



# Exploring the Reading Motivation of Less-Motivated Adolescent Latinx English Learners

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explored reading motivation among high school English learners whose first language was Spanish. Latinx English learners (N = 87) from two southeastern, suburban school districts took part in the first stage of the research. The researcher utilized subscores for self-concept as a reader and value of reading from a recognized reading motivation survey instrument along with reading subscores on a nationally recognized standardized language assessment to identify students who could be presumed to be less-motivated readers (n = 14) for interview selection. Responses from six randomly selected interviewees from this less-motivated pool of participants demonstrated that they faced numerous obstacles toward becoming proficient readers, including challenging home environments and debilitating anxieties. Overall, a series of complex factors were shown to inhibit reading motivation. Implications and practical recommendations for educators are discussed.

Over the next 40 years, more than one million immigrants a year will move to the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). The Pew Research Center (2015) predicts a 6% surge in the Latinx population in the U.S. from 18% to 24% between 2015 and 2065. (As used in this study, Latinx refers to an individual of Latin American origin or descent, and this terminology is

used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina, or Hispanic.) Because of changing demographics and population growth, schools throughout the country are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. In 2015, roughly 4.8 million or approximately 10% of all public school students in the U.S. were identified as English learners (McFarland et al., 2018), and researchers predict that by the year 2030 approximately 40% of students will be English learners (Goldenberg, 2013). Furthermore, almost eight of every 10 English learners in the U.S. are native Spanish speakers of Latinx origin (McFarland et al., 2018).

Academic performance among this rapidly-growing population of linguistically diverse students has consistently remained far below that of their monolingual peers (Baker, Richards-Tutor, Sparks, & Canges, 2018). In 2017, the achievement gap in reading between English learners and their English-proficient peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was 37 points in fourth grade and 43 points in eighth grade (McFarland et al., 2018).

English learners who value reading and see themselves as capable readers are motivated to engage more deeply with reading tasks (del Rio, 2013), and prolonged reading engagement results

in increased academic English proficiency which promotes overall academic success (Cummins, 2011). Studies have found a strong relationship between higher levels of student motivation and increased academic achievement (Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Marks, 2000; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2013). Specifically, research has shown that less-motivated students report a sense of disconnect with academic content and a feeling of isolation stemming from being labeled a poor student (Marks, 2000; McKool, 2007; Schunk et al., 2013). As such, this study seeks to explore more completely what inhibits motivation in reading among high school Latinx English learners.

Few studies exist specifically to explore what motivates English learners to engage in reading. Of the few studies that have been conducted concerning English learners' reading motivation (e.g., Arzubigi, Rueda, & Monzó, 2002; del Rio, 2013; Howard, 2012; Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Protacio, 2012), none addresses English learners' reading engagement at the high school level. Listening to what students say about reading is central to this study's purpose. As such, this study seeks to determine what high school Latinx English learners who are classified as less-motivated readers say about themselves as readers and what factors promote or inhibit their motivation. The descriptor less motivated was chosen because motivation should be considered along a spectrum and cannot be defined dichotomously (Schunk et al., 2013).

### Expectancy-Value Theory

As the conceptual framework undergirding this study, the expectancy-value model of achievement posits that motivation is strongly influenced by one's expectation of success or failure at a task (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Atkinson, 1957; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Proponents of the expectancy-value model have argued that an individual's beliefs regarding competency and the extent to which one values an activity will determine the individual's choice, persistence, and performance on that activity (Eccles, 1983; Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). People will attempt to attain goals they value and perceive as achievable (Dörnyei, 1998). Unfortunately, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) found that as individuals got older, their ability-related beliefs and values became more negative, which led

to a decline in motivation and task engagement.

### Trends in Prior Research

Past research into reading motivation among Latinx students has primarily concentrated on the cognitive processes of individual students, but there is a growing trend toward viewing reading motivation through a sociocultural lens. Additionally, prior research has concentrated primarily on elementary and middle school students. Few studies exist that specifically address reading motivation among high school Latinx English learners.

Arzubigi et al.'s (2002) pivotal study of Latinx English learners' reading motivation focused on how sociocultural dynamics such as home environments and family routines promote or inhibit reading engagement. Survey results (from Gambrell et al.'s [1996] Motivation to Read Profile) from 18 second-generation Latinx English learners from Mexico and El Salvador in third and fourth grades and interviews with their parents suggested that family togetherness and the encouragement and emotional support it fosters positively related to how much children valued reading. Family nurturance that promoted students' perceptions of the value of reading included teaching children religious values and moral principles, encouraging them to do well in school, and inspiring them to pursue an academic future. Furthermore, the extent to which families pursued Spanish and English reading and cultural activities positively correlated with how students perceived themselves as readers. In contrast, the extent and strenuousness of parents' work responsibilities and the number of young children at home negatively influenced children's perceptions of the value of reading (Arzubigi et al., 2002).

