Fostering Cultural and Language Visibility by Integrating Multicultural Literature in the Classroom: A Case Study

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FOSTERING CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE VISIBILITY BY INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

by

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An Honors Capstone
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Diploma to The Honors College of The University of Alabama in Huntsville

November 17, 2019

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Abstract

Drawing on Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2002), this qualitative research utilized a case study method to examine the impact of multicultural literature involving authors and characters reflective of Hispanic culture on Hispanic English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This case study provides an in-depth description of the influential role that multicultural literature plays in a classroom that includes Hispanic ESL students, and how it can be used to foster cultural and language visibility and socialization practices among these students. Findings of the study reveal that incorporating multicultural literature in the classroom appears to have a positive impact on cultural and linguistic visibility of Hispanic ESL students in the classroom, as well as students’ socialization practices and motivation to read. Implications of this case study suggest that integrating multicultural literature into the mainstream classroom is invaluable to students’ self-concept and feelings of belonging within the classroom environment as well as their motivation to read and become personally invested in their learning experiences.
Introduction

Nationally, the majority of English as a Second Language (ESL) students enter the school system with Spanish as their first language (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016). In Alabama schools, according to the Modern Language Association (2010), these students make up the vast majority of ESL students, as Spanish is the second most spoken language in the state (see Appendix D), and the number of Spanish-speaking students continues to grow. Because these students are such a large demographic in Alabama, it is imperative that these students are encouraged and supported not only to learn English, but to excel academically as well as socially. The main goal of this qualitative research study is to provide an in-depth description of the impact of multicultural literature, particularly multicultural literature involving authors and characters reflective of Hispanic culture, fosters cultural and linguistic visibility of the students in the classroom as well as the way in which multicultural literature impacts the students’ motivation and socialization practices in the classroom environment.

The following two research questions guided the current research study: (1) In what way does incorporating multicultural literature influence cultural and linguistic visibility of Hispanic ESL students in the classroom? (2) How does multicultural literature in the classroom impact Hispanic ESL students’ socialization practices and motivation to read?

This qualitative study describes the impact of multicultural literature accurately portraying Hispanic characters, culture, and use of the Spanish language on Hispanic ESL students in the mainstream classroom. Analyzing the way in which multicultural literature featuring characters reflective of Hispanic culture fosters cultural and linguistic visibility in Hispanic ESL students, this research addresses the way in which incorporating multicultural literature influences cultural and linguistic visibility of Hispanic ESL students in the classroom.
and the way in which meaningful multicultural literature impacts these students’ socialization practices and reading motivation.

This case study was conducted through a series of interviews with a second-grade teacher and classroom observations of a class in which 70% of students were Hispanic and all of which were or had previously been enrolled in an ESL program. Though the effects of multicultural literature in the classroom have been researched extensively in the past, there is still a need for research on investigating the effects of multicultural literature specifically on Hispanic students in the United States Public Education System, a need which is identified and targeted by this research.

The next section presents the review of literature regarding the effects of multicultural literature in the classroom as well as the needs of and challenges facing Hispanic and ESL students in public schools. Furthermore, a description of terms used in this study is established in order to provide a frame of reference for the study itself. Following a review of present literature and terminology, there is a description of the case study conducted in an elementary classroom at Lakeside Elementary School. This case study was conducted in order to examine the impact on Hispanic and ESL students of the use of equity pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 1995), the transformative teaching approach (Banks, 2004, Nieto & Bode, 2018), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002) as practiced by the teacher.

**Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Throughout this study, the terms visibility, linguistic visibility, motivation, Hispanic ESL students, self-concept, ethnic identity, socialization, and multicultural will be explored and used frequently.

**Terminology**
This section describes the definition of terms central to the study. These terms frame the objectives of the study itself, helping to answer the questions of the impact of literature on cultural and linguistic visibility, socialization practices, and reading motivation. Through a thorough understanding of these terms, the objective of the study itself will be made clear.

The concept of visibility encompasses student exposure to prominent figures reflecting their cultural identity as well as a shifting environmental attitude towards the culture to which they belong as well as the ability to demonstrate pride in their cultural identity (Nieto & Bode, 2018). Visibility entails the main issues such as identity construction, socialization, and motivation, etc.. Particularly, according to Nieto and Bode (2018), visibility refers to the way students see themselves and their culture accurately represented in class material.

