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## MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENT COMPETENCY IN SPANISH SKILLS AND THE SUPPORT THEY RECEIVE

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENT COMPETENCY IN  
SPANISH SKILLS AND THE SUPPORT THEY RECEIVE

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Shizatiz Gioconda Guerrero

Giselle Sanchez

June 2018

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## ABSTRACT

With the growth of the Latino population in the United States on the rise and the limited number of bilingual Spanish social workers, it is critical to explore the Master of Social Work student's self-perceived competency in Spanish skills and the support they receive. These are the emerging professionals that will be interacting and providing services for Latinos in our communities. Exploring and understanding the challenges students encounter, their self-perceived competency, and how students can be supported, will be beneficial not only to them but also to Latino clients seeking services in Spanish. Providing appropriate services in Spanish may alleviate the language barrier that many Latinos are concerned about when seeking services. This research utilized a mixed methods design with self-administered surveys and interviews conducted and analyzed with SPSS and transcriptions. The study findings suggest that bilingual Spanish-speaking Masters of Social Work students are not provided with adequate training, resources, and support from their MSW program or their field placements in order to provide high quality services to the Latino population. The study findings also suggest that not all bilingual individuals are comfortable with working with monolingual Spanish-speaking clients.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge an exceptional professor and research advisor, Dr. Erica Lizano. Thank you for your guidance and patience throughout this research project. You've made this research process smooth, insightful and quite exciting. Your passion has been inspirational and has influenced us to strive in becoming leaders just like you. You have had a great impact in our development as social workers from the first day of the MSW program. No one in this world could have made learning about social work history as interesting as you did. One year you empowered us as women by encouraging us to attend the women's march. You taught us how influential a social worker can be by lobbying for policies. You also shared your love and passion for research which opened a whole new world of social work for us. We are grateful for your enthusiasm and encouragement throughout this program.

"Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders." -Tom Peters

## DEDICATIONS

To my parents, I would not have been able to get to this point if it wasn't for your sacrifices. Ama y apa, gracias por siempre apoyarme en todo. Nunca hubiera podido llegar a este punto si no fuera por todos los sacrificios que han hecho para que yo tuviera las oportunidades que ustedes no tuvieron. Gracias por siempre inculcarme la importancia de aprender sobre mi cultura y de ser bilingüe. ¡Los quiero mucho!

To my little sister, my best friend, and roommate; Nataly thank you for always being so supportive. I am lucky to have someone like you by my side during the tough times with stressful days and also the good times celebrating achievements. I love you sis!

-Giselle Sanchez

On September 11th 2013 you gave me the title of "mommy". There's nothing I take more pride in than being your mother! These past 3 years have been quite challenging for us. To be honest they have to be one of the toughest years of my life! There were days where I wanted to give up, but you were what pushed me to keep going. I know, I know, it's a typical thing a mother would say, but just the thought of you and our future was enough motivation to push me through those days! Arely Teresa Mauricio, Thank you! Thank you for the motivation! Thank you for the laughs during my stressful days, and thank you for the endless love! I want to dedicate this to you, because if it weren't you and that

beautiful smile, I wouldn't be here today. I love you baby! And always remember,  
"You're the best thing that's ever happened to me."

-Shizatiz Guerrero

Together we would like to dedicate this to the Latino community. To those that continue to struggle with reaching out for mental health assistance and to receive high quality services in Spanish. We will continue to fight the stigma that prevents many from getting the services they need. You are not forgotten!



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

The most recent census showed that Hispanics account for 56.6 million of the population in the United States as of 2015 (US Census Bureau, 2016). As the Latino population in the United States increases, so does the need for mental health services in our nation. By 2060, the number of Hispanics in the United States is projected to grow to 129 million (US Census Bureau, 2016). As a bilingual practitioner, one may know how to speak fluent Spanish in their home and with family or be familiar with their own culture; but providing high quality mental health services to consumers in Spanish or being familiar with the culture from a specific region in Latin America are completely distinct.

Due to the lack of resources for people who do not speak English, Latinos are more reluctant to access services for prevention and may only be seeking biopsychosocial services in the event of an emergency (Arriaza, 2015). Thus, increasing medical costs for the individual and health care organizations, as well as increasing their risk of experiencing chronic healthcare conditions (Arriaza, 2015). Bilingual Spanish-speaking providers receive little to no official training in Spanish skills in their graduate programs or by their employers and their level of competence is rarely assessed before providing services in Spanish (Engstrom, Piedra, & Min, 2009). This is an issue that affects not only the monolingual

Spanish-speaking consumers but also bilingual practitioners and their professional development (Engstrom et al., 2009). As of now it is implied that it is the responsibility of the student to seek any trainings in Spanish, but reflecting on the social work values it is essential that we advocate for the Latino population and the services that they deserve to receive. Bilingual employees often experience higher caseloads of clients compared to their monolingual coworkers and along with that comes a lot of anxiety about using the correct vocabulary in order to communicate with their clients effectively (Engstrom et al., 2009). Bilingual social workers have reported experiencing more fatigue than their monolingual coworkers when switching from one language to the other (Engstrom et al., 2009). It's important that we look into the education and support provided to bilingual students from different Master of Social Work (MSW) programs in California.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to look at bilingual Spanish-speaking social work students working with the Latino community and the many different barriers which impede therapeutic success and proper assessment. There is a lack of comprehension on the skills practitioners need to have when working with the Latino population (Lanesskog et al., 2015). Many social workers who identify as bilingual believe the only skill needed to provide services is speaking Spanish, but there is more to it (Lanesskog et al., 2015). Spanish skills are not only about speaking the language, but also learning the proper terminology and

understanding the different sub-cultures in the community (Laneskog et al., 2015). MSW students are provided with the proper tools, and support from their school and field placement to succeed in providing services to the English speaking population, but are the bilingual students provided with the same tools and support to provide services in Spanish? This study is ethical and culturally sensitive to the research participants as it aimed to foster their professional development and ease the difficulties they experience if any.

