

Understanding the Impact of Heritage Language on Ethnic Identity Formation and Literacy for U.S. Latino Children

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Abstract

Studies show positive associations between ethnic identity, socio-emotional health and academic success. However, most work is carried out with adolescents and few have examined how young children develop an ethnic identity, particularly U.S. Latino children. The present study represents a first-pass investigation of children's ethnic identity mechanisms and their relation to academic success. We carried out semi-structured interviews in Spanish with 25 Latino children (ages 5–12). Open-ended questions addressed items on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure and Ethnic Identity Scale, incorporating a mixed qualitative (i.e., themes) and quantitative (i.e., scoring) analysis. Results revealed that children provide great detail when discussing their ethnic background. Additionally, Latino children's bilingualism and Spanish-language proficiency were significant markers of ethnic identity formation, which in turn were positively associated with affect and Spanish literacy. These findings shed light on the complexities of ethnic identity construction during children's early years, and establish a path for further investigation of Latino children's socio-emotional health and academic achievement.

Keywords

affect – ethnic identity – heritage language – literacy – social development

1 Introduction

Ethnic identity (EI) is the self-categorization to a specific ethnic/cultural group with which one shares values and norms; it is comprised of a sense of belonging and preference for the group, positive affect, and understanding of one's ethnicity. EI develops over the lifespan, and may be altered by experiences across social contexts (Phinney, 1990, 2003). Forming an EI is related to positive socio-emotional health and academic success (see Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a). Previous research focuses on adolescents and adults whose EI is established, and few studies examine populations younger than age 12. Young Latino children are the fastest growing population in the United States (U.S.), and they are also at the highest risk for poor socio-emotional health and academic failure among all U.S. ethnic/racial groups (Flores et al., 2002). Therefore it is crucial to study EI formation in the early years, in order to understand its complexities and repercussions on children's socio-emotional health and academic success. The present study investigates the impact of a minority heritage-language (i.e., Spanish) on children's socio-emotional development, awareness of ethnicity, and literacy.

1.1 *Forming an Ethnic Identity*

Phinney's (1990) model of EI formation is grounded on developmental and social identity theories (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Tajfel, 1981). Subsequent research examined relationships between EI and positive outcomes, including academic achievement for African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans adolescents (Yip and Fuligni, 2001; Perreira et al., 2010; Chang and Le, 2010; Kiang et al., 2012). Influential cognitive development theories suggest children actively construct their social world (e.g., Piaget, 1954), and begin developing identity mechanisms as early as age 5, becoming stable by age 12 (Aboud and Doyle, 1993; Ocampo et al., 1997; Martin et al., 2002). The dearth of research on the early EI stages is mainly due to a lack of child-friendly designs (Byrd, 2011); for example, self-reported paper-and-pencil measures are not reliable with children whose vocabulary may be limited, and who are still learning to read and write. Some measures also require participants to name their self-identity (e.g., Latino, Mexican American), however children may not know these labels

yet, although they may have some awareness and attachment to their ethnic group (Quintana, 1998; Ambady et al., 2001; Bigler and Liben, 2006; Byrd, 2011).

Gaining insight into one's own ethnic/cultural background is the first step towards EI formation, entailing physical and social features, geographic location, speech patterns and lifestyle (Phinney, 1992; Quintana, 1998; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Children may experience formal and informal social interactions, allowing them to acquire knowledge about "who they are." This acquisition can occur by hearing stories from parents and other family members, visiting places linked to familial origins, attending cultural events, celebrating holidays, or meeting others with whom they share similar cultural values and form meaningful relationships with.

Forming an EI also entails a sense of belonging with others who share the individual's background (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Phinney and Ong, 2007; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). Research with adolescents and adults use items reflecting individuals' personal involvement, commitment, and exploration of their ethnicity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Phinney and Ong, 2007). In studying children's EI, constructs of commitment and exploration may not be established yet, as children are limited to experiences within the sphere of their family's social contexts.

Affect, or the individual's sentiments towards their ethnicity and experiences, is another EI component (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a). Children's awareness and understanding of physical and social features may positively (e.g., happy, proud) or negatively (e.g., embarrassed, sad) impact EI (Quintana, 1998). According to Phinney's model (1990), the individual must identify with the ethnic group in a positive manner for socio-emotional functioning to be positively impacted; however, evidence shows that negative affect aids in resolution during the individual's EI conceptualization (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Positive ethnic affect may be represented through pride, group esteem, or affirmation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a), with more salient and stronger associations during adolescence (Huang and Stormshak, 2011).