Linguistic visibility, extending Neito and Bode’s (2018) definition of visibility, will not only encompass a shifting environmental attitude towards the students’ culture but also their native language, which, in this study, is Spanish. Linguistic visibility is not simply addressed through the exposure of prominent figures representing these students’ culture, but also language through access to bilingual books in order to encourage literacy and reading motivation.

Motivation, according to Gardner (as stated in Ghazvini & Khaljehpour, 2011), is the extent that a student strives to learn a second language due to a desire to learn the language as well as the satisfaction the student experiences throughout the action of. Motivation when aligned with Gardner’s (as stated in Ghazvini & Khaljehpour, 2011) definition, is considered to be one of the key factors influencing the rate and success of students learning a second language, as Hispanic ESL students are doing throughout their American school career (Ghazvini & Khaljehpour, 2011).
Hispanic ESL students, referred to as Hispanic English Language Learners (ELL) in some school systems, refer to “an active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 2). ESL or ELL can also refer to an instructional program to help students who do not speak English as their native tongue learn English (NCTE, 2008). The present study focuses on Hispanic ESL students, the student group in focus are students entering into the American school system speaking Spanish as their first language and having limited English proficiency.

As this study centers around the impact of multicultural literature on Hispanic ESL students, the term multicultural refers to material integrated into the classroom accurately reflecting non-mainstream cultures and challenging biases and misconceptions present in material produced by the mainstream culture, and in this study, materials that accurately represent both the Spanish language as well as Hispanic cultures.

Self-concept, according to Eggen and Kauchak (2016), is one’s own appraisal of their competence, whether it be social, academic, or physical, though this study will focus upon social and academic self-concept. Extending this definition to Hispanic ESL students, students’ self-concept of their competence directly affects their self-esteem, which implies that a positive self-concept of one’s competence in a subject is related to a greater willingness to approach and succeed in tasks in which the students believe they are or will be competent (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016).

Self-concept is directly related to identity construction, particularly the construction of an ethnic identity, which is defined by Eggen and Kauchak (2016) as one’s sense of belonging to a cultural group defined by the group’s cultural heritage, including its language, values, and traditions; students’ identity construction, or a development of their sense of self, is inseparable
from their ethnic identity. In this study, the use of multicultural literature in the classroom is evaluated as a tool to assist in affirming the ethnic identity of students through the presence of familiar characters, culture, and language in literature presented in the classroom.

**Literature Review**

The main purpose of this literature review is to identify and analyze research studies related to multicultural literature in the classroom, research centered around students outside of the mainstream culture, and challenges faced by Hispanic ESL students in the American school system, as a means to better understand the current research. There is ample research outlining the importance of multicultural literature within the classroom (Bishop, 1990; Bieger, 1996; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Walker-Dalhouse, 2008) and much research regarding the struggles faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) students, or students learning English within the school setting as a separate language (Congress & Lynn, 1994; Eggen & Kauchak, 2016; Lee et al., 2007; Nieto & Bode, 2018). However, there is little research regarding the connection between multicultural literature displaying Hispanic authors and character and its impact on Hispanic ESL students, who make up the majority of English learning students in the United States (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016).

**Multicultural literature in the classroom**

Multicultural education, as defined by Nieto and Bode (2018) is “a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect” (p. 32). Using this definition, multicultural literature can be described as literature which celebrates the pluralism of students, including
characters outside of the mainstream culture. According to Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001), multicultural literature for African American students should: feature the cultural characters in realistic contexts, use authentic dialogue consistent with the culture presented in the literature, include accurate illustrations of the characters and the setting, and contain information that is accurate to the culture and characters presented in the text (as cited in Walker-Dalhouse, 2008). While Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd’s (2008) formula for effective multicultural literature was created referencing African American multicultural literature, these standards can be extended to the use of multicultural literature surrounding most cultures, as the requirements for the literature to be effective tend to be overarching and not specific to any one culture.

**Effects of multicultural literature**

Multicultural literature in the classroom is important, not just for students to learn about different cultures, but for culturally marginalized students to feel validated and celebrated in their culture in the classroom setting. Children, when exposed to multicultural literature learn to respect minority groups as well as heightening their personal aspirations (Bieger, 1998).