The research method used in this study is a mixed methods research design. The study used a self-administered questionnaire survey via email to explore their level of competence, support, and comfort when providing services in Spanish. The survey also asked personal background information to get an overview on the demographics of the population. This research design was chosen due to the focus being on data collection from students of different MSW programs, which allowed for a larger sample. For the student participants' convenience, it was more efficient to take this approach in collecting quantitative data. As far as the qualitative data, individual interviews were held to collect in-depth information on how the bilingual students feel about providing services to the Latino population, the challenges they face when providing services, and how to improve the support they receive from their MSW program and field placement.

## Significance of the Project to Social Work

Social workers are required to attend school and field placement (internship) to develop a foundation in order to succeed when they graduate. MSW students are guided by well-established professional practitioners to strengthen their skills in becoming well-rounded social workers. It is important to know if these schools and field placements are providing the proper support for all students across the board, especially for those students providing services to the Latino community. Based on the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics, "Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups" (2008). This creates an ethical dilemma because practitioners may be practicing outside of their scope of practice or denying services to clients if they do not feel competent when working with them in Spanish. It is important for the social work profession to keep its promise to provide high quality services to everyone. The National Association of Social Work has revised the standards of cultural competence in social work practice to include cultural humility as well as language and communication to address issues, such as working with clients of limited English proficiency (2015). As social workers continue to research and learn, they find better methods and different ways to improve therapy, assessments, groups, and other services provided. By researching and exposing those areas which need improvement it would increase the quality of service



provided not only to the Latino community but every other community as well. The findings in this research study may potentially push for the support that bilingual students and practitioners need. This research study attempts to address the following questions: Are bilingual MSW students competent in Spanish skills and do they receive support from their program or internship placement in order to provide high quality services to the Latino population? For the purpose of this study, Spanish skills are defined as three different components: language, culture, and clinical skills.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter contains an investigation on research related to MSW student's competency in Spanish skills and the support provided to students from their program and field placement. To examine and properly organize the research there will be four different subsections which include, language, culture, Spanish clinical skills, and support provided to students.

#### Studies Focusing on Language

With the high portion of the population being Latino, Castaño, Gonzalez, and Anderson (2007) conducted a study on understanding how bilingual practitioners deliver their services. According to Castaño et al.'s findings, 60% of bilingual practitioners are providing services in Spanish and 52% of them reported concerns with their Spanish vocabulary. Training for professionals in the United States is in English regardless of their preferred languages, therefore it is difficult for an English-trained bilingual professional to revert back to their native language and translate concepts when working with clients who do not speak English (Castaño et al., 2007). This research study helps prove the lack of Spanish training bilingual practitioners receive and also exposes the unpreparedness practitioners feel when providing services in Spanish. The study by Castaño et al. (2007) exposes many areas bilingual practitioners are lacking

in, but it does have its limitations. The sample size used for this research study did not represent the MSW student population.

The number of Spanish-speaking social workers in the United States is unknown and little research has been done to find out about their challenges in providing services in Spanish, their professional needs, and how they perceive their level of competence. Arriaza (2015) explored the self-perceived Spanish language skills of 321 bilingual social workers. The participants rated their self-efficacy Spanish language skills in relation to five social work competency categories: case management, treatment planning, supportive interventions, evaluation and treatment planning, and psychotherapy. Results indicated that there was a correlation between the language the participating social workers spoke at home and the five competency categories. Social workers who identified as Spanish speaking at home were more confident in their skills compared to 43% of those who spoke English at home (Arriaza, 2015). However, these findings do not indicate that they are competent in professional Spanish, they report their perception and comfort level. The limitations in this research include the bias of the participant's self-reporting and the sample size was not a representative sample of all bilingual social workers due to the unknown amount of bilingual social workers in the United States.

The field practicum experiences of MSW students are an essential component in their educational and professional development. For some students, it may be their first time gaining experience in the field, those students

with previous experience may be providing services at a different capacity in their internships. Either way it is necessary to take a look at the experiences of bilingual students at their field placements in order to ensure that they are receiving support. Engstrom, Gamble, and Min (2009) examined the field internship experiences of 55 bilingual MSW students working with limited English proficiency (LEP) clients. The findings revealed that their Spanish-speaking clients had more difficult cases which required more of their time, they were often asked to interpret for English speaking staff, translated agency documents, and experienced fatigue when working in two languages. Most of them also reported not receiving any training to work with LEP clients.

Engstrom et al. (2009) research study reported that students did not share their bilingual skills at their second internship because their language skills were taken advantage of at their first internship. This is such a powerful perspective from a student that demonstrates how the lack of bilingual social workers at agencies can impact the experiences of the few bilingual students or social workers. When agencies have limited bilingual student interns or employees, it may lead to a lack of exposure to a variety of clients because they may be getting Spanish-speaking only clients. The limitations of this study include the small sample size and that the participants included MSW students only. This study draws the implication that field education from MSW programs should be more aware of the demands for bilingual MSW students and make sure that

those demands do not interfere with their learning opportunities (Engstrom et al., 2009).