1.2 *Language and Academic Achievement During Ethnic Identity Development*

From a U.S. perspective, 'heritage language (HL)' refers to a language, other than English, associated with a speaker's ethnic/cultural background (Valdés, 2001). A perspective within EI theory posits that HL influences and supports its formation (Hurtado and Gurin, 1995; Laroche et al., 2009). For instance, proficiency in the HL allows the individual to interact with others of his/her

ethnicity (Imbens-Bailey, 1996). HL proficiency is not only associated with adolescents' EI, but also conducive towards overall positive relationships with their parents (Phinney et al., 2001; Oh and Fuligni, 2009). To date, the scant research existing on EI development in minority children does not examine HL contributions (Félix-Ortiz et al., 1994; Feinauer and Whiting, 2012).

Academic achievement, while not a unidimensional construct, is strongly predicated upon EI components (González and Padilla, 1997; Smith et al., 2003; Supple et al., 2006; Byrd and Chavous, 2009; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). Ambady et al. (2001) showed that children are susceptible to positive/negative stereotypes associated with their identities (gender and/or race), consequently impacting the children's academic performance. The current study makes timely advances by focusing on literacy competence in the HL, in relation to socio-emotional development and EI formation.

The present research investigates the following questions concerning children's EI formation: (1) Are U.S. Latino children aware of their ethnicity? (2) Can these mechanisms (e.g., understanding of ethnic background, belonging/exploration of ethnicity, affect) established in the adolescent/adult EI research be differentiated during childhood? (3) How does HL impact children's EI construction? (4) How does the emergence of EI mechanisms impact academic achievement, as assessed per HL literacy skills? The study carried out a child-friendly semi-structured interview in Spanish with 25 U.S. Latino children. We developed open-ended questions in order to encourage children to express themselves during informal interviews. Since little is known about children's EI formation, we used a mixed methodology by subsequently analyzing children's responses qualitatively (i.e., themes) and quantitatively (i.e., scored).

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Twenty-five Spanish-heritage speaking children (15 females; age range 5–12 years, mean age \pm SD = 7.52 \pm 2.02 years) took part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. All children were born in the U.S. (except for 1 child born in South America). Children and their families were living in a mid-size Midwestern community with a growing Latino population, and were attending English-instruction schools. All participants attended a Saturday Spanish-HL school, in which they received academic instruction in Spanish. The study was reviewed and approved by institutional review boards. Participants were recruited via a consent form distributed to all children attending the

Spanish-HL school. If the consent form was returned with the parent's signature, children were invited to take part in the interview during a school session.

2.2 Procedure

Participants took part in a 10-minute, one-on-one audiotaped verbal interview in Spanish with a trained experimenter. The interviewer began by engaging children in a conversation to familiarize themselves, and then proceeded to read the verbal assent. If the child agreed to take part in the interview, the experimenter followed the transcript containing language suitable for primary school-level Spanish-HL speakers; experimenters deviated from the script only when asking for further clarification.

The Saturday Spanish-HL school provided participants' Spanish literacy levels (obtained the same month that interviews took place) assessed by the Illinois Snapshots of Early Literacy (Barr et al., 2004) and Fountas-Pinnell Reading Evaluation (2011), ranging between 16 reading levels. In the present study, HL literacy skills were based on reading level, as well as the difference of levels gained between the beginning and end of the school year. One child's reading score was missing due to absence; therefore it was omitted from analyses.

2.3 Measure

We developed child-friendly open-ended questions based on questionnaires' items from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992; Phinney and Ong, 2007) and Ethnic Identity Scale (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004), to allow children to discuss (1) understanding, (2) belonging and exploration, and (3) affect towards ethnic background. Each of these dimensions included questions on the child's self-reported background, parents' background, and language use (Spanish-HL and bilingualism); see Table 1.

2.3.1 Understanding of Ethnic Background

This variable is conceptualized as an individual's ability to recognize factual information or personal experiences about his/her ethnicity. Questions allowed for EI self-report and elaboration on personal/self, parental, and language backgrounds. Responses could include parents' origins, geographic information, cultural knowledge, or any mention of personal perspective to their ethnicity.