According to Bieger (1996), “people who find their own life experiences mirrored in books receive affirmation about themselves and their culture. They feel pride and develop self-worth” (p. 309). This finding establishes the importance of integrating multicultural literature into the classroom. Articles such as Bieger’s (1996) describe the positive effects of multicultural literature in the classroom, though the claims are not specific to Hispanic and ESL students. Bishop (1990) emphasizes the dangers of failing to integrate multicultural literature into the classroom highlighting that students feel “devalued in society” (p.1) when they either do not see themselves reflected in the literature in their classroom or only see inaccurate depictions of their culture in literature presented in the classroom. Cullinan (1989) asserts that multicultural
literature expands understanding of differing cultures while touching on events that are universal, yet still relate to individual culture groups, highlighting the uniqueness of each culture and the commonalities between cultures as well (as cited in Bieger, 1998).

**ESL students in the mainstream classroom**

The importance of ESL students experiencing validation and care in the classroom is embodied by Lee, Butler, and Tippins (2007), who claim that diverse students need to exist in a learning community where students and teachers practice acknowledgement, help, and support of one another. Regarding the need for a student to feel safe and welcome in the school environment, to Congress and Lynne (1994) state that many immigrant children experience fear, panic, and loneliness as well as a struggle with understanding the new expected social behavior within their new environment as well as within the school. When students face these struggles within the classroom validation of students become of the utmost importance, as stated by Lee, Buter, and Tippins (2007).

Multicultural literature in the classroom contributes to the visibility of minority students and encourages them to recognize their value in society (Bishop, 1990), making multicultural literature in the classroom an integral part of education, not just for minority students, but also, as Cullinan (1989) suggests for students of the mainstream culture (as cited in Bieger, 1998). For the purpose of this research, for multicultural literature to be considered effective, it must fit the guidelines set out by Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001), who stated that multicultural literature should portray realistic characters in realistic settings (as cited in Walker-Dalhouse, 2008). Although every student deserves to be supported in the classroom, ESL students can pose a particular challenge for educators, as there is often a communication struggle due to the very nature of these students learning the educator’s first language as their second language. These
students, as stated by Lee, Butler, and Tippins (2007), deserve to be involved in a supportive learning environment. The purpose of this research is to understand the current research on multicultural literature in the classroom and research centered around ESL students, and then examine the effects of multicultural literature, particularly that which features Hispanic authors and characters, and its impact on the cultural and linguistic visibility of Hispanic and ESL students.

**Theoretical Framework**

This section establishes the framework by which the effectiveness of multicultural education through the use of literature will be evaluated. In order for a teaching practice to be considered effective, there must be a standard to which the practice is held. The goal of this research is to observe the effects of multicultural literature in the classroom on Hispanic ESL students’ socialization practices and feelings of cultural and linguistic visibility. Therefore, the teaching practices in the case study will be evaluated by the teacher’s use of constructivism (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016), Socialization Theory (Ochs, 2000), Care Theory (Noddings, 2013, as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2018), Banks’ theories of the transformative teaching approach (Banks & Banks, 2004) and equity pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 1995), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002).

Socialization Theory, as coined by Ochs (2000) is defined as the way in which language throughout the lifespan impacts the process of becoming an active participant in a community. Focusing on social and cultural interactions, Socialization Theory centers around how people structure knowledge, emotion, and social action through language (Ochs, 2000). As the current study focuses on Hispanic ESL students, language is central to the study, and Ochs’ Socialization
Theory (2000) embraces the power of language in socialization with others, which is central to the human experience (Ochs, 2000) and this importance carries over into the classroom as well.

Nel Noddings’ Care Theory (2013) coins the term “ethic of care” (as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2018, p. 216), which identifies the connection between student learning experience and schools and teachers that truly care for their students. Noddings (2013) further defines care, not as a static action, but as a dynamic process encompassing teaching practices and strong student-teacher relationships (as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2018). In the current study, the teacher’s practices and interactions with students will be examined according to Noddings’ (2013) Care Theory and ethic of care, as teacher-student relationships are integral to the learning process (Noddings, 2013, as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2018).