In their formative mixed-methods study, Ivey and Broaddus (2007) sought to determine what effective literacy instruction in reading and writing among adolescent Latinx English learners entailed. Interviews with 14 Spanish-speaking Latinx English learner beginners in an upper middle school ESOL language arts classroom revealed that effective reading instruction for English learners involves flexibility and variety in the selection of texts. Students reported being motivated to read when texts matched their interests and were not overly difficult. Ivey and Broaddus (2007) cautioned against a blanketed, stereotypical selection

of reading materials and noted how students, even those with similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, have unique family, cultural, and educational histories that influence what is engaging for them. Furthermore, this study revealed that when teachers take into consideration the larger sociocultural context of reading motivation and the individuality of each of their students, meaningful reading engagement is possible even before English learners have mastered content-specific reading, writing, and language skills (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007).

In her qualitative study, Howard (2012) conducted three case studies to explore fourth-grade English learners' (two Latinx students who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and one Hindi-speaking student who immigrated to the U.S. when he was a toddler) perceptions of themselves as readers, the types of reading support programs they valued, and their reading preferences. Survey results revealed that students were motivated to choose books their friends suggested, and surveyed students revealed that they were motivated to read when they were given the freedom to choose books that interested them. While they avoided overly long or difficult books, they favored graphic novels and fiction books most. Parent expectation was the number one reason students said they read outside of school.

An example of a sociocultural investigation of reading motivation among English learners is Protacio's (2012) qualitative study in which she interviewed six English learners (four boys and two girls) in the elementary grades from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds about what motivated them to read. She discovered that English learners use reading to affiliate with their American peers and assimilate into their new culture. She also found that the students she interviewed were motivated to read interesting texts that are at their independent reading level. As integratively motivated English learners, the focal students in Protacio's (2012) study remarked that reading became a way for them to bond with their peers in the United States and learn more about their new culture. In short, Protacio (2012) found that perceived competence, interesting reading materials, and social motivation all seemed to contribute to English learners' reading motivation.

Using a quantitative approach, del Rio (2013)

examined how third-grade reading achievement correlated with the reading motivation of fourth-grade students and how reading motivation (as measured by the Motivation to Read Profile [Gambrell et al., 1996]) related to fourth-grade reading achievement scores. Results from 207 fourth-graders in two different schools primarily of Latinx origin demonstrated that reading motivation influenced but did not control the correlation between third- and fourth-grade reading achievement scores. Most significant for del Rio's (2013) study was its implication that students' reading motivation in the early grades predicted future academic achievement.

Despite all the benefits of fostering increased reading motivation, research specifically investigating English learners' reading motivation at the high school level is relatively scarce (Protacio, 2012). Investigating reading motivation among high school English learners, therefore, warrants concerted research. Research is necessary to further clarify the strengths and learning needs of underperforming English learners.

### Method

As an expression of its exploratory focus, this study used a qualitative-dominant mixed methods design. Over 300 high school Latinx English learners in two suburban, southeastern U.S. school districts were invited to participate in this study, and 87 students (with the permission of their parents/guardians) agreed to participate in the first stage of the study, the survey phase. Reading motivation survey results and standardized test scores for these 87 participants were used to ascertain students who could be presumed as less-motivated readers. Specifically, three measures were used to collect data in a cascading design. Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP; Pitcher et al., 2007) survey results and ACCESS for ELLs (WIDA, 2019) English reading proficiency subscores were used to categorize participants (N = 87) into Below Average subgroups for the following categories: English reading proficiency (n = 48), student self-concept as a reader (n = 43), and student perception of the value of reading (n = 31). Students who scored below average on all three measures were placed in a Less Motivated subgroup (n = 14), and from this group, six students were randomly selected to be interviewed (Figure 1).

