

# English Language Learners' Attitudes Towards Bilingualism: Chicago Suburbs Case Study

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**Abstract**—This study assumes that the native language of immigrants and their descendants in the US is not equally cherished as the dominant language of the host country. The goal of the study was to examine English as a second language (ESL) high school Hispanic students' attitudes towards their home language (L1), English (L2), and bilingualism in their high school in the Chicago area, USA. The research, which includes sixty respondents, was based on an online questionnaire that was conducted in the selected high school. The results of the study showed generally positive attitudes towards the L1, L2, and bilingualism/the bilingual program by the English language learners. However, the results suggest a need for a different bilingual program, more additive in nature, which will include L1 instruction and offer better support, particularly for the lower English proficiency learners. In turn, it will prevent students from becoming monolingual in their second language. Moreover, the results also suggest that further research is needed after integration of the proposed bilingual program, which would prompt changes that would increase its effectiveness and measure students' achievement patterns. This study offers suggestions for teachers and policymakers for improvement of their bilingual program at their school, while keeping the students' interests in mind.

**Index Terms**—bilingual education programs, English language learners (ELLs), home language maintenance, English as a second language (ESL), bilingualism

## I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of bilingualism in the USA has been pivotal in education since it addresses the needs of numerous immigrants that were faced with a new language and culture upon their arrival to the new country. Bilingual education in the USA refers to an approach to teaching language minority students in their native languages and in English through a variety of programs (Ovando et al., 2006).

In reference to the US, the origins of bilingual education date as far back as the 17th century, however, it wasn't until the first half of the 19th century that bilingual education legislation was passed in Ohio, which became the first state to authorize German-English instruction in schools. Due to the sizeable influx of immigrants, instruction in a number of languages in US schools (Blanton, 2005; Crawford, 1992; Kloss, 1998) was eventually met with xenophobic sentiments, triggering the trend of encouraging families to blend in with the American culture, and give up using their native language. The goal was to Americanize immigrants through the assimilation process (Schmid, 2000). This was a part of an English-only ideology, which spread throughout the first half of the 20th century (Blanton, 2005). By 1923, about two-thirds of the states had ruled that English be the only language of instruction, disregarding bilingual education as a form of instruction (Baker, 2011; Ovando, 2003). The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the reintroduction of bilingual education in the US. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the (1968) Bilingual Education Act (BEA) stood out the most in protecting language minority students by introducing a minimum standard of education (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009) and advocating changes in the federal policy, viewing English language learners as 'with positive potential' rather than 'deficient' due to their (lack of) English language skills (Flores & Murillo Jr., 2001). In the 1990s and early 2000s, many language restriction initiatives (English-only legislation) arose through voter initiatives. Proposition 227 in California and Proposition 203 in Arizona went as far as banning bilingual education, emphasizing that students should learn English by being taught in English (Del Valle, 2003; Haas, 2014). In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) was passed, creating big changes for bilingual education. The focus was now placed on English-language instruction (without maintaining students' culture and home language), with the goal of assimilating students into the mainstream classrooms as quickly as possible. In reference to the above brief of bilingual education policies, English language learners have faced unfair treatment being geared towards monolingualism in English, making them believe their home language (L1) is of less value (Garcia & Diaz, 1992).

The main aim of this paper is to examine the attitudes of English as a second language (ESL) high school Hispanic students' attitudes towards their home language (L1), English (L2), and the bilingual program in their high school in the Chicago area, USA. Firstly, bilingual education programs will be presented as well as the relevant field research. Next, research questions will be introduced, followed by elaboration of the questionnaire. Finally, the results of the study will be presented along with a discussion of the findings and practical implications of the study.

## II. BILINGUAL EDUCATION THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. *Bilingual Education Programs*

Bilingual education research focuses on programs using two languages of instruction (Baker & Jones, 1998; Cummins, 2010; Freeman, 1998), where students are required to learn another language because their home language (L1) is not the language of the broader society, such as English in the U.S. They are speakers of minority languages, often experiencing the process of subtractive bilingualism, which is one of the two main bilingual educational models for non-native English speakers in the United States (Baker, 2011; Crawford, 2004; Ovando, 2003; Ovando et al., 2006). The other model is additive (Lambert, 1975).