### Studies Related to Cultural Competence

In the Latino population, there are various subgroups which constitute this diverse population. Each group contains their very own beliefs, values, customs, and versions of Spanish. Being aware of each subgroups' differences and similarities is important when working with the different groups of the Latino population. About 90% of graduate school faculty have realized and agreed on the importance of preparing students to be culturally competent to work with the Latino Population...but reality is, only 40% are truly prepared to do so (Furman et al., 2009).

Lusk, Baray, Palomo, and Palacios (2009) researched the preparedness of students when given the opportunity to be properly trained in Spanish. The University of Texas offered all bilingual MSW students a class which will help them develop not only proper Spanish terminology and clinical skills but also help them become culturally competent. There are many different subgroups in the Latino population and they all share a common language, but as far as their tradition, values, and customs they are very different and practitioners need to recognize that (Lusk et al., 2009). Many of the research participants felt the class helped them prepare to understand their client's specific background (Lusk et al., 2009). The limitation of this research study was that the size of the sample population was not a representation of the MSW student population. Along with

the lack of representation in the sample size the research study was not evidence-based.

There are not many programs which emphasize helping practitioners develop the proper skills to provide services in Spanish. Sisneros and Alter (2008) developed curriculum to help prepare MSW students work with all subgroups of the Latino population. According to Sisneros and Alter connecting the curriculum to theories will allow ethnicity to become a priority of analysis. The research study connected diverse ethnicity to critical social theory. Researchers found only learning critical theory enables the student to recognize and understand the complexity of the U.S. Latino population and also explain intra-Latino differences. (Sisneros & Alter, 2008). The strength of this article is the connection the researchers made between cultural competency and a theory. The theory really does help clarify the importance of cultural competency to be aware. The limitation of this article is the fact the curriculum has yet to be tested which means it is not an evidence based study.

Researchers from the University of Illinois decided to look into the human services provided to a new community which was quickly growing with Latino immigrants (Lanesskog, Piedra, & Maldonado, 2015). In the study, Lanesskog, Piedra, & Maldonado (2015) were able to interview 25 individuals and found that more than just language skills are needed to provide services to the Latino immigrant population (Lanesskog et al., 2015). They were able to identify the importance of understanding the cultural of not only Latino's but the American

culture as well. Being competent and understanding both cultures allows the practitioner to form a bridge between the cultures and decrease the tension, which appears from misunderstanding and or misinterpreting (Lanesskog et al., 2015). Lanesskog et al., (2015) also found that knowing basic knowledge of the Latino cultural is helpful, but it is important to not assume all Latinos are alike and or similar.

### Spanish Clinical Skills

Developing clinical skills is a process which is developed through practice. About 80% of Lusk et al. (2009) study was to help bilingual MSW students develop those clinical skills and feel comfortable performing them when they are out in the field. The class was created to have the students interact with each other and create a safe environment to promote learning. Many of the activities done in class were actively practiced doing intakes, assessments, and interventions in Spanish. By the end of the course many of the participants expressed their confidence levels increasing and a decrease in their feelings of nervousness (Lusk et al., 2009).

Verdinelli and Biever (2009) examined the differences between those practitioners who were heritage speakers and native Spanish speakers. The researchers identified heritage speakers are individuals who learned Spanish at home from their parents who immigrated to the United States and learned English at school. Native speakers were identified as those whose first language was Spanish. Three areas were explored in order to find common themes:

Personal language development background, professional uses of language, and the therapy process. When exploring the language development background two themes arose, struggle and living in two worlds. When exploring the professional uses of language, the two themes were training and supervision, and being a bilingual therapist. Last, exploring the therapy process in Spanish, the themes found were self-perceived differences in the therapist, challenges in providing therapy in Spanish, and the use of two languages in session. This study found valuable information that indicates the differences between the experiences of native and heritage Spanish speakers. Although both groups found it valuable to be bilingual, they reported a lack of support and identified their difficult experiences of developing their own competence. Supervision is usually conducted in English and it is not always with a supervisor that speaks Spanish so it is difficult for bilingual students to consult or express any frustration in the process of developing their Spanish clinical skills or debriefing about Spanish-speaking only clients.

Gallardo (2012) explored the strategies used in therapy with Latina/o clients by 27 Latina/o therapists who identified as bilingual, bicultural, and culturally competent. When those therapists were asked about their strategies, the findings indicated that some of the important and common themes were personalismo and respeto, language and psychoeducation, small talk, and self-disclosure from the therapist. Personalismo is important in the therapeutic relationship with a Latina/o client, emphasizing warmth and placing great value



on the personal relationship, along with being respectful and careful how the therapist addresses the client. Language use and psychoeducation was a critical theme as participants described the importance of engaging the client, providing information about the therapeutic process, and taking the time to educate the client. Making small talk, also known as “charlar” in the Latino culture allows for the client to feel comfortable and develop rapport with them. Last, the significance of therapist self-disclosure was identified as a strategy utilized by these participants, although they are cautious of whether it is appropriate and beneficial to the client when using self-disclosure (Gallardo, 2012). These strategies may be taught and utilized to improve the Spanish clinical skills of bilingual students in order to ensure Spanish-speaking only clients are engaged and achieve therapeutic success.