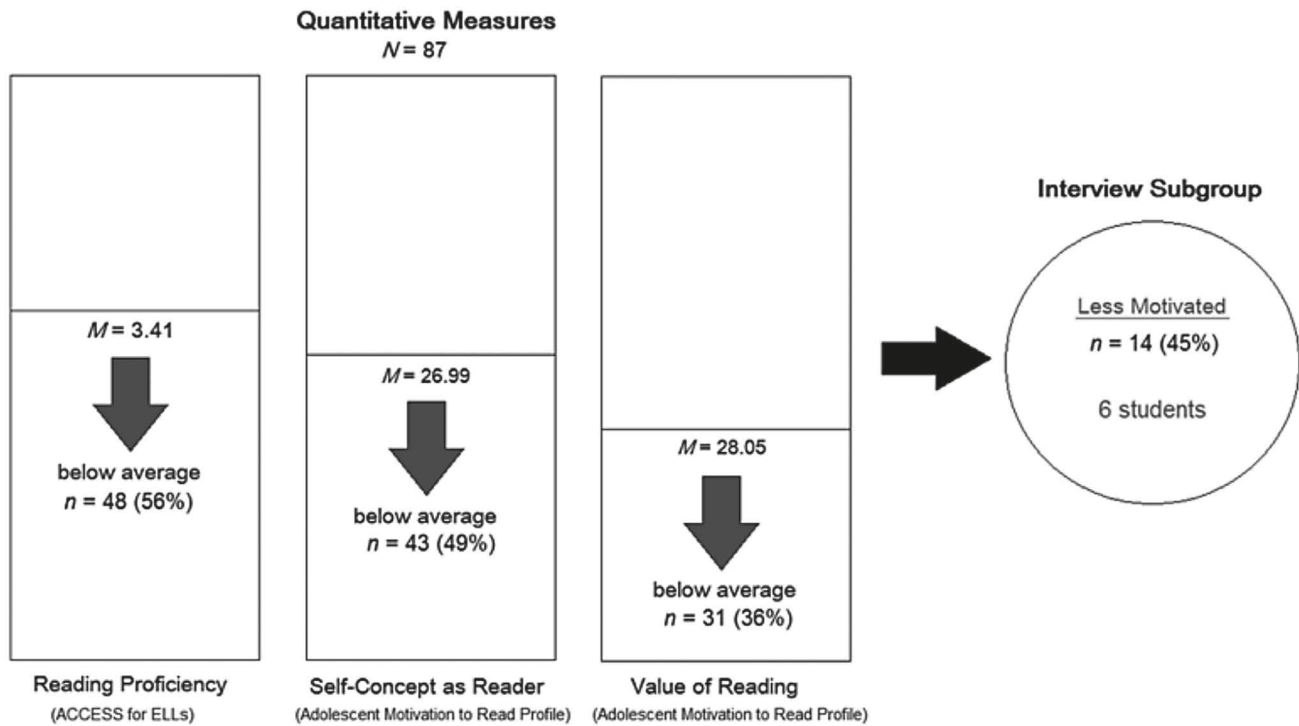


Figure 1. Procedure for selecting interview candidates.

### Data Collection

The conversational interview protocol used in this study (see Appendix A) is an adapted and abridged version of Sturtevant and Kim's (2010) AMRP conversational interview for English learners (ACIELS). Ten questions were included on the interview protocol asking students to reflect on their reading experiences, primarily in English. Probing questions were also included to elicit more-detailed information from student interviewees. An audio recorder was used to record the interviews. The interviewer and a research assistant, a native Spanish speaker, took detailed notes on the students' responses during the interview sessions. The researcher interviewed all students, while the research assistant sat in on each interview to translate for the interviewer or interviewee as necessary. To promote a natural manner of conversation, the interviewer began by telling interviewees about an interesting book that he had read recently and why that book was interesting to him. This brief introduction prepared the students to open up and share about their own reading experiences in an honest and reflective manner.

The interview sessions ranged in length from 35 to 67 minutes, with the average length being approximately 50 minutes. Some interviews were longer than others because more probing questions were needed to

elicit more-detailed responses or because students provided rich responses that elicited further tangential discussion. Each interview session was unique as the primary researcher and the research assistant probed to explore deep-seated emotions and experiences related to reading over multiple contexts.

### Data Analysis

The primary researcher transcribed the interviews to promote familiarity with the data. The assistance of a shadow researcher, a doctoral candidate at the research university, was also utilized to assist with coding the transcribed interviews. The researchers read the transcripts repeatedly to ensure intimacy with the data. Using a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017), each interview was coded separately using open coding, and the researchers shared their codes with each other. After becoming highly familiar with the data and agreeing on the preliminary, open codes, the researchers used the same approach to develop overarching or axial coding categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### Findings

Six students identified as less-motivated readers were randomly selected to participate in the interview sessions: Timoteo, Ulises, Vicenta, Ximena, Yesenia, and Zanetta (all pseudonyms). The depth of self-awareness of their own abilities as students and

readers was immediately apparent. In addition, the impediments they faced toward engagement with reading emerged from the conversational interviews.

### Self-Awareness

Students reported a strong sense of awareness about their academic aptitudes both in and out of the classroom. They were acutely aware of their reading skills and language capabilities in English. Their reading motivation was linked to their image of themselves as poor students or nonreaders. They were specifically aware of their understanding of English and its impact on their perceptions of themselves as readers. In addition to being aware of their academic aptitudes, students were also highly aware of their own reading competence. Their struggles with reading caused lower self-esteem and feelings of embarrassment for not being able to transfer learning from one language to the other. Some of them expressed awareness that their limited vocabulary impeded their reading comprehension. Almost all of the interviewees were also aware that they were in the Less Motivated subgroup without being told beforehand.

When asked how she thought of herself as a reader, Ximena said in a tone of self-defeat, “A little bit. Not fluently. I’m an okay reader, not [an] excellent reader,” and Yesenia managed to utter, “A little bit less,” meaning that she thought she was in the “less” reading group. Ulises also knew right away into which group he fell, and he explained how he knew:

I’m in below . . . because I don’t think I have the perfect way how to read, so why would I teach someone to read if I don’t even know how to? . . . I do know, but I’m not a perfect reader . . . because when I read, I read slow. Sometimes I have to ask the teachers how you pronounce that word, and I . . . ¿Cómo se dice “tartamudeo”? . . . I stutter a lot when I read.