Cognitive constructivism, as described by Eggen and Kauchak (2016) is the theory that learning is an individual and internal process. Further, constructivism theorizes that people build knowledge through their own experiences and that knowledge is made meaningful when it is personally relevant (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016). Relating constructivism to the importance of multicultural literature in the classroom and its impact on students, the use of literature that is accurately representative of students’ cultural experiences assist in making content personally relevant to students. As constructivism focuses on personal relevance of information as a medium for better retaining new knowledge (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016), literature accurately depicting different cultures and languages may assist students in better understanding themes explored in literature culturally relevant to the students.

This current study uses Banks and Banks’ (2004) transformative approach to education as well as his concept of equity pedagogy (Nieto & Bode, 2018) as a framework for guiding the effectiveness of multicultural education in the classroom in which the case study was conducted.
According to Banks, as stated in Nieto and Bode (2018), a transformative approach to education is defined as a change in teaching focusing on evaluating concepts from multiple points of reference and multiple ethnic frames of reference. This approach involves teaching social issues not only from the mainstream point of view, but from less mainstream and overlooked viewpoints as well in order to encourage students to develop a broader worldview (Nieto & Bode, 2018). Beyond encouraging this expanded worldview (Nieto & Bode, 2018), utilizing the transformative approach in the classroom also validates the experiences and points of reference for students outside of the mainstream culture, and therefore fostering a more culturally inclusive classroom.

Equity pedagogy is being used as a standard for effective multicultural education in this case study, because, as individual student needs vary greatly in learning styles, as stated by Nieto and Bode (2018), there is also a need to cater to students with varying cultural backgrounds. Banks and Banks’ (2004) concept of equity pedagogy is a pedagogy that exists only when teachers adapt their teaching to include multiple teaching styles that reflect the array of learning styles and cultural groups (as stated by Nieto & Bode, 2019). This means that, in the classroom, teachers are not focusing on giving all students the same resources but are actively focusing on making sure that each student is given the tools needed for personal classroom success (Nieto & Bode, 2018) that recognizes and accommodates their individual cultural differences.

Culturally responsive teaching, as theorized by Gay (2002), is the process of utilizing the varying cultural perspectives culturally diverse students in order to reach students more effectively. Gay (2002) claims that when academic topics are within the frames of reference of the students being taught, knowledge becomes more meaningful for all students. Further, Gay (2002) states that academic achievement of ethnically diverse students is directly correlated with
students being taught through “their own cultural and experiential filters” (p.106). The use of multicultural literature is an integral aspect of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). Students who are exposed to literature that resemble their own experiences, in extension, may feel as if their cultural identities are validated. As this study focuses on the effects of multicultural literature in the classroom, culturally responsive teaching practices are necessary for multicultural literature to be considered effective in validating the cultural identities of students.

**Methodological Framework**

The current research study focuses on examining the effects of multicultural children’s literature showcasing Hispanic characters, culture, and authors on Hispanic ESL students in the mainstream classroom. The main goal of this study is: (1) Determine the way in which incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom influences the cultural and linguistic visibility of Hispanic ESL students in the mainstream classroom (2) Determine the way multicultural literature in the mainstream classroom impacts Hispanic ESL students’ socialization practices and motivation to read.

**Research Methods**

This case study used a qualitative research design. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews as the main source for information. The methodological procedure included three interviews with a teacher of ESL students, in addition to classroom observations and field notes. The interview was digitally recorded/audio-taped, and then transcribed in full. According to Silverman (2006), “qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire” (p. 114). Each interview occurred after no less than an
hour of observation, in which student socialization practices and lesson-participation was observed as well as the teaching practices of the participant of this study. According to Silverman (2006), qualitative research’s “greatest strength is its ability to analyze what actually happens in naturally occurring settings” (p. 351).

The following section describes the way in which the qualitative data were gathered from the classroom observations as well as the teacher interviews.

**Research Site Description**

This research study took place in the Spring of 2019 at Lakeside Elementary School (pseudonym). Lakeside Elementary is located on the north metropolitan area of Lakeside (pseudonym), in Smith County (pseudonym), Alabama. Lakeside is home to one of the highest populations of Hispanic Americans in the state, and it is also one of the largest counties in the state.