Subtractive bilingualism refers to the loss of the linguistic features of L1, which are replaced with the linguistic features of L2. The aim of the dominant language is to devalue the inferior language (Garcia, 2009a), which results in marginalization of the language learners with their L1 culture. It often happens that Hispanic learners who learn English in this way end up losing their home language, and as a result, new generations become monolingual (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009a; Landry & Allard, 1993). Some examples of subtractive programs are: structured English immersion, transitional programs (early-exit, such as sheltered instruction and late-exit), ESL (pull-out and self-contained), and submersion (sink or swim) (Antunez et al., 2000; Baker, 2011; Soltero, 2004). Their primary purpose is to become monolingual in the second language by leaving out the native language (Soltero, 2004).

Additive bilingualism aims to develop full bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism by adding the second language, while maintaining the first language (Landry & Alard, 1993; Soltero, 2004). Their linguistic outcome is bilingualism and biliteracy in L1 and English. Some examples of additive bilingualism are immersion (dual language and two-way immersion) and maintenance (heritage language and developmental) (Genesee, 1999; Soltero, 2004). Research shows that additive bilingual programs create students that are most likely to succeed (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2006; May et al., 2008; Thomas & Collier, 2002). According to Latchana and Dagnew (2009), attitude is defined as a mental state which includes feelings and beliefs. Positive attitudes seem to raise students' motivation, thus positively affecting students' competence in language learning (Lennartsson, 2008), which in turn affects students' success rate (Dörnyei, 1994, 1998, 2003). On the contrary, subtractive bilingual programs generally show lower levels of educational success. The additive and subtractive distinctions will serve to evaluate the philosophy of bilingual education and students' attitudes towards bilingualism.

The subtractive or additive approach to bilingualism affects students' attitudes towards the education process, connecting it to their academic achievement, in addition to a number of other factors which influence the learning of a second language such as: context, age, intelligence, attitude, motivation, and self-esteem. Gardner and Lambert (1972) argue that student's proficiency in a second language is not only due to their mental competence or language skills, but also due to the learner's attitudes towards the target language.

There is abundant research in the field of educating ELLs in the USA (cf. Cummins, 1996, 2000, 2010; Freeman, 2004; Garcia, 2009a, 2009b), but significantly less in the field of teachers' and parents' opinions regarding the matter (Pajeres, 1992; Shannon & Milian, 2002), and even fewer on students' attitudes towards bilingual education (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006). Students' perspectives should be heard in order for bilingual programs to be more successful, which may help shape the policies of their schools when it comes to making decisions regarding bilingual education programs.

### B. *Home Language Maintenance*

The usage of the first language (L1) is crucial in early second language (L2) acquisitions, and it continues to be beneficial during the entire process of L2 learning (Auerbach, 1993). This is why an adequate additive bilingual program is pivotal for adolescents in order to continue with L1 development and usage.

Kipp et al. (1995) suggested that home language maintenance is affected by a variety of individual factors such as age, gender, place of birth, education, prior experience with the majority language (English in this case), length of stay in the host country, the reason for migration, etc. Moreover, there are also several group factors that could affect heritage language maintenance, such as the size of an ethnic group in the area of residency, the language policy of the host country, and the proximity of the minority language (Spanish) to the majority language (English). The combination of both factor types affects language maintenance and its loss depending on language learners' previous experiences and situations.

Lack of opportunities for learning L1 and poor proficiency in English may contribute to learners losing their self-confidence and a chance to get on a path to success (Krashen, 2003). Furthermore, Krashen (2003) pointed out that learners' motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety could be affected by adaptation to the new environment. These variables, which are recognized in his affective filter hypothesis, play a facilitative role in second language acquisition. If learners are highly motivated, self-confident, and not anxious, their chances for success in second language acquisition (SLA) and future endeavors are greater. On the contrary, learners do not advance well when affected by negative feelings, such as monotony or anxiety. This is a barrier that may keep individuals from learning; therefore, if teachers are aware of the variables from the affective filter hypothesis, they will create a more enjoyable and less stressful language learning experience.

Language maintenance is necessary to keep the native language functional and connected to cultural values (Reyhner, 2003). These values help individuals build stronger self-images, creating more positive learning environments. In addition, Reyhner (2003) proposes that everyone could benefit from bilingualism. Since the United States holds one of

the highest numbers of immigrants in the world, totaling 44 million, it is essential to raise the issue of bilingualism, considering that immigrants already come to the US speaking their home language, and in order to adapt to their new country they should learn English as well (U.S. Census, 2019). Immigrant populations are, therefore, directly affected by bilingualism, as well as schools, working environments, hospitals, and other numerous institutions that interact on a regular basis with diverse communities. This proves that language maintenance should not only be important for individuals, but also for preservation and development of traditional cultures, which should be supported by schools and other educational institutions.