Zanetta knew she was in the below-average group, but she contributed her lack of motivation to the absence of childhood reading experiences: “I think it’s below because when I was a little child, I never read a book, never in my life. I read a book, I think one time, then never.” Zanetta also described as honestly as she could her sense of frustration at her own inability to learn English quickly enough, but her lack of progress likely came from her fear of failure:

Oh my gosh, I remember that because I feel so

. . . I was so angry with myself because I don’t know . . . I don’t know English. I don’t know how to answer. I don’t know what do you say? I think it’s embarrassing because . . . for me, like example of me, I think I don’t read well in English, but it’s something interesting I have to do, and I have to learn. I think it’s more like leave. . . If you are scared of something, leave that, and you know you have to learn, so focusing that. What do you have to do? How is the best way? I think it’s more like that.

Zanetta’s honesty illustrated how English learners sometimes gave up on themselves because of their past failures with language.

Timoteo, in his verbose style, acknowledged his own internal lack of self-interest and motivation as the root causes of his poorer reading skills:

Through 1 to 10, I think I’m like a 4 or a 5, probably in the below average, probably because I don’t put 100% effort to learning how to read in English, which English is something important that will help you through all your life, but I just don’t put the 100% effort, and I bet if I did and I practiced at home, I would have been a good reader by now.

Unlike other students who had abandoned their hopes of improving, Timoteo’s response showed some glimmer of hope that he could improve with time and effort, but self-depreciation still came across in his response. These excerpts exhibited the strong sense of self that pervaded the responses of interviewees, and they highlighted an apparent connection between self-image and reading motivation.

### Impediments

Students faced significant obstacles with regard to becoming literate in both Spanish and English and ongoing challenges to improving their reading proficiency. Difficult home environments and anxieties concerning reading in public emerged as important subthemes that demonstrated the extent of their personal and emotional roadblocks toward reading success. These findings also underscored the magnitude of the challenges these students face.

**Early traumatic experiences.** Students reported rifts or disturbances in the family, such as parental conflict or divorce, or other influential mitigating factors,

such as financial hardships. Ulises, in what was a very touching exchange, talked about how his father abandoned the family: “He left us to . . . I don’t know. He left us . . . to make a new family, I guess.” Ulises had to stay with his neighbors because his parents worked for long hours: “My mom had to work to feed me here. My dad had to work too. I stay with my neighbors, and then they all took care of me.”

Moreover, Zanetta’s parents divorced when she was young: “When I was three years, my mom and my dad was separated.” Likewise, Vicenta’s mother left the family in Mexico to come to the U.S. when Vicenta was young: “She left me because she said in Mexico we didn’t have a good life. She was unemployed. She didn’t have no water. She said, ‘I have to leave my child, so I could have a better life.’” These examples highlighted the traumatic experiences that shaped the perspectives of students concerning learning, schooling, and reading.

The poverty and abject living conditions that many students interviewed had experienced were difficult to comprehend. Timoteo described in detail what life was like for his family in Mexico before coming to the U.S.:

When I was a little kid, probably when I was four, I also lived in a small house, probably with two bedrooms. It was made out of, I think, wooden boards. It was in Mexico . . . we didn’t have water running through our house—very poor lands, and to survive you would have to find jobs since you were young. Sometimes you would see kids in the streets asking at least for a nickel to buy them something to eat.

**Current living conditions.** Their living situations did not improve much after coming to the U.S. Parent workloads were of primary concern as their parents worked for long hours in factories doing labor-intensive tasks to earn money for the family. Heavy workloads served to distract the family from education for its members. Timoteo also described in detail the work situation of his parents:

I’m pretty sure that my parents would have love having a very good education because they could have probably had a better job and provide for their families with more money than they’re getting now, because right now, they are working at this factory. My dad, when it’s okay, \$11 or \$12 per hour, but

even with all that money, he still doesn’t have enough to pay for the bill at the end of the week. He probably has 2 or 300 dollars left which probably will be used for needs from the house as well. [My mother] works in the same place, but she’s not in a higher rank like my dad. She has less years in there.

While heavy parental workloads were common, students did household chores or managed multiple things at home, all of which did not allow them to focus exclusively on schoolwork when at home. Ulises’s after-school routine involved him helping his mother in the afternoons: “I go help her. She does pillows, and I unfold the pillows to stack them in the back.” In his verbose and highly expressive manner, Timoteo related his household responsibilities outside of school, responsibilities and chores that left little time for schoolwork:

When I get home, I usually help my mom because she right now she can’t do much, so I have to help her with the babies. She does a lot of stuff because she’s taking these pills that the doctor gave her so she can feel better and work more around the house so she won’t get like . . . because without the pills, she gets really hard headaches. She gets big fever, and she collapse, and she can’t move a lot. That’s why she’s taking pills, and with the pills, they help her because she feels like she’s already ready to walk around, move more, but she still can’t . . . I help the baby. She takes care of the one that just was born, the newborn, and I take over my brother, the one year old, which I help her clean diaper, give him food and stuff like that . . . I also take care of my dog when I get home . . . I have been working a lot because my family is coming from North Carolina, so we have to get the house ready for them and everything, and I had to clean the whole entire porch, which is actually a big porch. Then they made me clean the whole, the porch bars, little bars.

