

MULTILINGUAL VOICES

EXAMINING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY LEARNING



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Purpose

Student perceptions of literacy are significant in shaping their classroom learning experiences. Awareness of these perceptions helps educators in various disciplines plan and develop a customized curriculum aligning with the diverse needs of their students (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004). While extensive research addresses the academic and linguistic needs of MLs (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Bauer et al., 2017; Rowe, 2022), less is known about how these diverse students perceive literacy instruction in K-12 school settings (Pentón Herrera, 2021). We examined student survey responses in a design-based research study with the aim of building instructional capacity for MLs that includes these student perceptions. Our study sought to bridge this gap by answering the following research question: What are MLs' perceptions of literacy learning?

Perspective

This study is grounded in the sociocultural framework, which considers how social interactions, cultural contexts, and linguistic backgrounds influence literacy practices. The sociocultural framework recognizes literacy learning involves active engagement and meaningful relationships (Moje & Luke, 2009); therefore, it is important to consider how these factors influence MLs' perceptions of literacy. Valuing ML perceptions and experiences of literacy learning creates a space that encourages active participation and collaboration. This approach enhances their literacy development and fosters a sense of agency and empowerment in their educational journey. By examining ML perceptions of literacy learning through a sociocultural lens, we aim to contribute to more effective and inclusive classroom practices that support diverse learners.

Method

This research is part of a large-scale, designed-based research (DBR) study funded by the National Professional Development Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The project aims to enhance the abilities and resources available to MLs, their teachers, and their caregivers in high-need school districts in South Carolina. Thirty K-12 teachers were recruited to participate in a funded master's program in literacy with coursework meeting requirements for ESOL and literacy teacher add-on certifications. As part of the data collection process, teachers were instructed to administer a student self-efficacy survey at the beginning and end of each semester. The student self-efficacy survey was designed to measure students' perceived confidence with content learning, thus providing valuable insights into their beliefs and attitudes toward their academic abilities (Deng & Trainin, 2020).

Results

Through qualitative coding and analysis of 168 surveys from MLs in grades K-12, four focused codes emerged: communicating effectively through listening, speaking, reading, and writing; becoming proficient in English and home languages; needing additional instructional support; and supporting emotion and confidence. Drawing from the DBR framework, each focused code was categorized as either an enhancing or inhibiting factor. Enhancing factors were those that aligned with progress toward the learning goal while inhibiting factors were those that hindered the effectiveness of the intervention.

Discussion

The previously discussed focused codes were consolidated into two theoretical codes, guided by the sociocultural perspective. By categorizing the focused codes into theoretical codes, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of MLs concerning literacy learning and offer insights for designing effective literacy instruction and needed PD that promotes development across languages.

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Sample Data	Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Theoretical Codes
“Sometimes I struggled with keeping my attention in something.”	Listening actively and maintaining focus	Inhibiting: Communicating effectively through listening, speaking, reading, and writing	Opportunities for MLs to engage in meaningful instruction and classroom discourse are needed
“I am not that good at speaking.”	Speaking aloud		
“I have trouble understanding reading”	Reading and comprehending		
“Writing conclusions”	Expressing ideas through writing		
“Just to understand the process between Spanish and English.”	Developing skills in multiple languages	Enhancing: Becoming proficient in English and home languages	A flexible instructional framework is needed
“The teacher explains how to do it then helps me answer it.”	Repeating and clarifying	Inhibiting: Needing additional instructional support	
“Slowly pronouncing the words to me”	Reading aloud		
“By giving strategies for how to solve a question”	Scaffolding and differentiating		
“Reteach questions for me and help me in small group”	Instructing individually or in small groups		
“I would like to have more confidence when speaking in front of an audience.”	Building confidence	Inhibiting: Supporting emotion and confidence	
“Calms me down”	Supporting emotion		