### III. GOALS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of the study was to examine English as a second language (ESL) Hispanic high school students' attitudes towards their home language (L1), English (L2), and bilingualism/the bilingual education program offered in their high school in the Chicago area, USA. There is an assumption that positive attitudes towards the L1 generate positive attitudes towards the bilingual program students are participating in, since bilingual programs offer learning English with the assistance of L1. If students are satisfied with the program they are attending, they will obtain better results. An insight into the students' perceptions would allow the district to consider selecting a more fitting program accordingly. This could influence other districts to conduct similar questionnaires and create tailored bilingual programs for their students, aiming for more successful academic achievements. This research is conducted on a smaller scale, as a part of a larger research conducted within the scope of a PhD thesis.

The research attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are ESL Hispanic students' attitudes towards home language (L1)?
2. What are ESL Hispanic students' attitudes towards English language (L2)?
3. What are ESL Hispanic students' attitudes towards bilingualism/the bilingual education program at their school?

### IV. METHODOLOGY

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used to investigate the research questions on a sample of 60 study participants. An online Google Forms questionnaire containing 34 questions was designed, with open- and closed-ended questions, allowing for data categorization. The focus was placed on students' attitudes towards L1, L2, and bilingualism/the bilingual program in their school. A qualitative method was used to analyze open-ended questions, focusing on any prominent aspects noticed in the responses, subject to interpretation, such as reaction or behavior.

#### A. Participants

The study is focused on Spanish-English bilingual students from a northern suburb of Chicago (USA) high school. This area was selected due to the high number of English language learners. The high school has 2,212 students, 230 of whom are English learners, 207 of whom are Hispanic (90%) (Illinois Report Card, 2021-2022). This population composition is relevant because the majority of English language learners in the state of Illinois, USA are Hispanic (Migration Policy Institute, 2018).

Students who participated in this study attended grades 9-12 (ages 14-18). The majority were freshmen (38.22%) and sophomore (31.66%) ELLs. The 11<sup>th</sup> (16.66%) and 12<sup>th</sup> (13.33%) graders represented less than 30% of the Hispanic ELLs. Their English language proficiency ranged from levels 1-5 (entering (1), emerging (2), developing (3), expanding (4), and bridging (5)), which is measured by the ACCESS test for English proficiency and is administered yearly. Based on the test results, students qualify as English language learners if they score less than 5 on a scale to 6. The average duration of English learning is 8.16 years, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 2.36, and ranges from 3.00 to 14.00 years.

The school offers bilingual education courses in English, math, science, and social studies, using only the sheltered instruction content classes. Sheltered instruction does not primarily focus on language development; it rather focuses on the content area knowledge, using only English to transfer knowledge. Teachers simplify the language and use scaffolding strategies in the content area (Wright, 2010).

According to the 2014 district's plan and program for English language learners, districts have significant flexibility when developing programs to satisfy the needs of English learners (ELL Plan, 2014). This means that students' attitudes towards their bilingual program can make a difference in the implementation of more appropriate programs. The district could choose between transitional bilingual, developmental bilingual, dual language, ESL, content-based ESL, and sheltered English instruction. At the moment, only sheltered English instruction is offered.

#### B. Data Collection

The questionnaire was conducted electronically between February and April 2023 in the school's computer lab, and it was administered by the students' English language teachers. In this way, students had a set time to complete the questionnaire and were supervised. It was used as a data collection tool, targeting Hispanic ESL high school students.

The main contact was the school's assistant principal, who was sent a formal Request to Conduct a Study, which was approved.

The questionnaire was created as a combination of structured (scaled questions, multiple-choice responses, and Yes/No responses) and unstructured questions (open-ended questions), and was divided into three sections. Each section contained a mixture of structured and unstructured questions: student attitudes towards L1, student attitudes towards L2, and student attitudes towards bilingualism/bilingual programs. Structured questions were designed to focus on students' habits and usage of their home language (Spanish) at their homes, away from home, and in different situations, as well as their own evaluation of their English knowledge. The questions were short, closed-ended with yes/no answers, with an option to select from a list of given responses, or multiple-choice responses. A 5-point Likert-scale was used with the scaled questions (1 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree) (Tullis & Albert, 2013). Conclusions could be made from the students' responses regarding their usage of Spanish (L1) and English (L2), and the overall importance of both languages.

Another group of questions used was unstructured, open-ended questions, which focused on personal information and feedback. Personal information included questions such as their age, time spent learning English/their proficiency level, persons they speak their L1 with, etc. The feedback provided students' experiences on the given questions.