In northeastern Alabama, according to the 2009 American Community Survey, the population of the Lakeside City School District (pseudonym) was 169,448, with 3.6% (6,062) of the population comprised of Hispanics or Latinos. The grade levels that are taught at Lakeside Elementary range from pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. Lakeside Elementary is categorized as a Title I school and is one of two elementary schools in the district with the highest population of Hispanic students who either are currently enrolled or have previously been enrolled in an ESL program. Specifically, this case study was conducted in a second-grade classroom in which 65% of students are Hispanic, 30% of students are African American, and 5% of students are biracial. Based on classroom observations and fieldnotes, the classroom utilizes flexible seating and technology in the form of a smart board and laptop computers for the students. The
classroom has a library in which the students are allowed to freely choose books to read, and many of the books are multicultural and/or bilingual (see Appendix B).

**Participant Description**

According to Silverman (2006), sampling is usually concerned with “a representative subsection of a precisely defined population in order to make inferences about the whole population” (p. 304). In this study, purposive sampling procedure was used in order to achieve representativeness. Thus, choosing the teacher as the key informant of this study associated also to choosing Lakeside Elementary as a research site.

The teacher interviewed in the case study, Ms. Johnson (pseudonym), is a third-year teacher who teaches in a second-grade mainstream classroom. Ms. Johnson holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in differentiated instruction specializing in Autism Spectrum Disorders. After obtaining official and written permission from Ms. Johnson, and then the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix C), the following research methods and procedures were utilized.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Qualitative content analysis was implemented, and data were analyzed throughout the data collection process. In this regard, Sayer (2009) explains that this procedure is a “relatively simple process of describing the data set and identifying connections and patterns across parts of the data” (p. 145). The data analysis process started by coding the collected data from the resources described earlier: interviews, fieldnotes, participant-observation, and images. An “attribute” coding procedure was utilized (Saldaña, 2009) to report the information about the demographic characteristics of the study participant, Ms. Johnson, the teacher observed in the case study. Additionally, a “descriptive” coding was employed to summarize the basic topics of the
qualitative data in words or short phrases (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70). This coding system was
developed by using Excel software, and it was designed to elicit consistent categories and
subcategories based on the research approach. Through the coding, the findings from the case
study were divided into the following categories: socialization practices, visibility, the role of
multicultural literature and reading motivation. The findings from the coded data will be
elaborated in the following section.

**Data Findings and Discussion**

The current study provides an in-depth description of the impacts of multicultural
teaching pedagogy on ESL students and demonstrates how teachers in the mainstream classroom
have a role supporting Hispanic ESL students using multicultural education, particularly the use
of multicultural literature in tandem with the ESL program of this school.

While there is no exact number public regarding the students who are participants in ESL
programs, within the classroom observed in the case study, 70% (Interview #1) of students were,
or had previously been enrolled in an ESL program. Because these students make up a
significant portion of the school population, it is imperative that they are reached and encouraged
to excel academically, socially, and personally.

Ms. Johnson’s classroom was laid out with flexible seating and tables rather than desks.
The use of flexible seating served to facilitate discussion between the students as well as allow
students to move freely throughout the classroom in a productive manner (see Appendix A),
highlighting the inclusive classroom environment fostered by Ms. Johnson. Based on the
interview findings, Ms. Johnson, a second grade teacher in a mainstream classroom, asserts that
the importance of multicultural literature in the classroom is twofold: (1) to help students become
personally invested in reading due to them seeing themselves represented in the literature they
are exposed to and (2) to facilitate an ownership and pride in their culture, a claim echoed by Gay (2002). Both of these goals are at the heart of this study, as the observations and interviews provided evidence that when Hispanic ESL students are exposed to literature that features familiar characters and cultures, reading motivation seems to increase due to the increased visibility the students feel as a result of the literature actively reflecting their ethic, cultural, and linguistic identities.

