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Expecting Excellence: Student and Teacher Attitudes Towards Choosing to Speak English in an IEP

Alhyaba Encinas Moore
Brigham Young University

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Alhyaba Encinas Moore

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Norman Evans, Chair
K. James Hartshorn
Dan P. Dewey

Department of Linguistics and English Language

Brigham Young University

ABSTRACT

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Towards Choosing to Speak English
in an IEP

Alhyaba Encinas Moore
Department of Linguistics and English Language, BYU
Master of Arts

In an effort to immerse learners in the target language, many IEPs in the U.S. hold fast to inflexible English Only policies (Auerbach, 1993; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). However, research has identified several shortcomings of such a rule, such as (1) the benefits of the L1 in L2 learning, and the lack of research supporting the exclusion of the mother tongue (Atkinson, 1993; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Butzkamm, 2003), and (2) psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic factors that diminish the effectiveness of English Only and contribute to a negative learning environment (Shvidko, Evans, & Hartshorn, 2015). This body of research has prompted a large IEP in the U.S. to replace its English Only policy with initiatives that encourage English use, foster learner autonomy and create a more positive learning environment. This study evaluated this IEP's initiatives and found that this new perspective on language policy has created a viable alternative to English Only. These initiatives' intended objective to encourage English use was met while preserving learner autonomy and without sacrificing a high standard of excellence.

Keywords: intensive English programs, English only, learner autonomy, expect excellence initiatives

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PREFACE

In accordance with the TESOL MA program guidelines, this manuscript was prepared for submission in *System*: *An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*. This journal was chosen because of its previous publication of articles regarding English Only policies, one of which (Shvidko, Evans, & Hartshorn, 2015) in part motivated this IEPs decision to make the policy changes which this study examined. Publication in *System* will continue the current vein of research in this journal on English Only policies and alternatives. This manuscript conforms to the journal's guidelines and limitations.

Introduction

With the worldwide demand for English speakers in a variety of professional fields, an increasing number of international students continue to seek an education in the United States. In 2014, 886,052 international students studied at U.S. colleges and universities (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014, p. 6). This is an increase of 72% over the past 15 years. In response to this influx of international students and the demand for English-language education, Intensive English Programs (IEPs) have surfaced across the United States. In 2014, 126,016 international students were enrolled in IEPs (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014, p. 12).

In order to give these international students a worthwhile learning experience, many IEPs seek to immerse their students in the target language. This practice follows the general consensus among language educators that the more immersion learners experience, the faster they will learn the language (Auerbach, 1993; Phillipson, 1992; Rivers 2011). In accordance with this belief, classes in these institutions are taught in English and are typically comprised of a linguistically diverse student body. Additionally, many IEPs seek to keep learners constantly immersed in the target language by adopting *English Only* policies (Auerbach, 1993; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). These policies prohibit use of students' native tongues within the confines of the school. These policies are often instituted with students' best interests in mind and the concept of immersion is indeed supported by the literature (Chauldron, 1988; Duff & Polio, 1990; Linck, Kroll, & Sunderman, 2009; Martinsen, Baker, & Bown, 2011).

However, research has suggested that the inclusion of students' L1 in the ESL classroom may aid them in their language-learning (Atkinson, 1993; Rivers, 2011). This is especially true in the case of adults who, through their L1, already possess a scaffold with which to quickly build their understanding of other languages (Brooks-Lewis, 2009). Because of the knowledge

base and understanding acquired through learning their L1, learners' mother tongues are the greatest asset they can bring to foreign language learning (Butzkamm, 2003). However, the inflexible nature of English Only policies place learners in an environment in which they are cut off from this resource.