### C. Data Analysis

The framework for the study analysis consisted of four questionnaire categories with general questions about the students, their attitudes towards L1, their attitudes towards L2, and bilingualism/the bilingual program in their school. The data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 25 software as one of the most recognizable tools used for descriptive statistics (IBM Corp., 2017). The questionnaire items were scrutinized by calculating the frequency (f), probability (p), t-value (t), degree of freedom (df), chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), mean, standard deviation (SD), and overall percentages (%) of participants' responses for each item.

## V. RESULTS

In this section, the research results from the questionnaire are presented beginning with the first, general section that included questions regarding students' age, ethnic background, English language learning experience, the bilingual program at their school, their self-assessment of English and Spanish, information on language spoken at home, and their language preference with family and friends.

In reference to students' ethnic backgrounds, all respondents were of Hispanic descent (n=60, 100%) in grades 9-12. The average duration of learning English among the observed respondents is 8.16 years, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 2.36. The respondents' proficiency scores based on the ACCESS test were as follows: Level 1 WIDA entering (n=2, 3.33%), Level 2 WIDA emerging (n=4, 6.66%), Level 3 WIDA developing (n=30, 50%), Level 4 WIDA expanding (n=18, 30%), and Level 5 WIDA bridging (n=6, 10%). Most respondents are involved in the ESL program (n=41; 68.33%), some are enrolled in the bilingual program (n=11, 18.33%), while the rest (n=7; 11.67%) did not know what program they attended (see Table 1 below). The majority self-assessed their knowledge of English with a 3 (n=29; 48.33%), while only 3 respondents rated their knowledge as excellent (n=3; 5.00%) (see Table 2). On the contrary, the largest number of respondents self-assessed their knowledge of the Spanish language with a grade of 5 (n=52; 86.86%), while only 1 respondent assessed their knowledge as insufficient (n=1; 1.67%) and 7 as average (n=7; 11.67%) (see Table 3).

In reference to the respondents' usage of languages and their preferences, for most respondents the language spoken at home is Spanish (n=40; 66.67%), while the rest of them (n=20; 33.33%) use both English and Spanish. The majority prefer communication in English (n=32; 54.24%), while 14 (n=14; 23.33%) prefer the use of Spanish, and the same number (n=14; 23.33%) prefer to use both Spanish and English. Most respondents communicate with their friends in both English and Spanish (n=36; 60.00%), while no one communicates only in Spanish among friends. All respondents (n=60; 100.00%) use the English language when learning. Most respondents' parents speak only Spanish (n=42; 70.00%), while only 2 respondents' parents speak only English (n=2; 3.33%). The largest number of respondents rarely visit their family in their country of origin (n=41; 68.33%). The majority confirmed that teachers' use of Spanish in lessons makes them understand better what they are learning (n=33; 55%), while the rest (n=20; 33.33%) responded that the question did not apply to them (see Table 4).

TABLE 1  
ENGLISH LEARNERS' PROGRAMS OF ENROLLMENT

5. What English program (ESL) are you enrolled in?	<i>n</i>	%
Bilingual (I learn both in Spanish and English)	11	18.33
ESL	41	68.33
I don't know	7	11.67
Transitional	1	1.67

TABLE 2  
STUDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH

6. How well do you speak English?	<i>n</i>	%
1	0	0
2	9	15.00
3	29	48.33
4	19	31.67
5	3	5.00

TABLE 3  
STUDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT OF SPANISH

7. How well do you speak Spanish?	<i>n</i>	%
1	1	1.67
3	3	5.00
4	4	6.67
5	52	86.67

TABLE 4  
SPANISH USED IN LESSONS

15. The teacher's use of Spanish in lessons makes me understand better what I am learning.	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	33	56.90
Doesn't apply to me.	20	34.48
No	5	8.62

TABLE 5  
THE USE OF LANGUAGE

8. What language(s) is spoken at home?	<i>n</i>	%
Spanish	40	66.67
both English and Spanish	18	30.00
other	2	3.33

12. What language do your parents speak?	<i>n</i>	%
Both English and Spanish	16	26.67
English	2	3.33
Spanish	42	70.00

15. The teacher's use of Spanish in lessons makes me understand better what I am learning.	<i>n</i>	4. How many years have you been learning English?	4. How many years have you been learning English?	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
Yes	33	7.42	1.70	9.35	<0.001
Doesn't apply to me.	20	9.75	2.43		
No	5	6.60	2.88		

6. How well do you speak English?	6. How well do you speak English?	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
2.88	0.60	14.56	<0.001
3.85	0.75		
3.60	0.55		

A descriptive analysis was used on the questionnaire section about students' attitudes towards home language (L1). A statistically significant majority gave an affirmative answer to the statements "I would like to have more classes with help in Spanish (66.7%)," and "It is important to speak and read Spanish fluently (96.61%)," while a statistically significant majority of students reacted negatively to "Students who speak Spanish are smarter (91.67%)," "It is more important to speak Spanish than English (95.00 %)," and "I feel embarrassed to speak Spanish at school (95.00%)."