#### Studies Related to Support Provided to Students

In order to increase a student’s success, it is critical to have as much support as possible from internship and MSW programs. Although there is not much literature available related to effective support for bilingual providers Gonzalez, Ivers, Noyola, Murillo-Herrera and Davis (2015) reported the experiences of bilingual supervisors and bilingual trainees. Through the experiences, they identified specific themes and effective ways to support and train bilingual student interns. The trainees reported the following: not feeling prepared to provide therapy in Spanish, switching their thinking from Spanish to English within a short time period to complete documentation, and experiencing

difficulty communicating about their Spanish-speaking only clients in supervision when their supervisor did not speak Spanish. With a bilingual supervisor, they were able to address any issues related to language, culture, and specific approaches to take with the clients. Although the supervisors were native English speakers they were cautious in considering their competency and ability to maintain credibility with their bilingual supervisees. With Spanish as their second language, the supervisors practiced speaking Spanish even more in order to improve their skill. Both the supervisor and the trainee were able to discuss continuity of care or termination, learning how to detach while still giving empathy to the client, and ethical dilemmas regarding undocumented clients. The authors gave specific recommendations for the supervisors and for the bilingual trainees. Some of the recommendations for a supervisor to achieve a successful and effective bilingual supervision are to improve language fluency by speaking Spanish and using other resources, cultivating their own cultural competency, and maintaining clear and honest communication with the trainees. The recommendations for bilingual trainees are to seek group supervision in Spanish and practice their Spanish in order to assist with their therapeutic Spanish development. Second, that they advocate for themselves by requesting bilingual supervisors and that they acknowledge their limitations regarding their scope of practice when working with monolingual Spanish-speaking clients. Lastly, that along with their supervisors they conduct a site evaluation in order to plan how to support the student in providing services to clients (Gonzalez et al.,2015). The

limitation to this article is that it was a reflective work based on experiences but not used as qualitative data. Nevertheless, those experiences are valuable in the future development of appropriate support and supervision so that bilingual trainees will be better equipped for working with the Latino population.

As social workers, it is crucial to be culturally sensitive with useful language skills to be an effective practitioner, but educators have failed in teaching bilingual students those skills (Smith, Hawkins, & Carnes, 1999). Increasing those culturally sensitive skills became an area of interest for some researchers. Researchers believe the population social workers service is becoming more diverse, which means teaching methods, theories and exercises should be changing as well (Block, Rossi, Allen, Alschuler, & Wilson, 2016). A study was conducted assessing student's competence levels after taking a course in cultural diversity. From the pre/post test results they were able to see a significant change in the level of cultural competence in the students after taking the class (Block et al., 2016). By increasing the levels of competence for these future social work practitioners it has also been proven to increase consumers' satisfaction, decrease the number of consumers dropping out of services and also provide better services for the consumer (Block et al., 2016).

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

In this study, the two theories used to conceptualize the ideas were Contingency Theory and Systems Theory.

In regards to the Contingency Theory, Thyer (1987) describes how it has been used at the community level to resolve social issues. As this theory focuses on how individuals and groups gain access to resources through taking action together, it is important to reflect on the current lack of support and access to beneficial trainings for bilingual MSW students. Students standing together and advocating for their needs and the needs of their clients can truly prove their commitment to social work.

Systems Theory focuses on the interactions between a person and the environment and this theory allows us to view this issue of lack of support and training for bilingual MSW students not only as it affects their professional development but also the service provision to a vulnerable population, the Spanish-speaking Latino community. Systems on a micro level are affected by macro systems and vice versa (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). Being that this affects not only students but also the Latino clients seeking services in their preferred language, both parties can benefit from a change.

### Summary

This study explored MSW student's competence and the support provided to the students from their program and field placement. MSW programs do a great job at preparing the monolingual student to go out in the field and provide quality services, but seem to be lacking in preparing Spanish-speaking bilingual students. When looking at student's competence the research has identified four different areas, language, cultural competence clinical skills and support provided

to students. Contingency and systems theories can help researchers understand how different systems come together to improve the education for the bilingual Spanish-speaking MSW student. This research study looked into the competence of MSW students in Spanish skills and if they received support from their program or internship placement in order to provide appropriate services to the Latino population.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study has determined if bilingual Spanish-speaking Masters of Social Work students are competent in Spanish skills and if they receive support from their program or internship placement in order to provide high quality services to the Latino population. In this chapter, the specific details of how this study was conducted will be discussed. The sections discussed will be study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of self-perceived competence of MSW students in Spanish skills and their perception of the support they receive from their graduate programs and field placements. A mixed methods research design with qualitative and quantitative methods was used for this study. Utilizing an exploratory mixed methods approach with a self-administered survey allowed for the collection of demographics and competence of the student's skills. Facilitating interviews with open-ended questions gave the students an opportunity to share their experiences as bilingual Spanish-speakers in the field and their needs. Acquiring more information about the student needs and how they should be addressed for the benefit of both the student and the

future consumers they will be providing services to, is an essential component of this study.

This research study sought to explore and understand the following questions regarding MSW students: Are bilingual MSW students competent in Spanish skills and do they receive support from their program or internship placement in order to provide high quality services to the Latino population?

### Sampling

This study used a non-probability sampling technique called snowball sampling. The researchers used their personal networks along with assistance from Master of Social Work Program Directors for email distribution in order to recruit participants. Participants were a part of one of three MSW programs in Southern California. Participants had to be 18 or older, had to be bilingual and must speak Spanish. Approval from the four MSW program directors of each university was needed for this research along with consent from the subjects themselves by signing an informed consent form. Based on participant's willingness to provide additional information, seven participants were selected to be interviewed.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative data such as demographic information was collected during this portion of the study. The survey questions consisted of the participant's age, gender, ethnicity, fluency of Spanish, number of years providing services in Spanish, and their comfort level in providing services in Spanish. This information

was measured on a nominal, ordinal, and ratio level. The instruments used in this study were created by the researchers in order to ensure the information being sought was gathered.