2.3.2 Belonging and Exploration of Ethnic Background

This variable reflects an individual's sense of being part of their ethnic group (including their parents') and the extent of involvement with others of similar

ethnic background. These questions assessed whether children interacted with others, including whether they had friends who shared their ethnic, parental, and/or language background.

2.3.3 Affect towards ethnic background

This variable addresses children's sentiments (positive and negative) on their ethnicity and being part of their ethnic group. During this portion of the interview, the participants were asked how they felt, what they liked and did not like about their origins, linguistic background, their parents and friends.

2.4 *Scoring*

Children's audiotaped sessions were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. After the transcription, two research assistants scored the interviews' dimensions ranging 1 to 3. Interviewer reliability score was 90%.

A score of 3 denotes answers with comprehensive details. During understanding questions, the participant shows extensive knowledge of his/her ethnic background by providing details on their culture, customs, and geographic placement of self and/or parental countries of origin (i.e., talking about a holiday in Mexico known as "Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)," mentioning traditional food dishes, etc.). In belonging/exploration questions, the participant indicates awareness of experiencing social interactions with individuals of the same ethnic background. For example, one participant stated he knew others who shared his parents' ethnicity, specifically a cousin with whom he enjoyed to visit because they partake in ethnic-specific activities together (such as drinking "Cola-Cao" and eating ethnic food). In affect questions, the participant provides sufficient elaboration of their feelings demonstrating awareness, attitudes towards the ethnic background and expression of feelings through anecdotes and explanations. For example, one participant explained that she felt very special having parents from different places.

A score of 2 denotes answers with limited details, showing little to some knowledge. During understanding questions, the participant shows some understanding of their ethnic background, including if s/he only provides geographical information. In belonging/exploration questions, the participant provides limited details on their knowledge of being part of an ethnic group. For example, affirming that s/he knew others but did not provide details of whom, even after prompted. In affect questions, the participant provides a response with some details, but no continuance after being prompted. For example, stating that they felt very happy and/or proud, but did not explain why they felt this way.

Children received a score of 1 when answering, “I don’t know,” “I forgot,” and/or when not providing details. The participant shows no knowledge of his/her ethnic background, cannot identify relationships with others of similar background, such as stating that s/he does not have any friends who share his/her ethnic background although they attend a Spanish HL school, or does not express any attitude (or lacks feelings) towards their background. It is important to point out that a score of 1 is given to neutral responses to show that the interview only conveyed a lack of presence, knowledge and/or awareness to the variables under study.

Scores were omitted and removed from the participant’s overall score when the interviewer failed to ask a question, or when follow-up questions could not be asked due to a participant’s previous response. For example, if participants answered that they did not have any friends of their father’s ethnicity, the affect follow-up question was subsequently omitted.

2.5 *Data Analysis*

Scores were averaged to create composite values for each variable: understanding, belonging/exploring, and affect towards ethnic background. The understanding composite score was the average of 3 sub-variables: personal/self, parental, and linguistic background (range 3–9). The belonging/exploring composite score was the average of 3 sub-variables: engagement with others of similar personal/self, parental, and linguistic backgrounds (range 3–9). The affect composite score was the average of 8 sub-variables on attitudes towards understanding and belonging/exploring personal/self, parents’, and linguistic background (range 8–24). Scores were converted into percentages (considering omitted responses) and used during between-variables statistical analyses. Otherwise, raw scores were used for within sub-variables data analyses.

The open-ended questions allowed children to express attitudes about their ethnicity. Given that the range of scores in the affect variable did not allow for a detailed review of the responses, we also used a thematic qualitative analysis. Attitudes and experiences were analyzed by identifying themes that emerged as patterns of responses, based on techniques described by the qualitative methods literature (Connolly, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006). First, we read each transcript and identified sections that referred to affect towards ethnic and linguistic background. Second, we identified the different types of experiences each participant reported (e.g., pride, alienation) and their descriptions – these served as preliminary themes. After identifying these experiences, we re-read all transcripts aiming to identify related experiences from other participants. Thus, in the results section we describe the six themes that emerged.