Regarding the importance of Spanish when it comes to maintaining it, "Students are not encouraged to speak Spanish at

school” (n=36, 60%) and “Speaking Spanish will not make me successful” (n=42, 70.00%) was selected by the majority. The results are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 6  
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOME LANGUAGE (L1)

Item #	Yes		No		$\chi^2$	p
	n	%	n	%		
16. I would like to have more classes with help in Spanish.	40	66.67	20	33.33	6.67	0.010
17. It is important to speak and read Spanish fluently.	57	96.61	2	3.39	51.27	<0.001
18. Students who speak Spanish are smarter.	5	8.33	55	91.67	41.67	<0.001
19. It is more important to speak Spanish than English.	3	5.00	57	95.00	48.60	<0.001
20. I feel embarrassed to speak Spanish at school.	3	5.00	57	95.00	48.60	<0.001
21. Students are not encouraged to speak their home language (Spanish) at school.	36	60.00	24	40.00	2.40	0.121
22. Speaking Spanish will not make me successful.	42	70.00	18	30.00	9.60	0.002

Furthermore, the descriptive analysis on students' attitudes towards English (L2) is summarized below. The statement "I prefer learning only in English" received a negative response by a small majority (n=35, 58.33%), while a statistically significant majority of students provided a negative response to the statement "I knew about the English learning programs offered at this school when I started it" (n=13, 22.41%). The majority of the respondents supported English and its importance in the future, which is evident from the following statements: "I think it is more important to speak English than Spanish" (n=53, 89.83%), "Speaking English makes you more successful" (n=55, 93.22%), and "Students who speak good English are smarter" (n=53, 88.33%). Finally, the statements on students' satisfaction with ESL classes (n=51, 86.44%) and their need for more ESL classes (n=46, 77.97%) were both answered affirmatively by a great majority. The results are shown in Table 6.

TABLE 7  
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH (L2)

Item #	Yes		No		$\chi^2$	p
	n	%	n	%		
23. I prefer learning only in English.	25	41.67	35	58.33	1.67	0.197
24. I think it is more important to speak English than Spanish.	53	89.83	6	10.17	37.44	<0.001
25. I am satisfied with the ESL classes that I take at my school.	51	86.44	8	13.56	31.34	<0.001
26. I think I should have more ESL classes because they help me with learning.	46	77.97	13	22.03	18.46	<0.001
27. I knew about the English learning programs offered at this school when I started it.	13	22.41	45	77.59	17.66	<0.001
28. Students who speak good English are smarter.	53	88.33	7	11.67	35.27	<0.001
29. Speaking English makes you more successful.	55	93.22	4	6.78	44.09	<0.001

Lastly, the final section about students' attitudes towards bilingualism/the bilingual program in their school is presented. For all statements that were offered, except for "I would like to learn in English and Spanish all subjects" (n=17, 29.31%), a statistically significant majority of students had positive responses. Overall, their attitudes towards bilingualism are positive, which shows in their willingness to learn content area subjects such as science or social studies in Spanish and English (n=42, 72.41%), placing importance on speaking fluently in both English and Spanish (n=57, 95.00%), getting a good education (n=60, 100%), and keeping their culture alive (n=60, 100%). The results are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 8  
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS BILINGUALISM/THE BILINGUAL PROGRAM IN THEIR SCHOOL

Item #	Yes		No		$\chi^2$	p
	n	%	n	%		
30. I would like to learn all subjects in English and Spanish.	17	29.31	41	70.69	9.93	<0.001
31. I would like to learn in English and Spanish just some subjects, such as science or social studies.	42	72.41	16	27.59	11.66	0.001
32. It is important to speak English and Spanish fluently.	57	95.00	3	5.00	48.60	<0.001
33. It is important for me to get a good education, so I can get a good job.	60	100.00	0	0.00	60.00	<0.001
34. It is important to keep my culture - my customs and traditions.	60	100.00	0	0.00	60.00	<0.001

The length of learning English among respondents who want to learn all subjects in English and Spanish is shorter by 1.94 years, and the presence of a statistically significant difference was determined by the questionnaire (t=3.02; p=0.004).