Timoteo’s description highlighted the time restraints these students faced toward attaining any degree of literary or academic achievement.

**Parental literacy.** Students were also largely aware of the ability or inability of their parents to read and write both in Spanish and English. As such, students

were aware of their own family members' reading abilities and linguistic competencies in Spanish and English. Although their own motivation to read was low, sensitivity about their family members' education, level of learning, and grasp of language was high. Literacy among their parents was generally low, and literacy in English was usually restricted to one parent, most often the father who worked outside of the home. Students largely came from traditional, patriarchal home environments where reading was largely not part of their experiences growing up.

Their mothers suffered from low literacy levels, specifically in English. Their fathers were more proficient, though not proficient enough in English to be able to help their children. Ximena was asked about her parents' literacy in English, to which she emphatically responded: "[My father] can understand English, and he knows how to speak it a little bit. No, my mom doesn't know how to talk English."

Ulises shared similar thoughts about his parents' English skills, highlighting the obstacles his parents' illiteracy posed to him:

It makes it difficult because my mom doesn't know how to speak English, and my dad, I can hardly understand him when he speaks English, so it's hard to speak English [to them]. Mom knows some words, but she doesn't know it perfectly.

Likewise, Zanetta was embarrassed by her mother's inability to speak English correctly:

Mm-hmm, my mom doesn't know nothing. That day we was in the grocery store, and she said, "Dank you." I said, "Mama, it's thank you." Yeah, thank you, thank you. No English!

Zanetta gave her father a little higher mark when she responded, "[Dad] kind of learned, but he's not good." And Timoteo shared how his father corrected his mother's English: "She still has a few difficulty, but my dad always be like, 'No, you're spelling it wrong and reviews [corrects] her.'"

**Anxieties about reading in public.** To further illustrate the complexity of the challenge and obstacles to academic and reading success students face, students reported feeling anxious about the whole effort of learning English and reading. This theme

denoted anxieties about reading or concerning the future because of students' current perceptions about reading. For less-motivated students, reading in either English or Spanish was difficult because the very act of reading created internal anxiety. Internal anxiety was due to their own inability to read or to feelings of social anxiety that arose from being watched and ridiculed by peers and friends if they did not read well or made mistakes in reading. This internal and social anxiety not only prevented them from reading; it also made them apprehensive about future prospects of reading. Students felt anxious about reading aloud in class, and they associated such public reading tasks with a deficiency within themselves, which made them want to avoid or escape from reading.

When asked why she did not like to read in public, Yesenia looked down and commented, "I don't know. I think the people's going to laugh at me," and Ximena responded matter-of-factly, "I don't like reading out loud." This unfavorable perception of reading aloud repeated itself. Other interviewees shared feelings of anxiety related to learning tasks and school activities in general. For example, Timoteo, in his distinctively reflective manner of responding to interview questions, remarked:

[T]here's a lot of students, and they're all watching me. What if I mess up in a word? They're probably going to be like, "You don't know how to read," or something. Well, if it's a small class, I don't really mind, but if it's like a big, big class with a lot of students, only if I know most of them. If I know everybody, I really don't care.

Ulises, in a similar fashion, described his feelings of anxiety:

[W]hen I started reading, I get nervous and I start . . . what's it called? Tartamudeo . . . stuttering, like you're stuttering once I read. When I read, I just get nervous because I don't like people hearing when I read. Yeah. That concerns me next year since this year, words are difficult. Some words are difficult to understand. Imagine next year what's going to happen.

Along these same lines, Zanetta shared her anxieties about reading aloud:

Everybody says, "Why you scared? You read so good." I'm like, "I don't know. I can." I feel

embarrassed, I think. Not really. It's just when I am in the front [of] other people . . . I have to read out loud. I feel so bad because I want to read really good. I want to do it good, but I cannot sometimes.

### Discussion and Implications

The students interviewed for this study faced numerous challenges in their quest to attain proficiency as English readers. Coming from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and home environments where both parents worked long hours, students found themselves facing almost insurmountable obstacles to reading engagement. As explained through the lenses of expectancy-value theory, the students' self-awareness served as a further inhibitor to their motivation and success as their low self-esteem was reinforced from the negative experiences of their past failures with reading.

### Factors Inhibiting Motivation

As the interviewees for this study shared, Latinx English learners experience much over the course of their lives that can adversely affect their motivation to read. Economic and social hardships and the time constraints they bring with them are primarily responsible for the lower reading motivation of Latinx English learners in general.