3 Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of variables (understanding, exploring/belonging and affect) and sub-variables. Results indicate that children provided a large amount of details during questions on understanding of ethnic background (81.88%), including their own and their parents', as well as during belonging/exploring questions (79.28%). There was a positive correlation between these variables ($r(23)=0.48$, $p=0.015$), yet the scores were not significantly different ($t=0.84$, $p=0.412$). Participants, however, provided significantly less information during affect (70.28%) questions, in comparison to understanding ($t=3.73$, $p=0.001$) and belonging/exploring ($t=3.41$, $p=0.002$). Understanding and affect significantly correlated ($r(23)=0.45$, $p=0.024$); however, belonging/exploring and affect did not ($r(23)=0.25$, $p=0.22$).

Given that understanding and belonging/exploring variables did not differ, we analyzed sub-variables to investigate whether children spoke more about themselves, their parents, or their language background. Yet, understanding sub-variables turned out non-significant: children provided about the same amount of knowledge when speaking about themselves, their parents' background and their linguistic background ($p > 0.05$, ns). In belonging/exploring sub-variables, we found children provided significantly more details about belonging to representative groups of their parents' background than their own (personal/self: $t=2.57$, $p=0.017$; linguistic: $t=2.87$, $p=0.008$). Children did not differ when providing knowledge about belonging to groups of their own ethnic and linguistic background ($p > 0.05$, ns). Overall, these results illustrate that children have nearly the same amount of knowledge about their parents' background as their own, but partake in activities and/or know others whose ethnic background matches that of their parents instead of their own.

Affect sub-variables were analyzed, but significant differences did not emerge. Questions concerning children's likes and dislikes about their self/personal, parental, and linguistic background were analyzed, and results revealed that children spoke significantly more about positive (73.8%) than negative (26.2%) experiences, $t=4.14$, $p=0.001$.

TABLE 1 *Mechanisms of ethnic identity as assessed per interview questions*

Understanding of ethnic background 2.45(0.03)	Personal/Self	¿De dónde eres? (<i>Where are you from?</i>)	2.36(0.62)
		¿Dónde naciste? (<i>Where were you born?</i>)	
	Parents	¿Cómo es [lugar]? (<i>How is [place]?</i>)	
		¿De dónde son tus papás? (<i>Where are your parents from?</i>)	2.56(0.65)
		¿Dónde nacieron? (<i>Where were they born?</i>)	
		¿Qué sabes sobre el lugar donde tus papás nacieron? (<i>What do you know about the place where your parents were born?</i>)	
Language	¿Cómo es (lugar)? (<i>How is [place]?</i>)		
	¿Cómo aprendiste a hablar español? (<i>How did you learn Spanish?</i>)	2.44(0.58)	
Belonging and exploration of ethnic background 2.37(0.08)	Personal/Self	¿Cómo aprendiste a hablar inglés? (<i>How did you English?</i>)	
		¿Has conocido personas de (lugar)? (<i>Have you met people from [place]?</i>)	2.24(0.66)
	Parents	¿Tienes amistades/amigos que son de (lugar)? (<i>Do you have friends from [place]?</i>)	
		¿Has visitado alguna vez? (<i>Have you ever visited?</i>)	2.60(0.50)
		¿Te gustaría ir a (lugar)? (<i>Would you like to go to [place]?</i>)	

TABLE 1 *Mechanisms of ethnic identity as assessed per interview questions (cont.)*

		<p>¿Has conocido a otras personas que son de (lugar)? (<i>Have you met people from [place]?</i>)</p> <p>¿Tienes amistades/amigos que son de (lugar)? (<i>Do you have friends from [place]?</i>)</p> <p>¿Hablas español con otras personas? (<i>Do you speak Spanish with others?</i>)</p> <p>¿Tienes amigos que hablan español? (<i>Do you have friends that speak Spanish?</i>)</p>	2.28(0.54)
Affect towards ethnic background	Personal	<p>¿Cómo te sientes siendo de (lugar)? (<i>How do you feel being from [place]?</i>)</p> <p>¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de ser de (lugar)? (<i>What do you like best about from [place]?</i>)</p> <p>¿Qué es lo que no te gusta de ser de (lugar)? (<i>What is it that you don't like about being from [place]?</i>)</p>	2.15(0.06)
	Knowing others and/or having friends of same background	<p>¿Cómo te sientes teniendo amistades/amigos de (lugar)? (<i>How do you feel having friends from [place]?</i>)</p>	2.12(0.44)
	Parents'	<p>¿Cómo te sientes que tus padres son de (lugar)? (<i>How do you feel that your parents are from [place]?</i>)</p> <p>¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de tener papás que son de (lugar)? (<i>What do you like best about having parents from [place]?</i>)</p>	2.09(0.43)