TABLE 8A

30. I would like to learn in English and Spanish all subjects.	Yes			No			t	df	p
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD			
4. How many years have you been learning English?	16	6.81	2.29	40	8.75	2.12	3.02	54	0.004

Self-assessed knowledge of the English language is lower by 0.57 points among respondents who want to learn all subjects in English and Spanish, and the presence of a statistically significant difference was determined by the examination (t=2.77; p=0.008).

TABLE 8B

30. I would like to learn all subjects in English and Spanish.	Yes			No			t	df	p
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD			
6. How well do you speak English?	17	2.82	0.81	41	3.39	0.67	2.77	56	0.008

The duration of learning English among respondents who want to learn just some subjects in English and Spanish, such as science or social studies, is shorter by 1.48 years, and the presence of a statistically significant difference was determined by the examination (t=2.18; p= 0.034 ).

TABLE 8C

31. I would like to learn in English and Spanish just some subjects, such as science or social studies.	Yes			No			t	df	p
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD			
4. How many years have you been learning English?	41	7.85	1.78	15	9.33	3.24	2.18	54	0.034

Self-assessed knowledge of the English language was lower by 0.59 points among the respondents who want to learn just some subjects in English and Spanish, such as science or social studies, and the examination established the presence of a statistically significant difference ( $t=2.90$ ;  $p=0.005$ ).

TABLE 8D

31. I would like to learn in English and Spanish just some subjects, such as science or social studies.	Yes			No			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD			
6. How well do you speak English?	42	3.10	0.62	16	3.69	0.87	2.90	56	0.005

## VI. DISCUSSION

Results of the research questions analyses will be discussed in the following section, including students' attitudes towards L1, their attitudes towards L2, and bilingualism/bilingual programs in their school.

In order to better understand the significance of bilingual education to the target students, and the role of the languages they are using, it is crucial to analyze their background. This is addressed in the general part of the questionnaire. All the respondents are of Hispanic descent, and as such are directly exposed to biculturalism and bilingualism. When asked to self-assess their knowledge of English and Spanish, they showed more confidence with their knowledge of Spanish, in comparison to their knowledge of English. The largest number of respondents self-assessed their knowledge of the Spanish language with a grade 5 ( $n=52$ ; 86.86%). On the contrary, the largest number of respondents self-assessed their knowledge of English with a 3 ( $n=29$ ; 48.33%), while only 3 respondents rated their knowledge as excellent ( $n=3$ ; 5.00%). It is clear from this information that students have a solid background in Spanish, which comes from using it in their homes (see Table 8). They keep the Spanish active at home for communication purposes, since most of their parents and family members speak only Spanish. Two-thirds of the students confirmed this, which is why it is imperative for them to know Spanish and to continuously develop it. It can be concluded from the rest of the students' responses that their Spanish is developed at a conversational level only. Their only language of learning is English (59 students confirmed). Moreover, a beneficial correlation was found between the teacher's use of Spanish in lessons, which helps to better understand English and speak it, and the length of learning English. Students with lower proficiency (self-assessed) in English showed a greater need for Spanish support in lessons ( $F=14.56$ ;  $P<0.001$ ). In addition, the average duration of English learning is the highest among respondents who believe that the statement "The teacher's use of Spanish in lessons makes me understand better what I am learning" does not apply to them. This is not surprising considering that English knowledge should be at a higher proficiency level the longer learning lasts, possibly even to a level of exiting the bilingual program. On the contrary, most students who responded positively to the same claim have almost the least experience in learning English, as evident in the analysis that established the presence of a statistically significant difference ( $F=9.35$ ;  $P<0.001$ ; Table 5).

Surprising information was revealed in the students' responses about the English learning programs offered at their school. Two-thirds of the students said that they were enrolled in an ESL program ( $n=41$ ; 68.33%) and roughly one-sixth in a bilingual program (learning in both English and Spanish) ( $n=11$ , 18.33%). Considering that their school only provides sheltered instruction for content classes, such as math, science, and social studies as a bilingual learning method, students seem to be misinformed about the program they are attending. It is possible that the bilingual program they are referencing is sheltered instruction for lower proficiency students since they need special assistance in their native language when learning. Those who answered "ESL program" get additional support in English for some of their classes that are only in English. Since ESL programs are often offered in elementary schools as a form of bilingual support (they focus more on language development than the content and are geared towards lower proficiency students) (Cummins, 2010; Ovando et al., 2006), it is possible that the students called it the same out of habit. This suggests that they do not question the program they are attending and its benefits for their future education.