Visibility

In his work, Bieger (1996) states that when students are affirmed in their individual and cultural identity find their own experiences mirrored in literature. Supporting Bieger’s claim (1996), Ms. Johnson, when asked about student response to reading multicultural literature, states:

[The Hispanic ESL students] get excited [when reading multicultural literature]. They're able to make those connections, they [say] ‘Oh, we do that too!’ or ‘This is how we do it in my house!’ They talk about their own beliefs, their own traditions, and they can share with their peers, and they get excited about sharing a part of themselves, they really make that connection. They, you can see the excitement in their faces. (Interview #1)

This statement lends support to the claim that students are affirmed in their identity as a result of experiencing multicultural literature and are increasingly willing to share their life experiences in the classroom because their experiences are validated through the literature itself.

Socialization Practices

Regarding socialization practices, Lee, Butler, and Tippins (2007) asset that diverse students should belong to a learning community that helps, acknowledges, and supports them. Lee, Butler, and Tippins (2007) claim revolves around the importance of a classroom community
in which the socialization practices of students include being actively involved in helping one another. Ms. Johnson, on the topic of classroom community and socialization practices of her Hispanic ESL students, spoke about an issue she faced at the beginning of the school year, stating:

I saw a little bit [of students wanting to primarily socialize with their own racial group], but I made sure that... At the beginning of the year, I saw cliques with Hispanics and African Americans, they kind of separated themselves, and I was... no. I did not like that and I made sure that [as if speaking to the students] “Now we're going to sit and we're going to have mixed groups.” I didn't say that to them but, but now, no, not so much. Sometimes they'll go back to their normal groups, but not so much anymore. (Interview #1)

The tendency of her students to separate racially is not surprising, however, the students’ socialization practices changed as the classroom culture became more familiar to them. In contrast to this observation about students at the beginning of the year, Ms. Johnson recalled an event prior to the interview, saying:

I had a student this morning who was sitting by himself, and one of my little boys was sitting here for breakfast, and he noticed that a student was by himself and went to sit by him. It makes your heart happy. They make sure everyone is included, and we have students who can't speak English yet or they can speak broken English, so we have kids who are always helping translate, and they don't let language be a barrier, they go up and they start talking. [...] They don't confine themselves, they mingle well. (Interview #1)

The power of a culturally inclusive classroom environment in order to produce healthy and inclusive socialization practices between students, much like those described by Lee, Butler, and
Tippins (2007), is invaluable. Referencing Ms. Johnson’s previous statement, it was also observed that students were both allowed and encouraged to speak to one another in Spanish if it made them more comfortable in the classroom environment. These socialization practices, many of which are encouraged through the establishment of a classroom that values the pluralism of students, demonstrates the connection between multicultural education in the classroom and the construction of healthy and inclusive socialization practices within the classroom.

**Reading Motivation**

Evidently, language acquisition is largely connected with literacy, so, by extension, motivation to read relates to motivation to continue learning language skills. Regarding an observation of students choosing multicultural children’s books to read during individual reading time, Ms. Johnson states:

“My students love to read. Although they struggle at it, they love to read. We have Idea time, which you walked in on. Typically, its, we take time and we just, I let them sit wherever they want. […] That's really improved the love of reading, we will put on soft music and we'll just read. Sometimes we do buddy reading, sometimes it's individual reading, sometimes students will read to me during that time, I'll go around asking questions about their books. They're definitely engaged. They definitely love what they're reading. We have a great librarian, and she definitely has boosted the love of reading as well. (Interview #1)

According to Ghazvini and Khaljehpour (2011), motivation is considered to be one of the key factors influencing the rate and success of students learning a second language. Ms. Johnson’s sentiment is especially important in evaluating the reading motivation of Hispanic ESL students, as she acknowledges the struggle ESL students face in reading. However, by creating an
inclusive classroom environment in which students are free to choose their own reading material, it appears that motivation increased. After taking an inventory of multicultural literature in Ms. Johnson’s classroom library, it was evident that the students have access to a large amount of multicultural literature that may assist in validating their identity. It appeared that students were incredibly attentive to the multicultural literature they were able to choose for their own reading time, demonstrating the influence of the availability of multicultural literature accurately representing their own cultural experiences on the general reading motivation of the Hispanic ESL students in the classroom.