As for the qualitative part of the research study, audio-recorded interviews were conducted in January of 2018. A proper introduction with a description and purpose of the study was provided at the beginning of each interview. The interview was conducted by one of the two researchers and followed specific guidelines. The guideline sheet was created by both of the researchers and the purpose of it was to keep the interview on task and to guarantee we gathered the information we needed. Participants were asked to share their difficulties with providing services to monolingual Spanish-speaking clients, the type of support in which they receive from their field placements, the resources that were available to them in order to develop their Spanish skills as professionals, and how they felt their needs as bilingual students can be met.

In the quantitative portion of this research study, the dependent variable was the services provided to the Latino population and the independent variables were the MSW student's competency in Spanish skills and the support they received. The researchers created dichotomous categorical variables and used a series of Chi-Square tests for analysis and frequency distributions.

### Procedures

To initiate the data collection, emails were sent with a link of the survey to all MSW program directors of the participating universities which then were



distributed to their students. At the end of each survey there was an opportunity for participants to indicate if they were interested in being a part of an interview. The interviews were created from individuals who had taken the survey and were interested to participate. The researchers contacted the participants to schedule interviews at their convenience.

The interviews were held at the participant's universities. To provide variety and flexibility, researchers offered participants to select the date and time for the interview. Giving participants a flexible schedule and providing a location at their universities ensured participation in interviews. Researchers provided a safe and comfortable environment by making sure the location was private. Each interview was between five to ten minutes.

Participants were given information on the topics that would be covered during the interviews along with consent forms to read and sign. At the beginning of each interview a brief introduction and discussion on confidentiality was given along with the collection of consent forms. Researchers thanked participants and the study was introduced. Finally, the audio recording device was turned on and the interview began. At the end of each interview, researchers concluded by thanking participants again.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Maintaining confidentiality in the course of this study was a priority, therefore the individuals' identities and responses were protected while collecting data via the self-administered electronic survey by not requesting identifiable

information such as their name or address. Researchers also used a website called Survey Monkey which insured the participants' answers remain anonymous. The appropriate measures were taken at all times during the interviews to ensure confidentiality. The interviews took place in a reserved and private location at the universities in order to make it more convenient and accessible to participants. Before initiating the interview, each participant read and signed a consent form to be audio recorded. The audio recording of the interview was uploaded onto a USB device and was kept in a locked box. All of the information collected was destroyed after the completion of the study.

### Data Analysis

All data gathered from surveys and interviews was analyzed with quantitative and qualitative techniques. First, the data collected by the surveys was entered into SPSS and the audio recording from the interviews was transcribed into written form. Surveys were conducted by using an online survey software called Survey Monkey and the data which the researchers received from the website was reviewed and underwent statistical testing. The answers from the interviews were then categorized into six different categories which are, the different challenges which the participants encounter as Spanish speaking practitioners, resources their MSW program provides to them as Spanish-speaking MSW students, preparing techniques participants use before interacting with Spanish speaking clients, and the participant's opinions on how to improve

the MSW programs and field placements contribution to their development as Spanish speaking practitioners.

### Summary

This study examined the self-perceived competence of bilingual Spanish-speaking Master of Social Work students and explored the support they receive from their MSW programs and field placements. The self-administered survey assisted in identifying the self-perceived level of competence of bilingual Spanish-speaking MSW students from various universities. The interviews allowed students to express their perspectives, their needs, and their experiences as bilingual MSW students. Utilizing a mixed methods approach captured the necessary information best in order to address the questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine if bilingual MSW students are provided with support from their graduate program and or field placement, to develop and enhance their skills as bilingual practitioners. This study assessed the level of comfort of bilingual practitioners and if Spanish trainings influenced their perception of their competency in providing services in Spanish. The study also identified barriers bilingual practitioners encountered when providing services to the Spanish-speaking only community. In order to gain an in-depth understanding a mixed method approach was used. In this chapter there will be a focus on the demographics of the study's participants along with an analysis of the data collected with the surveys and the responses given during interviews.

#### Presentation of Findings

##### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the demographics characteristics of the study sample. The age range for the sample was 22 to 51. A large portion of the study participants were women (91%). The sample was majority Latino (95.8%), with the second largest group being White (3.5%) and the third group being Black (.7%). The largest portion of the study participants attended California State

University, Long Beach (77.2%), the second being California State University, San Bernardino (22.9%) and lastly Loma Linda University (4.9%).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample

		N (%)	Range
Age			22 - 51
Sex			
	Female	133 (91%)	
	Male	13 (9%)	
Ethnicity			
	Black	1 (.7%)	
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	
	Latino	138 (95.8%)	
	White	5 (3.5%)	
	Native American	0 (0%)	
	Other	0 (0%)	
University			
	California State University, San Bernardino	33 (22.9%)	
	Loma Linda University	7 (4.9%)	
	California State University, Long Beach	104 (72.2%)	

When looking at the Crosstabulation of responses the only respondent that took a class or training in Spanish indicated not feeling comfortable at all providing services to Spanish-speaking only clients (see Table 2). Seventy participants indicated not receiving any classes or training and reported feeling very comfortable providing services to Spanish-speaking only clients and sixty-one participants reported feeling somewhat comfortable.