The results suggest that Spanish is considered very important, as the students would like to see more of it in school and become fully proficient in it, but at the same time, they do not want to place more importance on it over English. One of the reasons for this is the lack of encouragement from the school (60% of the students felt they weren't encouraged to speak Spanish in school). All of the students' English proficiency (ACCESS) scores fall between low proficiency levels 1&2 (9.6%+28%) and intermediate proficiency levels 3&4 (46.4%+16%) (Illinois Report Card, 2021-2022). Furthermore, their scores are aligned with the 2022 ACCESS overall performance scores for the state of Illinois. These students would certainly benefit from a bilingual program that would involve L1 support in learning English.

The study findings showed that Hispanic English language learners hold positive attitudes toward their home language. Domestic use of Spanish makes it a part of students' culture and tradition, and they wish to have an opportunity to develop it further through a bilingual program of additive nature offered at their school (Soltero, 2004).

The second research question about Hispanic ESL students' attitudes towards English (L2) came as a response to the school's learning environment, which is promoting English learning without relying on the home language. In order to



assimilate faster to the host culture, the students want to learn only English (Baker, 2011; Celaya, 2016) believing that focusing only on one language would make their learning experience more successful and faster. This was evident from the questionnaire results showing that all students (100%) use English when learning. This could be explained by the fact that students are not used to learning in both languages, since their school does not offer such programs. Lack of encouragement to speak Spanish at school (n=36, 60%) contributes to the belief that English is not only dominant, but superior to their home language, which is why they support the statement that it is more important to speak English than Spanish (n=53, 89.83%). To add, students are not properly introduced to the English language learning program at the beginning of their high school education, which is evident from negative responses (almost 80% of the students, n=45; 77.59%) to the statement “I knew about the English language program when I started.” Due to the push from the school to transition the English language students quickly into the mainstream classes by using as much English as possible while creating monolingual English learners, the students seem to share similar attitudes towards English language superiority. This shows in their confirmation (n=53, 88.33%) of statements “Students who speak good English are smarter” and “Speaking English makes you more successful (n=55, 93.22%)”.

An analysis of the questionnaire results suggests students' positive attitudes towards the second research question, which refers to their L2. They find it more important to speak English than Spanish, and also students who speak English to be smarter and more successful than those that don't. They prefer to speak English (n=31, 54.24%), and all of them use it in learning (see Table 7).

The third research question, which concerns Hispanic ESL students' attitudes towards bilingualism/the bilingual education program at their school, also resulted in positive attitudes. Their positive attitude towards bilingualism certainly arrives from their home environment and traditions. All of them stated that it is important to keep their culture alive, while Spanish is spoken in two-thirds of homes (n=40, 66.67%), and even in more cases parents speak only Spanish (n=42, 70%). The home support makes them believe that it is important to speak English and Spanish fluently and to use English and Spanish in learning certain subjects, such as science or social studies. The minority preferred learning all subjects in both languages (see Table 8).

In addition, the students may have expressed positive attitudes towards the school's bilingual program based on its name, or simply were aiming to improve their English knowledge by participating in it. A majority preferred having more ESL classes (n=46, 77.97%). The research reminds us that ESL classes most often use L2 for quicker language acquisition without using L1 as support (Francis et al., 2006). In this way students develop lower language proficiency skills, such as colloquial language, which may trick the non-English language learners' staff into believing that their academic language is more advanced than it actually is. Most schools identify their programs as bilingual, although they only offer subtractive bilingual programs with only sheltered instruction or ESL classes, and are far away from true bilingual programs that promote bilingualism and biliteracy in both languages studied.

Students develop positive attitudes towards subtractive bilingual programs, as in this case, because they see it as a quick and only path to mastering English. At the same time, this causes a loss of interest to further develop L1, which was evident from the negative feedback majority gave regarding learning all subjects in both languages. This finding is contradictory to students' wish to speak both languages fluently (in all areas, not just for communication purposes) because they are not knowledgeable about what is necessary to master a language.