**Role of Multicultural Literature**

When students are exposed to literature in which their differences are celebrated rather than ignored, reading motivation, socialization practices, and a sense of visibility is improved (Nieto & Bode, 2018). Regarding the importance of using multicultural literature as a persistent teaching practice, Ms. Johnson states:

[Multicultural literature is] not just a one-time deal. You have to incorporate multicultural books throughout the entire school year. And different ethnicities, like our different cultures in the text because you have to expose them to different cultures so that they can talk about differences and similarities, and they can see that we're all the same, but we all have unique qualities, we're all different. It's not just a one-time deal. (Interview #2)

Research supports this statement; Cullinan (1989) asserts that multicultural literature expands understanding of differing cultures while relating universal experiences and celebrating individual culture groups, highlighting the uniqueness of each culture and the commonalities between cultures as well. Regarding Ms. Johnsons’ comment, it’s important to note that multicultural literature must be integrated in classroom continuously in order for it to have the
effects noted in the above sections. Further, Ms. Johnson noted that multicultural literature serves as a channel of finding continuity between the varying cultures of students.

**Limitations**

Regarding the purpose of case studies, Nieto and Bode (2018) state that educational research cannot generalize all students. However, it assists researchers in examining specific examples so that solutions for generalized situations can be hypothesized, which is the aim of the current study. Qualitative research lacks generalizability because its major concern is to understand what is happening and why from the perspective of the informants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Accordingly, because the current study is a single case study that took place in a brief period of time, the conclusions of the present research are inductive, as hypotheses are drawn from the examination of the data (Nieto & Bode, 2018) identifying the impact of multicultural literature on Hispanic ESL students. However, the purpose of qualitative research is not to locate an empirical truth, but to unearth and understand new perspectives through the lens of a first-person experience that can be extended to a similar demographic in varying regions.

**Implications**

This case study contains meaningful implications to help policy makers and curriculum developers reevaluate the necessity of multicultural literature in the classroom, particularly because the population of Hispanic ESL students continue to grow (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016). Based on the findings of this case study, the participant Ms. Johnson suggested the following for teachers:

Incorporate [multicultural literature] in any aspect that you can. It's great to have your library. For new teachers, [having multicultural literature in the classroom is] hard, they have to spend a lot of money to get the resources, so sometimes that literature is difficult,
but if [new teachers] can have a wish list or a donors choose, incorporate [the multicultural literature] in whole group and small group instruction. [The students] absolutely love it. (Interview # 3)

While Ms. Johnson acknowledges the struggle to have a culturally diverse classroom library, she reminds teachers that is not impossible, but a matter of understanding how to go about getting the supplies that are invaluable to creating a classroom in which all students feel safe and valued.

Beyond suggestions for teachers, Ms. Johnson also spoke on the general implication of the use of multicultural literature with Hispanic ESL students. On this topic she states:

[Multicultural literature] is very crucial and [it’s] important that we get the diverse literature in our classrooms. [Multicultural literature] needs to be shared and talked about and we need to expose our children to different diversities and different cultures. It opens up great conversations and [the students] learn and they are excited. Our kids come from very diverse backgrounds, so they're always excited to hear about their culture being shared, and we talk about cultures they may not be familiar with so it just, it's great for the kids. They learn so much, they become more open, and it brings about great conversations. (Interview #3)

Ms. Johnson’s passionate comment about the general necessity for multicultural literature in the classroom for all students documents how multicultural literature acts as a tool to spur student curiosity and understanding of students different from themselves. When students see themselves represented in literature, their excitement helps shape their self-concept, an identity from which their culture cannot be separated.

Taking Ms. Johnson’s statements into account, it is clear that integrating multicultural literature into the mainstream classroom not only increases student engagement, but brings about
conversations about culture and language, helping students to become more open to cultural differences, as well as feeling excitement and pride regarding their own culture. In short, multicultural literature is a necessary part of establishing a healthy and inclusive classroom environment for all students. Evidently, the role of teachers to choose effective multicultural literature to integrate into their classrooms is imperative in establishing a culturally inclusive classroom environment in which students, especially students entering the classroom having limited English proficiency, can be excited and proud of their cultural identity rather than shamed for their differences.

