they? How are they being implemented in the classroom?

6. Are students learning in a classroom with English only instruction? Are students learning in Dual-immersion instruction? Please express you opinion.

7. By the end of the year, how do you students improve on their acquisition of English?

8. Are there any resources that you would like to share with other teachers regarding teaching students to acquire English?

9. Have you ever received special training to implementing teaching methods and doing lesson plans to facilitate students to acquire English as a second language? If so, please give examples of teaching methods used.

10. Any other experiences or suggestions you have working with students acquiring English as a second language.

**Appendix 3: Anonymous Mexican American College Student Survey Questions**

## Students Experiences Acquiring English

Hello:

In order to complete the final requirements for my Liberal Studies Major at CSU Monterey Bay, I am conducting research to gain insight about how students acquire the English Language. I am surveying Mexican American students. It will take approximately five minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point or skip a question. Your response is appreciated and will be of great help.

\*All submissions will remain completely anonymous\*

Thank you for helping me with my capstone.

1. Age

2. Are you a Mexican American student

Yes

No

3. Role as a child at home:

Eldest Child

Youngest Child

Middle Child

Only child

4. Do you have a fear of losing your Spanish Language?

YES

NO

Maybe

5. How did you acquire the English language at School?

English only instruction

Half Spanish and English instruction (Bilingual Education)

Mostly Spanish instruction with a little English

Other

6. What language/s do you use with your mother?

English

Spanish

Both

7. What language/s do you use with your father?

English

Spanish

Both

8. What language/s do you use with your siblings?

English

Spanish

Both

9. What language/s do you use speak the most at home?

English

Spanish

Both

10. What language/s do you use speak the most at school?

English

Spanish

Both

11. How confident do you feel:

(1=least confident and 5 =Very confident)

a. Writing in English	1	2	3	4	5
b. Speaking in English	1	2	3	4	5
c. Listening or understanding in English	1	2	3	4	5
d. Writing in Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
e. Speaking in Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
f. Listening or understanding in Spanish	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix 4: Participant Information**

Table 1 Participant Information

<b><u>Ethnic background:</u></b>		# of Participants
	Mexican American	26
	Non-Mexican American	1
<b><u>English as a second language</u></b>		27
<b><u>Age:</u></b>		
	17	1
	18	N/A
	19	4
	20	7
	21	13
	22	1
	24	1