Based on the conducted research it is evident that there is a gap in the English language proficiency among students. Moreover, all students scored between lower and intermediate English proficiency levels. It was expected that an additive bilingual program would be offered at the high school suiting English language learners' needs; however, this was not the case. According to the Illinois Report Card (2021-2022), the goal of their school's “Bilingual” Education Program is to help students acquire English language proficiency in all four language domains, while gaining academic skills. The stated goals align with a program that contains ESL instruction, which is not offered at this school. Moreover, the bilingual program that the school offers uses sheltered instruction content classes, which are meant for English learners at advanced levels of English proficiency.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study showed that there is a clear language separation when it comes to its purpose. English is used for academic purposes, mostly only at school- in classes and among peers, while Spanish is used for conversational purposes-at home, among family and friends. This suggests that true bilingualism is not present, with students being fully bilingual and biliteral in both languages.

This study shows Hispanic ESL students' positive attitudes towards L1, as they already have support for Spanish at home, however, they become aware of its inferiority to English, stemming from the school's lack of effort to support its maintenance and usage. The students are willing to participate in additive bilingual programs if guided properly, which was evident from their positive responses regarding reading and speaking Spanish fluently, as well as their desire to use both languages in learning.

Furthermore, the students' positive attitudes towards English can be explained by the idea of assimilating faster into mainstream education and society. They view English as a means to success. Consequently, they are led to believe that learning Spanish would hold them back in their progress. The school and the authorities see Spanish as a hindrance to learning, fearing it would only diminish students' focus as they learn English. On the contrary, learning English in a

proper program can reduce the learning process. Often a common misconception that many hold is that learning two languages slows the process down, however, research shows (Eckert, 2000; Fairclough, 1989) that the L1 background makes stronger foundations for the second language learners, helping them acquire it with fewer difficulties. A second language does not have to be acquired under the condition of losing the home language.

Finally, it can be concluded from the study that Hispanic ESL students have positive attitudes towards bilingualism/the bilingual program at their school. The school's existing bilingual program is a fast-track sheltered program that focuses on content instruction with the goal of achieving English language proficiency using a bare minimum of L1, or without using any. Although the students expressed satisfaction with their bilingual program, they clearly did not understand that there is a wide spectrum of bilingual programs a school could choose from, that aim for bilingualism and biliteracy in English and home language, and that such programs would be more beneficial to them. The questionnaire yielded suggestions the students would like to add to the program. For instance, the majority would like to have more L1 support, which would benefit the lower proficiency level students the most. Others would like more ESL support, which would make their comprehension smoother. Since only a subtractive bilingual program is offered at their school, there is a lack of support to further develop students' mother tongue. A solution would be to include a transitional bilingual program, which would offer content area subjects in the native language, while teaching students English through special ESL instruction. Since the law does not require bilingual programs to undergo an official assessment, and since it is up to each school to decide on its own type of bilingual program, this study is a great reminder to the decision-makers of the importance of the selected bilingual program for the school, the district, the students, as well as the overall success.

### VIII. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of the findings are directed at the school's decision-makers, the ELL teachers, and the students' parents as follows: (1) ELL teachers, as experts in working with bilingual students, should propose a bilingual program more additive in nature. Since the transition from a subtractive (that offers very limited support for ELLs) into an additive program (as the opposing program) is quite significant, a good starting point may be selecting a subtractive bilingual program that requires a lesser transformation, such as a transitional, which is a step closer towards an additive bilingual program. It is the most widely implemented bilingual model in the USA (Baker, 2011; Crawford, 1999). This would facilitate students' academic progress through the language they understand, while they acquire enough proficiency in the second language to function academically in English;

(2) Both, the school and the district will benefit from offering a proper bilingual program for English language learners, which will show in their achievements (better test results, graduation rates, etc.) because students will be motivated to learn. Apart from the cultural advantages, students in bilingual programs experience other positive outcomes, such as improved working memory, increased control over attention, greater awareness of the form of language, and other benefits economic in nature (Adesope et al., 2010). From the above stated, the district should realize that adequate English language programs should be offered based on its learners' English language proficiencies (lower proficiencies should have more L1 support);

(3) The change in the bilingual program will allow parents to get involved with their children's education. If more Spanish is included in the instruction, the parents will be able to understand better what their children are learning and what is expected of them. This will create a more positive learning environment for students, their language and literacy development, and a sense of belonging, considering that their native language is supported at school and among teachers (Portes & MacLeod, 1996).

These findings open more options for research on Hispanic ESL students' achievement patterns while attending the modified bilingual program, in comparison to their achievement patterns under the previous system. Attitudes of Hispanic ESL students' parents towards bilingual education could also be further explored. Undoubtedly, the proposed bilingual program change is a process that requires follow-up studies that will examine changes and the overall success of students.

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