	¿Qué es lo que no te gusta de tener papás que son de (lugar)? (<i>What is it that you don't like about having parents from [place]?</i>)	
Knowing others and/or having friends of parents' background	¿Cómo te sientes teniendo amistades/amigos de (lugar)? (<i>How do you feel having friends from [place]?</i>)	2.19(0.40)
Spanish use	¿Cómo te sientes hablando español? (<i>How do you feel speaking Spanish?</i>)	2.08(0.28)
	¿Te gusta hablar español? (<i>Do you like to speak Spanish?</i>)	
Spanish use with parents	¿Cómo te sientes hablando español con tu mamá y papá? (<i>How do you feel speaking Spanish with your mom and dad?</i>)	2.26(0.45)
Spanish use with friends	¿Cómo te sientes hablando español con tus amistades? (<i>How do you feel speaking Spanish with your friends?</i>)	2.14(0.36)
Being bilingual	¿Cómo te sientes sabiendo que puedes hablar dos idiomas? (<i>How do you feel knowing you can speak two languages?</i>)	2.20(0.41)
	¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de poder hablar inglés y español? (<i>What is that you like best about being able to speak English and Spanish?</i>)	
	¿Qué es lo que no te gusta de poder hablar inglés y español? (<i>What don't you like about being able to speak English and Spanish?</i>)	

Values are given as means, with standard deviations in parentheses.

Pearson correlation tests were used to determine associations between EI constructs and Spanish literacy skills; see Figure 1. We did not find significant correlations between children's reading scores and understanding ($r(23)=0.38$, $p=0.071$), nor belonging/exploring ($r(23)=0.06$, $p=0.785$). However, we found a significant positive correlation between children's reading scores and affect towards ethnic background, $r(23)=0.44$, $p=0.030$. Overall scores did not reveal a significant correlation with children's reading scores, nor EI constructs to the difference of Spanish literacy levels gained between the beginning and end of the school year ($p > 0.05$, ns). It is important to interpret these results with care: while certain key variables do not show significant correlations, they nonetheless present subtle, yet noteworthy patterns which may be linked to the emergent nature of EI for children (see Discussion).

3.1 *Themes Based on Attitudes and Experiences of Ethnicity*

Six themes emerged as pertinent to participants' experiences, which were all related to being a Spanish-English bilingual U.S.-born individual with Spanish-speaking Latino parents: (1) cultural pride, including a sense of uniqueness for being able to speak another language; (2) appreciation for diversity, including opportunities that the children perceived as a result of being bilingual; (3) use of Spanish to create a sense of group membership and exclusion; (4) bilateral language learning, including helping parents with their English and parents helping children learn Spanish; (5) difficulty speaking Spanish, especially confusion between the languages and/or having parents intervene to correct mistakes; and (6) emerging issues for predominant Spanish use at home. Below we provide details and examples for each theme. Importantly, we did not alter children's Spanish responses in the manuscript; any linguistic mistakes convey children's actual speech.

3.1.1 Cultural Pride

Ten participants mentioned positive attitudes by feeling special and/or proud in relation to their family's ethnicity and language use. Feeling "proud" was a popular response when children were asked how they felt about being bilingual or speaking Spanish. Many children stated feeling "happy" and/or "special" when describing their Latino background. For example, one child described feeling "very happy" about having friends from Brazil and Colombia, which are her parents' countries of origin. Children who used terms such as "happy" and "proud" also described their attitudes more extensively, compared to children who stated that they felt "*bien* (good)" yet provided less detail. Children who stated feeling "special" or "different," explained that they felt as if they had a talent that others do not, e.g., speaking another language.