**Economic hardships.** English learners are first the children of immigrants, and their immigrant experiences shape their reading motivation more than other factors (Ayón, 2014). As immigrants from second- or third-world economies, Latinx English learners face many financial hardships that interfere with their reading success. Economic adversities coupled with the large families that are common in Latinx cultures usually mean that parents—primarily fathers, if there are small children at home—work long hours at labor extensive, low-paying jobs, while mothers are left home to tend to household chores and take care of multiple children. According to data from the Pew Research Center, more foreign-born Latinx mothers stay home than any other demographic subgroup in the U.S., regardless of the economic constraints the family may face (Livingston, 2014).

Moreover, Latinx immigrants have strong positive beliefs about the value of hard work in getting ahead socially and economically in the U.S. (Taylor, Lopez,

Martínez, & Velasco, 2012), but their immigrant experiences have largely contradicted their strong beliefs in the American Dream. The Great Recession hit foreign-born Latinos especially hard (Taylor et al., 2012). Immigrant parents work longer and harder than many other American workers. Given these dismal work conditions, finding the time to read with their children is difficult for immigrant parents who work outside the home for long hours at labor extensive, blue-collar jobs. Moreover, they are often paid much less than non-immigrant workers. In 2011, the median weekly wage of Latinos working full time in the U.S. was \$549 per week. White Americans earned approximately 30% more per week on average (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Low earnings like these can barely sustain a small family, much less a larger family. Latinx immigrant families, therefore, have limited discretionary funds to spend on non-essential reading materials like books or magazines.

Economic conditions are so dire in some families that older adolescents are required to work to help their parents earn money to support the family, leaving little time to read or discuss reading with family members or peers. The number of teens working after school or on the weekends has declined over the last decade among non-immigrant teens, but immigrant children are more likely to need to work to help their families survive (Soergel, 2015). Non-immigrant teenagers who work at low-paying jobs from 10–15 hours per week are usually able to pocket their earnings, but the children of immigrants have to spend their earnings on the family. Making a way for themselves in a new country while experiencing life on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder may make reading and schooling far-removed concerns for English learners and their families.

**Social hardships.** Latinx English learners also face numerous social hardships that impede their reading motivation and engagement. Parents of English learners are largely unable to help their children with their schoolwork or to read to their children because of their own lack of literacy. Most significantly, English (L2) literacy among Latinx parents of English learners is particularly low, though fathers who work outside of the home are somewhat better able to communicate socially in English. In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, over 60% of first-generation Latinos

said they were unable to read a newspaper or book in English with any real sense of aptitude (Taylor et al., 2015). In addition, Spanish (L1) literacy is also low among many Latinx immigrant parents because they often have not been well educated through no fault of their own (Gándara, 2010). The situation, therefore, is one in which both parents often lack academic proficiency in both Spanish and English, so not only are they not reading to their children in English, but they also are not reading to them in Spanish. Without sufficient proficiency in academic English or Spanish, these parents are completely unprepared to help their children succeed in school, and reading a text to their children in English (or Spanish) is largely out of the question.

Lower educational attainment among Latinx parents is also a major factor inhibiting reading motivation for English learners. In contrast with only 6% of white mothers, over 40% of Latinx mothers in the U.S. have not attained a high school diploma (Gándara, 2010). Fathers are usually not at home with the children, which leaves poorly educated Latinx mothers badly equipped to read with their children or to help them with their schoolwork. Given the strong positive influence of the educational attainment of parents on children, these statistics underscore the serious risks Latinx students face toward reading success in particular and academic achievement in general (Gándara, 2010).

### **Recommendations for Educators**

Understanding the theoretical dynamics of what negates or promotes reading motivation and engagement for Latinx English learners is only the starting point. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to take the theoretical and make it practical to the extent that teachers and school leaders are capable. English language teachers, mainstream teachers of English learners, school leaders, and other educational stakeholders may use the suggestions discussed here as talking points to elicit instructional and other reforms that promote higher reading engagement for adolescent Latinx English learners.

**Empathetic teaching.** More often than not, teachers and other educators with whom students interact during the school day have the greatest potential to be optimizers of reading engagement for English learners (Chun, 2009; Day & Bamford, 2002). To this

end, educators should be particularly mindful of the economic and social factors that impede reading motivation for the English learners they teach. Creating empathy and understanding among teachers and other educators concerning the backgrounds and living conditions of Latinx English learners is an important starting point in being able to reach more English learners. In accordance with expectancy-value theory, constant encouragement and celebrating wins, even minors ones, will help students find their own internal motivation to learn and read (Lutz, Guthrie, & Davis, 2006).

**Early literacy interventions.** Teachers and learning support specialists should focus their attention on those English learners who are most in need of their support and intervention. Reading support for at-promise Latinx English learners should begin earlier in their schooling (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2009; Calderón et al., 2011; del Rio, 2013; Donovan & Cross, 2002). Focusing on younger students in earlier grades, especially males and less-proficient English learners, for reading interventions will result in more long-term successes in reading achievement (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Halle et al., 2012; Schiefele et al., 2012; Sturtevant & Kim, 2010). Language teachers, though, should not give up hope of initiating reading interest for at-promise students even as late as high school.

