

Title: Spanish as a Heritage Language Across Disciplines: Assessing Spanish and Bilingual Courses at an HSI in South Texas

Abstract:

Long-standing research has confirmed the many benefits of Spanish as a heritage language in dual language in K-12 classrooms (Collier & Thomas, 2017, 2019). However, in higher education, there are very few exceptions to the English-only monolingual norm (García & Li, 2014). This study explores one exception, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in South Texas where certain classes are taught bilingually (Spanish/English) and in Spanish across various disciplines. In this study, we examine 1) how these courses impact success through a quantitative analysis of cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) and 2) how students perceive these courses through a qualitative analysis of open-ended surveys.

For the quantitative analysis of student success, we analyze cumulative GPAs from all students who entered the university in 2016 ($n=4181$). A Man-Whitney U Test reveals a small significant difference ($r=0.10$) between students who took one or more DLBE courses ($M = 3.12, STD = .60$) when compared with students who did not take a Spanish/bilingual course ($M = 2.70, STD = .97$) on cumulative GPAs, ($Z = -7.06, p < .001$). That is, students who took at least one Spanish/bilingual course earned a slightly higher GPA on average.

For the qualitative analysis of student perceptions, we distributed an open-ended survey to all students taking Spanish/bilingual courses during AY 2022-2023 as well as former students who took DLBE courses between 2018-2022. Survey responses from current students ($n=248$) and former students ($n=49$) reveal student perceptions of higher confidence, greater motivation, greater sense of belonging, and more positive experiences in Spanish/bilingual courses.

In sum, the results of this study show that Spanish and bilingual classes in higher education can positively impact student success and student experiences. These findings have important implications for language policy in higher education especially at HSIs.