Table 2. Relationship Between Access to Classes/Trainings for Spanish Skill Development and Comfort Working with Spanish-Speaking Clients

		Does your MSW program offer any classes or trainings for Spanish skill development?		
		Yes	No	Total
What is your level of comfort when working with Spanish-speaking only clients?	Not comfortable at all	1	9	10
	Somewhat comfortable	0	61	61
	Very comfortable	0	70	70
Total		1	140	141

When looking at the frequency distribution table and at Crosstabulation, sixty-seven participants indicated that they did have the opportunity to consult with a bilingual supervisor at field placement and thirty-three indicated feeling very comfortable and 30 somewhat comfortable (See Table 3).

### Inferential Analysis

In order to test relationships between level of comfort and supervision in Spanish, a Chi-square test was used. A Chi-square test for independence indicated significant association between the level of comfort when working with Spanish-speaking only clients and receiving training ( $\chi^2 = 13.19$ ,  $p = .001$ ; See Table 3). A Chi-square test for independence indicated a significant association between the level of comfort when working with Spanish-speaking only clients and how often they provide services to Latino clients in Spanish, ( $\chi^2 = 16.02$ ,  $p = .04$ ; see table 4).

Table 3. Relationship Between Level of Comfort and Supervision in Spanish

		Spanish training				Total
		Individual Supervision in Spanish	Group Supervision in Spanish	None, Supervision in English only	Has everything	
Level of comfort when working with Spanish speaking clients	Not comfortable at all	0	0	10	0	10
	Somewhat comfortable	1	3	55	1	60
	Very comfortable	2	2	65	1	70
Total		3	5	130	2	140

Note. p value= .001

Table 4. Relationship Between Level of Comfort and Providing Services to Clients in Spanish

		Almost never	Less than half the time	About half the time	More than half the time	Almost always	Total
What is your level of comfort when working with Spanish-speaking only clients?	Not comfortable at all	5	1	1	1	2	10
	Somewhat comfortable	8	15	19	13	6	61
	Very comfortable	10	11	17	14	18	70
Total		23	27	37	28	26	141

Note. p value= .04

## Qualitative Analysis

Seven individuals were interviewed in order to get a better understanding of the needs and thoughts of bilingual practitioners. After reviewing and analyzing each interview, several common themes emerged. The themes which will be described are as follow: challenges with terminology and translation, lack of resources for bilingual practitioners from MSW programs, educating oneself on proper terminology prior to working with a Spanish-speaking client, the need for courses, trainings, workshops, tools to enhance terminology and translated material for Spanish practitioners.

### Theme #1: Challenges with Terminology and Translation

When participants were asked about challenges experienced when working with Spanish-speaking only clients participants stated having difficulties with using the proper clinical terminology and translation of the language from English to Spanish. Participant number one stated “I am bilingual and I do feel that my Spanish is very good, but when it comes to social work terminology or clinical terminology, I don’t know it, so that’s my biggest challenge” (personal communication, January 30, 2018). Similarly, another participant also mentioned having similar challenges and said the following: “The challenges I experienced is not understand like not knowing the proper clinical terms” (Participant 7, personal communication, January 30, 2018). Participant number five stated terminology as a challenge, but also mentioned translation, “sometimes the words, I can’t seem to find the words that I’m looking for and the exact words to



translate” (personal communication, January 30, 2018). Another participant shared the same challenges and said the following: “I want to say...not translating everything how it’s supposed to be” (Participant 6, personal communication, January 30, 2018).

### Theme # 2: Lack of Resources for Bilingual Practitioners from MSW Programs

When asked about resources provided to participants to assist in developing their Spanish skills all seven participants stated not having any kind of resources. One participant stated “I don’t know of any resources that the MSW program has that would provide me with support as a bilingual student” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 30, 2018). Another participant also mentioned the lack of recourses and said the following: “we haven’t been given anything” (Participant 4, personal communication, January 30, 2018).

### Theme # 3: Educating Oneself on Proper Terminology Prior to Working with a Spanish Speaking Client

When preparing to work with Spanish-speaking clients most of the participants reported having to look up clinical terminology to prepare to serve their Spanish-speaking client. Participant one stated “educate myself a little bit more on the proper terminology” (personal communication, January 30, 2018). Another participant reported buying medical terminology books in Spanish to assist in learning clinical terms (Participant 4, personal communication, January 30, 2018).

#### Theme # 4: Trainings, Workshops and Courses Would be Beneficial to Develop Spanish Skills

All the participants identified some kind of training, workshop, or course to assist them in developing their skills as bilingual practitioner. The first participant reported “something that would be beneficial...any course that offer specifically examples for DSM-5 in Spanish” (personal communication, January 30, 2018). Another participant also mentioned trainings and said the following “I think definitely a lot more trainings prior to actually putting you to work with a caseload of Spanish speaking” (Participant 3, personal communication, January 30, 2018).

#### Theme # 5: Providing Translated Forms and Tools to Enhance Terminology from Field Placement

Several participants stated needing different translated forms and tools to enhance terminology from their field placement in order to feel supported, “having the material at hand for the direct translation” (Participant 7, personal communication, January 30, 2018). Another participant stated “having forms translated” (Participant 5, personal communication, January 30, 2018). Other participants identified having role models and supervisors, “definitely more supervision in Spanish” (Participant 6, personal communication, January 30, 2018). Another participant stated “having role models that are bilingual that are knowledgeable as far as resources and creative” (Participant 2, personal communication, January 30, 2018).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key findings of this study and how it supports current relevant literature. The limitations of this study will also be explored and presented here. In addition, the micro and macro implications of the study findings for social work practice, policy and future research will be addressed. To conclude, this chapter will present the researcher's final thoughts about what lies ahead for bilingual Masters of Social Work students.