For learning to occur, students must feel safe and welcomed in their learning environment, and as observed in the classroom in which the case study was conducted, multicultural literature that embraces cultural diversity appropriately acts as a way for the teacher to express to the students that they are not a cultural outsider in the classroom, but that their identity is valid and their learning is encouraged, supported, and celebrated (Nieto & Bode, 2018). According to Nieto and Bode (2018), developing comprehensive multicultural programs within the school and classroom in which students are exposed to the importance of diversity helps students develop pride in their cultural identity. As evident through the case study findings, when students are presented with book characters that share their cultural identity, the students become excited and take charge of their learning, going out of their way to research and learn more about their heritage, which helps demonstrate the importance of cultural visibility in the classroom and its impact on students who may traditionally be overlooked in mainstream literature.

**Conclusions**

While the role of multicultural literature in the mainstream classroom has been the subject of much research, this study focused specifically on the impact of multicultural literature
on Hispanic ESL students. Through a review of current literature as well as a case study, it is clear that the integration of multicultural literature focused on Hispanic ESL students has the potential to improve student socialization practices, reading motivation, and a general sense of belonging, or visibility within the classroom. Throughout the case study, it was frequently observed that not only was multicultural literature of frequent use during instruction, but the teacher’s attitude and students’ responses to the multicultural literature was clearly positive.

Regarding socialization practices, students engaged with one another in discussing their varying cultures, going as far as to explain their family and cultural traditions, as similar traditions were highlighted in the literature. Furthermore, students, particularly Hispanic ESL students, engaged more with the literature presented in class when it was representative of their own culture, which was both observed during the study as well as evident in the teacher-interview, as recorded in the data findings. Elaborating on visibility within the classroom, students felt comfortable to share out about their cultural heritage, much as a result of the multicultural literature made available in the classroom setting.

Taking these findings into account, it is evident that ESL students can benefit from multicultural literature. More specifically, however, the impact of multicultural literature accurately depicting Hispanic characters, culture, and language can contribute to the identity construction and motivation of Hispanic ESL students in the mainstream classroom. Through this study, it was found that student response to multicultural literature cannot be understated, it inspires curiosity, heightens reading motivation, assists in establishing an inclusive and culturally responsive classroom environment, and encourages students to take ownership of and pride in their cultural identity. The implications of this case study suggest that the use of multicultural literature in the mainstream classroom positively affects students’ self-concept, sense of
belonging, reading motivation, and personal investment in learning, suggesting that multicultural literature can be valuable to student experience and learning.
References


10.1080/00405849509543674


Appendix “A”
Ms. Johnson Classroom Layout
Appendix “B”

Multicultural Library in Ms. Johnson’s Class

¿Dónde está mi mamá? — preguntó.

"Where is my mother?" he said.

La buscó.

He looked for her.
Appendix “C”

IRB Approval

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

April 25th 2019

Anna Rodgers
Department of Education
University of Alabama in Huntsville

Dear Mrs. Rodgers,

The UAH Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Committee has reviewed your proposal, Study: Fostering Cultural and Language Visibility by Integrating Multicultural Literature in the Classroom: A Case Study, and found it meets the necessary criteria for approval. Your proposal seems to be in compliance with this institution’s Federal Wide Assurance (FWA) 00019998 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Please note that this approval is good for one year from the date on this letter. If data collection continues past this period, you are responsible for processing a renewal application a minimum of 60 days prior to the expiration date.

No changes are to be made to the approved protocol without prior review and approval from the UAH IRB. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of subjects, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the IRB Chair.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB’s decision, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Bruce Stallsmith
IRB Chair
Professor, Biological Sciences

EXPIRED (see pg 2)
Exempted (see pg 3)
Full Review
Extension of Approval

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
Von Braun Research Hall M-17, Huntsville, AL 35899 T 256.824.8100 F 256.824.6783
Appendix “D”

Demographic

Most spoken languages in Alabama in 2010

English is spoken by 95.05% of people over 5 years old in Alabama. Languages other than English are spoken by 4.95%. Speakers of languages other than English are divided up as follows.

- Spanish 63.84%
- German 4.44%
- French 3.64%
- Korean 2.83%
- Vietnamese 2.63%
- Chinese 2.63%
- Arabic 1.82%
- Japanese 1.62%
- Hindi 1.41%
- Tagalog 1.21%
- Italian 0.81%
- Persian 0.61%
- Other 12.51%