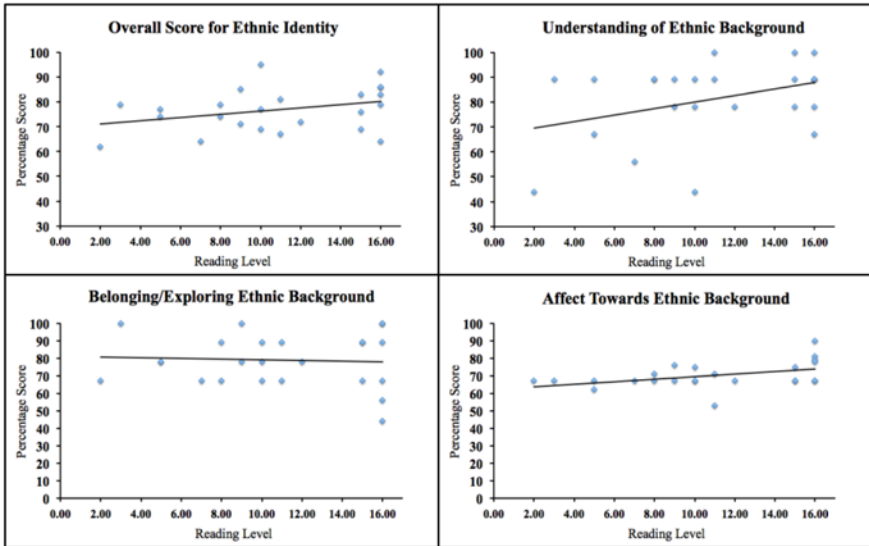


FIGURE 1 Scatterplots of ethnic identity mechanisms scores to Spanish reading levels.

Interviewer: What is it that you like most about being able to speak English and Spanish?

Child No. 3: *Que muchas personas no lo pueden hacer* (That many people cannot do it).

Child No. 4: *Que yo sé muchos idiomas y nadie en mi clase . . . puede hacer Español, y ellos solamente pueden decir “hola”* (That I know many languages and nobody in my class . . . can speak Spanish, they can only say “hola”).

Others expressed a sense of being special or different in relation to their Latino backgrounds:

Interviewer: Overall, how do you feel that your parents are from Bolivia and Mexico?

Child No. 11: *Me siento un poquito diferente de los otros* (I feel a bit different than the others).

Interviewer: Do you like feeling different? Or would you prefer feeling like them?

Child No. 11: *Me gusta porque sé que yo no soy como los otros . . . Yo no necesito hacer las mismas cosas que ellos hacen* (I like it because I know I’m not like others . . . I don’t need to do the same things).

3.1.2 Appreciation for Diversity

Six children showed an appreciation for the diversity of their parents' ethnic background. Three of them also mentioned liking the ability to speak Spanish, because it allowed them to speak with people from different places and make more friends. For example, one child spoke about how she liked that her family ate different kinds of food:

Interviewer: What is it you like most about having parents from Bolivia and México?

Child No. 11: *Hacen comida diferente de los otros Americanos* (They make different food than other Americans).

For another child, the diversity came from the history and culture of Mexico, in comparison to the U.S. He mentions that what he likes best about having parents from Mexico is that he can speak two languages and know more about his culture, such as its indigenous history, and have different experiences:

Interviewer: What is it you like most about having parents that are from Mexico?

Child No. 9: *Que puedo hablar dos lenguajes . . . Que tenga diferentes experiencias, que tenga como saber más cultura, diferentes lugares . . . Como que [México] los descubrieron los aztecas . . . También estoy aprendiendo en la escuela [sobre] las diferentes civilizaciones allí . . . como los Incas, los Mayas* (That I can speak two languages . . . That I have different experiences, that I know more about culture, different languages . . . Like that Mexico was discovered by the Aztecs . . . I'm also learning in school about the different civilizations from there . . . like the Incas, the Mayans).

3.1.3 Secretive Spanish-Speaking

Four children provided positive comments about being able to speak Spanish with their friends and family, including enjoying telling secrets that others cannot understand. For these children, speaking Spanish is not only a means of creating group exclusivity, but also a way of communicating with their parents, siblings and others through a "code" that they share with loved ones. One child spoke about how she enjoys speaking Spanish in public with her family:

Interviewer: What is it you like most about being able to speak Spanish and English?

Child No. 7: *Cuando estamos en otro lado que no es la casa, yo puedo hablarle [a mi familia] en español y nadie más puede entendernos* (When

we are in another place that is not home, I can talk to [my family] in Spanish and nobody else can understand us).