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore bilingual Masters of Social Work student's self-perceived competence and the support they receive from their program and field placement when working with monolingual Spanish-speaking only Latinos. The results from this study indicate that bilingual MSW students do not receive the support they need from their MSW program or field placement. It is worthy to note that most participants did not receive any type of supervision in Spanish at their field placement. Field placement is a requirement and where students are able to apply what they are learning in their courses but in many cases, bilingual students start taking monolingual Spanish-speaking clients without anyone to guide or support them throughout. Given that field placements

assign Spanish-speaking clients to students who identify as bilingual, it is the responsibility of the field placement supervisors and preceptors to also assist in their development to ensure that the clients being served at the agency are well taken care of.

The findings also showed that there is a lack of resources provided to students that can be useful in working with Spanish-speaking individuals. Resources such as books, glossaries, translated agency forms, and clinical terminology material in Spanish. These types of resources can be utilized to prepare before a session and feel more confident about how to appropriately translate words related to the client's treatment. This finding was consistent with research findings in relevant literature that bilingual practitioners experience concerns about their Spanish vocabulary (Castaño et al., 2007). Having a translation may not always guarantee that the client will understand but it is our duty to be able to further explain and be clear about what we are attempting to communicate.

Another significant finding was that there is a lack of training provided to bilingual students. All but one participant indicated that their MSW program does not offer any courses or trainings for Spanish skill development which is astonishing considering that the three universities that were included in the study are in Southern California, a region with a substantial Latino population. Training in order to develop Spanish skills is critical both from MSW programs and field placements.

A noteworthy finding from the interviews is that bilingual practitioners are overwhelmed with requests to interpret for other employees or clients and to take on more cases of monolingual Spanish-speaking clients. This is consistent with research findings on the fatigue that bilingual students experience due to the additional time that it takes to handle difficult cases in Spanish and the requests to interpret (Engstrom et al., 2009). When someone indicates that they are bilingual it is assumed that they are capable of speaking Spanish at different levels. Due to the lack of resources, lack of training, and overload of cases in Spanish there is also difficulty with fluidity.

### Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that the sample size only included three universities in Southern California. Due to that, it was not determined if all Masters of Social Work programs lack training and support of their bilingual students. Another limitation of this study is that it was focused on student's self-perceived level of competence in regards to their ability to provide services to the monolingual Spanish-speaking population. Unless participants were tested with appropriate instruments in order to determine their level of competence, we are not sure about the validity of their responses. Participants may feel competent enough but that does not confirm that they are. Including a reliable test that focuses on language skills, Latino cultural competency and clinical skills would best indicate if how participants feel correlates with their level of skills.

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The following recommendations for social work practice, policy and future research are important in developing more competent bilingual social workers and ensuring clients receive the best quality of care. The key findings from this study include that there is a lack of resources, lack of training, an overload of cases or requests to interpret, and difficulty with fluidity when working with monolingual Spanish-speaking clients.

It is recommended that changes are made on both a micro and macro level in order to move forward. In regards to the lack of resources offered to bilingual MSW students who are currently or will be serving monolingual Spanish-speaking clients in the future, it is recommended that additional support is provided such as supervision from a bilingual Spanish-speaking supervisor and provide materials. Having a supervisor that can offer support and guidance for a student can make a huge positive impact in their development. In addition to that, access to group supervision in Spanish gives students the ability to practice their language skills and support each other through any challenges they may experience. In order to address the lack of resources for bilingual students on a macro level, the National Association of Social Workers should provide accessible resources in Spanish online such as an approved and appropriate glossary and other material that would be helpful for bilingual practitioners.

With the issue of lack of training for bilingual students, on a micro level it is important for bilingual Spanish-speaking supervisors at agencies to step up and

provide trainings that will support students in increasing their comfort level and competence. To address this same issue on a macro level, it is crucial for organizations with bilingual student interns to develop and implement trainings that address language, culture, and clinical skills in order to prepare students before they start building a caseload of monolingual Spanish-speaking clients. If the agency's bilingual staff does not feel competent enough to conduct trainings, another option would be for agencies to hire outside experts to conduct trainings or workshops for the bilingual student interns and staff. On a macro level the Council on Social Work Education should require an elective course at every university offering an MSW program that is focused on working with monolingual Spanish-speaking clients. Giving bilingual students the opportunity to further develop their skills during their MSW program is contributing to their foundation as well rounded practitioners.

Bilingual Spanish-speaking clinicians are of great value to many agencies in the United States due to the high population of Latinos in this country. Along with that comes an overload of cases in Spanish for those who are bilingual which can be extremely overwhelming. It is suggested that at the organizational level supervisors are considerate when assigning cases and maintain caseloads balanced with English and Spanish speaking clients. Furthermore, it would be of value to create a policy for a cap on the number of cases that bilingual students and staff can have on their caseload in order to protect bilingual individuals and minimize the risk of burnout.

Lastly, a difficulty with fluidity when working with monolingual Spanish-speaking clients has also been identified by the study participants. Ensuring that bilingual clinicians speak Spanish that will meet the client's needs in treatment is essential. This can be addressed by establishing an exam that tests the competency of bilingual clinicians or by expanding current tests to include clinical terminology, skills, and ability to provide high quality services in Spanish. Such exams can assist in identifying the level that a bilingual clinician is able to provide services at and whether they can benefit from additional training in order to get them to a level that is acceptable to be able provide treatment in another language in a competent manner.