**Parent/family engagement.** While teachers have no control over the home environments or upbringing of their English learners, they can reach out to parents of English learners in a variety of ways to encourage them to get more involved in their child's learning. Parent involvement in their child's schooling and reading practices has more of a positive influence on student reading achievement than any other factor, including socioeconomic status, family size, or level of parental education (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Parents should be invited to literacy awareness evening or weekend events at their child's school. Such evening/weekend events would be ideal times to distribute engaging texts directly to parents to help build home libraries and to bring in Latinx community members and reading mentors to speak to parents and students together (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013).

## Conclusion

Motivation is a dynamic process influenced by multiple and varied factors. Reading motivation for English learners is no exception. As a sizable and growing student subgroup in U.S. schools, English learners—Latinos being the largest subgroup of them—lag behind their native speaking peers, principally in reading. Their overall lack of motivation and reading success is more understandable given the economic and social hardships they face as an immigrant population making a way for themselves in a new and unfamiliar terrain.

Improving reading achievement and closing the achievement gaps will need to involve concerted effort from teachers, administrators, and educational policymakers alike. The solutions will need to involve educators changing the ways they perceive English learners and their capabilities, but larger, systemic fixes will also be necessary—expanded parental outreach, community-wide literacy awareness programs, etc. Fixing the problem will require an “all-hands-on-deck” approach with students, parents, teachers, and school and community leaders working together to achieve viable solutions.

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## Appendix A: Reading Motivation Interview Protocol

Adapted from the *Conversational Interview for English Learners* (Sturtevant & Kim, 2010)

### English

#### Directions:

Make sure the audio recorder is working prior to the interview session. Have a notepad prepared to take detailed notes during the interview in the event a student declines having the interview recorded. Familiarize yourself with the interview questions before the actual interview session in order to establish a more conversational setting. Select a quiet, comfortable room for the interview. Provide refreshments during the interview session. Plan for the interview to take 20–30 minutes, but more time may be needed if the student speaks more than expected. Follow up on any interesting comments and responses to gain more insight and a fuller understanding of the student's reading experiences. Lastly, make sure you have thought of a personal reading experience to share for the preliminary discussion before the interview session.

Say: Before we begin, it is important to remember that your name will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher, the research assistant, and the faculty advisor. Remember your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may ask to stop the interview at any time. Your responses to the questions will not affect your grade in any class, including this one. I am going to ask you some questions. I want to know about your reading experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I really want to know how you honestly feel about reading and what reading experiences you have had. To help me understand your answers more, I would like to record your answers to my questions. May I record our conversation? Wait for the student to respond. Answer any questions the student may have about the interview process before proceeding.

I have been reading a good book (or magazine, newspaper article, etc.) about . . . (explain the nature of the text, some of its main characters, etc.). I was talking with . . . (name a person) about it yesterday. I enjoy talking about good stories, books, or articles I have been reading. Today I would like to talk to you about what you have been reading either from a fictional book, a newspaper, a magazine, a web site on the Internet, anything you have been reading and learning about. Are you ready to begin?

#### B. Interview Questions

1. Think about something important or interesting that you learned recently, not from your teacher and not from television, but from something that you have read. What did you read about? (Wait time.)
  - a. Tell me about what you learned. (Probe for language material was read in.) What else could you tell me? Is there anything else?
  - b. How did you know or find out about reading material on this topic (e.g., assigned by teacher, chosen by student at school or out of school)?
  - c. Why was this story (or reading) interesting to you?
2. Did someone ever do something that got you interested

### Español

#### Direcciones:

Asegúrese de que la grabadora de audio está trabajando antes de la sesión de la entrevista. Tener una libreta preparada para tomar notas detalladas durante la entrevista en el caso de que un estudiante se niegue a tener la entrevista grabada. Familiarizarse con las preguntas de la entrevista antes de la sesión actual con el fin de establecer un ambiente más conversacional. Seleccione un salón tranquilo, y cómodo para la entrevista. Proporcionar algo ligero de comer durante la sesión de la entrevista. Planee que la entrevista tome 20-30 minutos, pero puede necesitarse más tiempo si el estudiante habla más de lo esperado. Dar seguimiento a las observaciones y respuestas interesantes para obtener mayor conocimiento y una mayor comprensión de las experiencias de lectura de los estudiantes. Por último, asegúrese de que ha pensado en una experiencia de lectura personal para compartir en el debate preliminar antes de la sesión de la entrevista.

