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**EDRS 810 Problems and Methods in Educational Research**

**Qualitative Study: Evaluation of Empirical Research Article**

**APA Reference for Article:**

Pereira, N. & Gentry, M. (2013). A qualitative inquiry into the experiences of high potential Hispanic English language learners in Midwestern schools. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 24*(3), 164-194. doi: 10.1177/1932202X13494204

1. **Description of study:**

**Purpose of study:**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences of high potential Hispanic English language learners from low income families in four Midwestern schools. Issues such as how these students felt about school, their classes, activities, teachers, and classmates were investigated. In addition, the students provided their perspectives about their experience participating in the university programs for high ability students, their perceptions of being smart, and difficulties related to learning English and coming from Spanish speaking families. The study extended the research concerning out-of-school enrichment programming by investigating the educational experiences of high potential Hispanic English language learner students who participated in or who qualified to participate in a university based enrichment program (Pereira & Gentry. 2013).

**Methods:**

The study focused on Hispanic English language learners in grades 2 through 6 form four Midwestern schools. Twenty two (22) students, twenty (20) parents and twenty two (22) teachers were interviewed to gain a better understanding of the students schooling experiences. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Semi- structured interview protocols was used for this study for all the interviews. The researchers created parallel sets of questions that addressed issues related to the experiences of English language learners students in school and in the university talent development programs for students, teachers, and parents. Each of the interview protocols included questions that were relevant to students, teachers, or parents only. The researchers used results from previous studies about English language learners and their experiences in school to create the student interview protocol (Pereira & Gentry. 2013).

The issues included in the student interview protocol addresses students perceptions of school and enrichment programs, school environment, ability, levels of challenge, and classroom activities. Questions to teachers focused on issues related to the identification process, meeting the needs of English language learners, teacher’s expectations challenges teachers face in teaching English language learners. Questions to parents focused on their experiences of having a child in a United States school and in an enrichment program as well as parental involvement in school. Parents were asked to provide information the languages used at home, their profession, and the number of children they have. The researchers conducted seven parent interviews in English and nine in Spanish. (Pereira & Gentry. 2013).

The researchers analyzed the interview transcriptions using phenomenology and grounded theory as the theoretical frameworks. The phenomenological approach allowed the researchers to explore how English language learners in United States schools make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness. Grounded theory allowed the researchers to generate theory through analysis of qualitative data. Data was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding and the ATLAS.ti software was used at all stages of the data analysis process.

**Results/Findings of study:**

The results indicate that Hispanic English language learners enjoyed school and have positive interactions and experiences with peers and teachers and were committed to doing well at school. Results of this study also revealed that the participants were well integrated in school (Pereira & Gentry. 2013).

1. **Critical comments:**

**Strengths of research design:**

To begin with, the researchers interviewed participants. This means that the researchers got more out of the participants and were able to follow up and use probing questions in an effort to obtain more in-depth answers. Secondly, the researchers provided examples of questions used in the interview protocol for students, teachers and parents in the article. This was helpful in understand the context in which this research was conducted and to know the objective of the study conducted.

Thirdly, the researchers involved participants in four different schools and this was a good way of including participants from different schools since the researcher will be able to generalize results in the school district related specifically to Hispanic English language learners. Moreover to establish interrater reliability, a doctoral student in educational psychology and who was not involved in the project analyzed 15 out of the 64 interviews. There was 80% agreement between the graduate student and the authors on the various codes and themes. Finally, the researchers did not need an interpreter because one of the researchers was bilingual and could speak both English and Spanish. This was a good way to ensure reliable results.

**Weaknesses of research design:**

The researchers conducted their research by using only interviews. The researchers could have used questionnaires in addition to conducting the interviews for teachers and parents. The researchers used the ATLAS.ti software to analyze data at all stages of the data analysis process. The researchers did not provide any explanation regarding the software that was used to analyze data and therefore it was difficult to understand what that software is all about and why they chose that particular software.

Secondly the researchers restricted their study by using purposeful sampling. This was a limitation to this study because the research was limited to student who participated in the HOPE (Having Opportunities Promote Excellence) project. Thirdly, another limitation involved response bias. In other words issues related to social desirability or participants trying to please the researchers because they were thankful for the opportunity to participate in the project HOPE (Pereira & Gentry. 2013).

In addition, the researchers also failed to include an investigation of the school experiences of students at various English proficiency levels. The researchers restricted the study to Hispanic students who are English language learners and did not consider other English language learners from other races or other cultural backgrounds (Pereira & Gentry. 2013).

1. **Critical reflections about the article: Briefly discuss implications of the findings within your field and how this research may inform or influence you in your future education research endeavors.**

To begin with most of the existing studies in education concerning English language learners have focused on the problems English language learner students face in school. This study did not focus on the problems English language learners face but rather focused on the need to identify high potential English language learners for enrichment programs which is an area that needs to be explored more in the field of education.

Secondly the researchers focused on English language learner students in first, second, third, fourth and fifth grade. It would have been great if the researchers had also focused on English language students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten since it is these two grade levels that the foundational skills in language learning is formed. This implies that as an early childhood education major, even though my future research has to do with providing support to English language learners in kindergarten, there is the need to conduct research focused on English language learners who are high achievers in kindergarten and this is something that I can incorporate into my future research.

Finally, another implication would be to improve the identification procedures of English language learners who have the potential to be included in enrichment programs for the gifted. English language learners who are gifted and have the potential to succeed in school can be provided with enriching, challenging and rigorous activities that require English language learners to be reflective thinkers.