Another child explained how Spanish allows her to tell secrets to her Spanish-speaking friends:

Interviewer: How do you feel speaking Spanish with your friends?

Child No. 3: *Bien, porque si estamos hablando de algo secreto, las otras personas no pueden saber lo que estamos diciendo* (Good, because if we are talking about something secretive, other people can't know what we are saying).

For another child, speaking Spanish allows her to express her frustrations:

Interviewer: What are the times when you like [speaking Spanish]?

Child No. 11: *Cuando estoy muy enojada, yo hablo español para que nadie me escuche* (When I am really angry, I speak Spanish so that no one will hear me).

3.1.4 Bilateral Language Learning

Most children expressed having to help their parents with English as a positive experience, as it allows them to help parents learn English and for their parents to help the children with Spanish. Five children expressed details about their experiences acting as a translator for their parents. Some children brought up this topic when asked about how they feel about speaking Spanish with their parents:

Interviewer: How do you feel about speaking Spanish with your mom and dad?

Child No. 3: *Me siento bien porque yo les puedo decir que está pasando porque . . . ellos [solo] saben un poquito de inglés entonces es divertido que les pueda decir cosas* (I feel good because I can tell them what is happening because . . . they only know a little bit of English and so it is fun that I can tell them things).

This ability to help parents with English is also mentioned by one child as what he likes best about having parents from a different country:

Interviewer: What is it that you like most about having parents from Mexico, or Puebla?

Child No. 6: *Pues, que hablan español conmigo y yo hablo español también . . . Y que hablan dos lenguas y que les ayudo como no saben muy bien el inglés, pero yo les ayudo* (Well, that they speak Spanish with me and I speak Spanish too . . . And that they speak two languages and I can help them with that since they don't know English very well, but I help them).

For one child, however, having to help her mother with Spanish seemed more of a negative laborious experience:

Interviewer: What is it you don't like about being able to speak English and Spanish?

Child No. 5: *Porque hablo dos idiomas y no me gusta* (Because I speak two languages and I don't like it).

Interviewer: Why?

Child No. 5: *Porque le estoy enseñando a mi mamá cómo hablar [inglés] pero le tengo que enseñar muchas veces* (Because I'm teaching my mom how to speak [English] but I have to teach her many times.)

3.1.5 Difficulty with Spanish

Eight children expressed having some level of difficulty with speaking Spanish or being bilingual. These children mentioned their dislike for parents intervening to correct/improve their Spanish skills. When asked what they liked least about being able to speak two languages, they described Spanish as confusing and/or difficult. This confusion was mostly supplemented by the children's tendencies to mix English and Spanish, as well as having to switch between languages.

Child No. 2: *Unas veces me confundo entonces . . . En español si se me olvidó una palabra, lo digo en inglés. Entonces lo cambio* (Sometimes I get confused so . . . In Spanish if I forgot a word, I say it in English. So I have to change it).

Child No. 4: *Que yo a veces me olvido, y mi mamá dice, <<no, en español, en inglés no>>, y es muy difícil hablar todo en el mismo idioma* (That sometimes I forget and my mom tells me, "in Spanish, not in English," and it's very difficult talking to everyone in the same language).

Despite these challenges, five children also stated that they still enjoyed speaking Spanish or felt comfortable speaking it despite their mistakes, because parents were there to correct and help them.

Interviewer: How do you feel speaking Spanish with your mom and dad?

Child No. 2: *Me siento bien porque mientras hablo español, ellos algunas veces me corrigen si digo algo mal* (I feel good because . . . while I speak Spanish, they sometimes correct me if I say something wrong).

3.1.6 Language Use at Home

Six children mentioned that Spanish was the predominant language spoken at home, and a primary reason given was that at least one parent did not speak English:

Child No. 23: *Mi papá es de Chile . . . Sabe español e inglés. Entonces en la casa hablamos español. Porque no sería justo porque mi mamá no puede hablar en el inglés* (My dad is from Chile . . . He knows Spanish and English . . . So at home we speak Spanish. Because it would not be fair [to speak English] because my mom can't speak English.)