Diga: Antes de comenzar, es importante recordar que sus nombres no serán compartidos con nadie más excepto con el investigador, el asistente de investigación, y el consejero de la facultad. Recuerden que su participación en esta entrevista es completamente voluntaria, y ustedes pueden abandonar la entrevista en cualquier momento. Sus respuestas no afectarán sus calificaciones en ninguna clase, incluyendo ésta. Voy a hacerles algunas preguntas. Quiero saber acerca de sus experiencias de lectura. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas. Con honestidad me gustaría saber cómo se sienten acerca de la lectura y que experiencias de lectura han tenido. Para ayudarme a entender más sus respuestas, me gustaría grabar las respuestas que dan a mis preguntas. ¿Puedo grabar nuestra conversación? Espere a que el estudiante responda. Contestar cualquier pregunta que el estudiante pueda tener sobre el proceso de la entrevista antes de proceder.

He estado leyendo un buen libro (o una revista, artículo de periódico, etc.) acerca . . . (explicar la naturaleza del texto, algunos de sus personajes principales, etc.). Yo estaba hablando con . . . (el nombre de una persona) de ello ayer. Me gusta compartir las historias, libros o artículos buenos que he estado leyendo. Hoy me gustaría hablar acerca de lo que tú has estado leyendo, ya sea un libro de ficción, un periódico, una revista, un sitio web en Internet, todo lo que hayas estado leyendo y aprendiendo sobre tu lectura. ¿Estás listo para empezar?

#### B. Preguntas de la Entrevista

1. Piensa en algo importante o interesante que hayas aprendido recientemente, no de tu maestro ni de la televisión, sino de algo que hayas leído. ¿Qué fue lo que leiste? (Espera tiempo.)
  - a. Dime lo que aprendiste. (Sondea para obtener más información del idioma en que fue leído el material.) ¿Qué otra cosa podría decirme? ¿Hay algo más?

## Appendix A: Reading Motivation Interview Protocol

*continued*

in reading a book or some other text?

a. Who? What did s/he do?

3. What types of reading have your teachers asked you to do this year in school?

- What is your favorite type of reading in school? Why?
- Do you have any classes where you can read materials in your home language? (Probe for further explanation.)
- Do you have any classes in which your teacher reads to the class? Explain. How do you feel about this?
- In what class do you feel the reading is the most difficult? What makes it difficult?
- In what class is reading easiest? What makes it easy?

4. Have you helped anyone else learn to read? Explain.

5. Do you belong to any clubs or organizations for which you read?

- Could you explain what kind of reading or writing you do in these organizations (e.g., sometimes people read religious materials at church, or scout manuals at Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts)?

6. Do you ever work or help others with work where you need to read (e.g., students sometimes help their parents in a job or family store)? (If yes, probe for more detail).

7. In the next year, what kinds of new materials would you like to learn to read? Why?

8. Do you think having two languages has ever caused a problem for you? Explain.

9. Is there anything that worries or concerns you about reading? Please explain.

10. How do you think you could improve your own reading? Why?

- Do you try to do this?

Say: Thank you for helping me learn more about high school English learners!

b. ¿Cómo supiste o encontraste material sobre este tema (por ejemplo, fue asignado por el maestro, elegido por el estudiante en la escuela, o fuera de la escuela)?

c. ¿Por qué ésta historia (o lectura) fue interesante para ti?

2. ¿Alguien alguna vez hizo algo para que te interesaras en leer un libro o algún otro texto?

- ¿Quién fue? ¿Qué hizo ella, o él?

3. ¿Qué tipo de lecturas te han pedido tus maestros hacer en éste año escolar?

- ¿Cuál es tu tipo de lectura favorito en la escuela? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Tienes alguna clase donde puedas leer materiales en tu idioma natal? (Sondea para más información.)
- ¿Tienes alguna clase en la cual su maestro les lea? Explica. ¿Cómo te sientes acerca de esto?
- ¿En qué clase sientes que la lectura es más difícil? ¿Qué es lo que lo hace difícil?
- ¿En qué clase la lectura es más fácil? ¿Qué es lo que la hace que sea fácil?

4. ¿Has ayudado a alguien más para aprender a leer? Explica.

5. ¿Pertenece a algún club u organización para la cual lees?

- ¿Podrías explicar qué tipo de lectura o escritura hacen en estas organizaciones (por ejemplo, algunas veces leen materiales religiosos en la iglesia, o manuales de exploración en las niñas exploradoras o niños exploradores)?

6. ¿Alguna vez has trabajado o ayudado a los demás con trabajo en el que tu necesitas leer? (¿por ejemplo, los estudiantes algunas veces ayudan a sus padres en un trabajo o negocio familiar)? (Si sí, indaga para que te den más detalles).

7. ¿En el próximo año, que materiales nuevos te gustaría aprender a leer? ¿Por qué?

8. ¿En algún momento te ha causado problemas el saber dos idiomas? Explica.

9. ¿Hay algo que te inquieta o preocupa acerca de la lectura? Por favor explica.

10. ¿Cómo crees que podrías mejorar su propia lectura? ¿Por qué?

- ¿Tratas de hacer esto?

Diga: ¡Gracias por ayudarme a conocer más acerca de los estudiantes de preparatoria que están aprendiendo inglés!