This study can assist in developing a plan within MSW programs that will support bilingual students and will effectively contribute to the quality of education they are receiving. Although plenty of research has been completed at the employee level, further research related to students is necessary in order to reinforce the changes that are believed to be important. A future study with a larger sample of more universities offering an MSW program would be beneficial in advancing this current study.

### Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate that there is much work to be done in this area in order to improve in the preparation of students and quality of client services. As we move forward in the journey of progression in this field, it is the hope that one day the fire burning inside all bilingual students and practitioners



leads to countless opportunities to make valuable changes that will benefit them and their clients.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the competency of bilingual MSW students in Spanish skills and the support they receive from their MSW program and field placement. The study is being conducted by Giselle Sanchez and Shizatiz Guerrero, MSW students under the supervision of Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the competency of bilingual MSW students in Spanish skills and the support they receive from their MSW program and field placement.

**DESCRIPTION:** You will be asked to respond to demographic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity, and university you attend. After completion of the demographic section you will be asked to respond to questions related to their language skills, cultural competency, Spanish clinical skills, and support from MSW programs and field placements.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Erica Lizano at [elizano@csusb.edu](mailto:elizano@csusb.edu).

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2018.

I agree to be audio recorded for the purpose of the focus group.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

X \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the competency of bilingual MSW students in Spanish skills and the support they receive from their MSW program and field placement. The study is being conducted by Giselle Sanchez and Shizatiz Guerrero, MSW students under the supervision of Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the competency of bilingual MSW students in Spanish skills and the support they receive from their MSW program and field placement.

**DESCRIPTION:** You will be asked to share your difficulties with providing services to monolingual Spanish speaking clients, the type of support you received from field placements, the resources available to you in order to develop Spanish skills, and how you you're your needs as bilingual students can be met.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take 30-60 minutes to complete the interview.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Erica Lizano at (909)537-5584 or [elizano@csusb.edu](mailto:elizano@csusb.edu).

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2018.

I agree to be audio recorded for the purpose of the focus group.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

---

Place an X mark here

Date

APPENDIX B  
SELF-ADMINISTERED SURVEY

## Survey Questions

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What gender do you identify with?
  - Female
  - Male
  - Decline to disclose
3. What is your ethnicity?
  - Black
  - Asian/Pacific Islander
  - Latino
  - White
  - Native American
  - Other
4. What university are you attending?
  - California State University, San Bernardino
  - California State University, Fullerton
  - California State University, Long Beach
  - Loma Linda University
5. Is Spanish your first or second language?
  - First
  - Second
6. Where did you learn to speak Spanish?
  - Home
  - School
7. How often do you provide services to Latino clients in Spanish at your field placement?
  - Almost never
  - Less than half the time
  - About half the time
  - More than half the time
  - Almost always
8. How would you rate your level of Spanish proficiency when working with Spanish-speaking only clients?
  - Poor
  - Average
  - Good



- Excellent
9. What is your level of comfort when working with Spanish-speaking only clients?
- Not comfortable at all
  - Somewhat comfortable
  - Very comfortable
10. How would you rate your knowledge of different Latino cultures aside from your own in terms of regions? (Ex: Mexico, Cuba, Ecuador, Colombia, El Salvador)
- None
  - Poor
  - Average
  - Good
  - Excellent
11. Do you feel competent enough to provide the following services in Spanish? Check all that apply:
- Explaining confidentiality and informed consent
  - Explaining forms
  - Biopsychosocial Assessments
  - Risk Assessments
  - Individual Therapy
  - Family Therapy
  - Case Management
  - Making phone calls
  - None of the services above
12. Do you receive supervision (group or individual) in Spanish?
- Individual supervision in Spanish
  - Group supervision in Spanish
  - None, supervision in English only
13. Do you have the opportunity to consult with bilingual supervisors at your field placement?
- Yes
  - No
14. Does your MSW program offer any classes or trainings for Spanish skill development?
- Yes
  - No

15. Are you willing to participate in a focus group in the future?
- Yes (Include contact info such as email)
  - No

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Interview Guide

- What are some of the challenges you experience when working with Spanish-speaking only clients?
- What are some of the resources that the MSW program at your university has in order to provide you with support as a bilingual student?
- How do you prepare yourself before working with a Spanish-speaking client?
- What would be beneficial in order to help you develop your skills as a bilingual practitioner in terms of language, cultural competency, and clinical skills?
- How would you like to be supported at your field placement as a bilingual student?

APPENDIX D  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO**  
**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**  
**Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee**

Researcher(s) Giselle Sanchez & Shizatiz G. Guerrero

Proposal Title MSW Student Competency in Spanish Skills

# SW1762

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

-----  
Proposal is:

- approved
- to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
- to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
- missing informed consent  debriefing statement
- revisions needed in informed consent  debriefing
- data collection instruments missing
- agency approval letter missing
- CITI missing
- revisions in design needed (specified below)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair Signature

6/13/2017  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

The two researchers of this proposed study divided the responsibilities of this assignment equally. In order to organize the development of the work, Google Docs was utilized so that both writers could view the documents at the same time. Giselle and Shizatiz divided chapters one, two, three, four, and five. Giselle contributed to the formulation of the survey questions, interview guide, and informed consent while Shizatiz contributed to the development of the IRB application. Both researchers conducted the interviews. The researchers did not encounter any issues with the division of the work.