Some children mentioned that they were not allowed to speak English at home, despite their parents' ability to speak English. For one participant, this was an important issue, as she prefers English than Spanish, especially when communicating with her siblings:

Child No. 11: *No me gusta que me digan que necesito hablar español en casa porque me gusta hablar inglés con mis hermanos y mis hermanas* (I don't like it when they tell me that I need to speak Spanish at home because I like to speak English with my brothers and sisters).

4 Discussion

This study provides a first insight into children's EI formation, specifically examining the nature of its mechanisms of construction. We looked at U.S. Latino children's awareness of their ethnic background. The study was carried out in Spanish to address how linguistic background may impact EI and its association to academic achievement, as assessed per Spanish literacy skills.

We find that mechanisms of EI denoting understanding of ethnic background and belonging/exploring the ethnic group are moderately correlated for children, yet their scores are not significantly different. This association reveals that these developing components may not be distinguishable as sepa-

rate constructs among children yet. In a similar manner, we find that children provided more examples and details when discussing knowledge of others sharing their parents' background. During these questions, children discussed extended family members (such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins), but also discussed visiting their parents' native countries and meeting others who shared that culture. These results may be attributed to effects of children surrounded by family members and adults who the children identify as sharing their parents' ethnic background. Children discussed these individuals in greater detail than when identifying others who shared similar characteristics as themselves; this outcome is interesting because children could have discussed other children in the Spanish school who shared their characteristics. These results may reveal that at younger ages, parents control and influence children's social understanding of ethnicity within their surroundings—elements aiding in the formation of child's overall understanding of parents' ethnic background and scaffolding the child's emerging EI.

In contrast, we did not uncover significant associations between affect and understanding of ethnic background, nor to belonging/exploring the ethnic group. Affect scores were lower than these latter two mechanisms, leading to the hypothesis that affect is likely an autonomous mechanism still developing throughout childhood. During affect questions, children provided mostly positive feelings towards their ethnic experiences. Of the themes that emerged during these questions, all were related to children's bilingual experiences as HL Spanish learners. Therefore, HL was a strong marker for expressions of children's cultural pride, with benefits including opportunities to speak with a diverse range of individuals, form in-group memberships, and feel useful by helping parents learn the language. Nevertheless, these language-experiences also brought stressors to children during instances when they found bilingualism confusing, when parents' corrected their mistakes in Spanish, or having English-use prohibited in the home. Here, we show the importance of HL-learning during the formation of children's socio-emotional development, as part and parcel of EI construction. These findings support previous accounts on adolescents that suggest that HL proficiency impacts EI by bolstering the formation of positive relationships and communication between family members (e.g., children and their parents; Oh and Fuligni, 2009). Additionally, the themes touched upon by participants were all related to bilingualism and Spanish as a HL. This outcome may be due to factors related to participant selection, as HL-usage was a focus of the study, the sample was recruited from a Spanish-HL Saturday school and data was collected onsite. Future research should address whether these themes are equally valid for ethnic children who may be highly proficient in the HL, yet do not participate in HL programs.

Finally, research points to a relationship between positive affect during the formation of EI and its impact on academic achievement (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a). The present study replicated a relationship between affect scores and Spanish literacy skills. Importantly, we did not find significant associations with other mechanisms of EI as assessed in previous (adult) research (González and Padilla, 1997; Smith et al., 2003; Supple et al., 2006; Byrd and Chavous, 2009; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). However, the small sample size may have limited the correlational results. Nevertheless, the current interview assessment provides evidence that affect towards ethnic background is directly related to children's literacy skills.

5 Conclusion

The present work demonstrates that U.S. Latino children's understanding of their ethnic background and parents' influences their social surroundings supports EI formation. Children who were aware of their parents' ethnic background also exhibited knowledge of specific ethnic groups, picked out social relationships that shared these similarities, and shared their feelings towards their ethnicity. Moreover, we provide principled evidence that affect towards these early experiences is associated with academic success, specifically literacy. Despite the low sample size, this work provides significant insight into children's emergent perceptions of their ethnic and linguistic background, serving as an explicit guide for future work in the construction of effective assessments identifying mechanisms in children's EI development. Critically, these results also emphasize the important role of parents (especially in immigrant families) during EI formation and for children's academic success. Latino children now constitute the "majority minority" ethnic group of students in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), it is therefore vital to undertake investigations on early EI formation, in order to understand its complexities and repercussions on children's socio-emotional health and academic success.

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