In addition, this monolingual policy is also difficult to enforce. One of the largest obstacles is students' common L1s. For example, in 2013, 30% of students in IEPs in the United States came from Saudi Arabia; another 14% from China (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). The Spanish speakers at the IEP around which this study focuses have comprised between 35% and 42% of the student body in recent years (Shvidko, 2012). English Only policies can stand little chance against these large pockets of homesick learners who share a common language and culture. Perhaps because of this, there still seems to be an all-or-nothing view regarding English use. Teachers and administrators seem to live in perpetual fear of letting students speak their L1 lest it spreads beyond their control (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). However, McMillan and Rivers (2011) have shown that teachers' attitudes uphold the philosophy of allowing some L1 to enhance learning. For these kinds of reasons, researchers have encouraged IEPs to rethink their English Only policies (Auerbach, 1993; Grant, 1999; Shvidko, 2012; Shvidko, Evans & Hartshorn, 2015).

In light of these studies, Shvidko et al. (2015) gauged student attitudes towards the English Only policy at an IEP in a large university in the western United States. They found that while the attitudes towards the idea of only speaking English were generally positive, many students expressed difficulties with the actual implementation of the rule. These difficulties were identified as sociocultural, linguistic, psychological, individual, and institutional factors that hindered the institution's ability to implement its policy. Some obstacles to speaking English that

were discussed included issues such as the students' need for L1 as a learning aid and a way to bond with others, inconsistencies in implementing the policy, cultural norms among students prohibiting English use, and students desiring the freedom to choose.

In response to this research, this IEP has replaced the English Only policy with *Expect Excellence Initiatives*. Rather than requiring the use of English, these initiatives encourage English use by, (a) helping students take responsibility for their language learning, (b) facilitating a positive learning environment, (c) creating situations that encourage English use, and (d) rewarding students for English use.

The institution and faculty have made considerable efforts implementing these Expect Excellence initiatives in order to positively impact the learning atmosphere and students' English language use. With this program in place for several years, the timing seemed right to measure the extent to which this program is meeting its intended objectives. This was done by gauging both student and teacher attitudes towards the Expect Excellence initiatives through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Using these methods, this research attempted to discover whether the Expect Excellence initiatives' objectives are being met.

Literature Review

Research has shown that the inclusion of learners' L1 is beneficial in foreign-language learning (Auerbach, 1993; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Butzkamm, 2003). Brooks-Lewis (2009) describes the debate on L1 inclusion in EFL as an enigma because, while a body of literature is available supporting the concept, its exclusion is "in reality unfounded by research" (Auerbach 1993).

Despite this, there are many Intensive English Programs that continue to uphold English Only policies (J. Hartshorn, personal communication, April 28, 2016; Shvidko, et al., 2015). The

students in these IEPs are college-age or older adults who unlike infants learning a mother tongue, already possess a large knowledge base and, "also have available a language through which they can objectify the target language as a system and negotiate the relationships between forms and intended meanings and the tasks in which they are used" (Wells, 1998, p. 248). Schwarzer and Luke add that adults are able to use the L1 "as a scaffolding tool", and as a "psychological tool for regulation and task orientation" (as cited in Brooks-Lewis, 2009, p. 219). As Butzkamm (2003) stated, "using the mother tongue, we have (1) learnt to think, (2) learnt to communicate and (3) acquired an intuitive understanding of grammar. The mother tongue is therefore the greatest asset people bring to the task of foreign language learning" (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 29). Yet, English Only policies are perpetuated in the name of "pedagogical common sense and professional orthodoxy" (Canagarajah, 1999, 126). In search of more effective alternatives, it is important to understand the reasons for the prevalence of English Only, and the challenges that learners encounter with the policy.

Historical Reasons

In his book, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1992) argues that the worldwide spread of the English language as well as L1 exclusion in EFL classrooms have their roots in British imperialism. In addition to this force, another one is at play in the United States. Baron (1990) adds that English Only policies in the US have roots in the Americanization movement that came about as a result of the surge in immigration from Europe and Asia in the late 19th century. This movement attributed blame for political and economic problems on the immigrant population and created negative sentiments towards foreign languages. Robbins states that a mark of American patriotism became well-spoken English free of "Indian" or "foreign" influence (as cited in Baron, 1990 p.155).

These feelings deeply influenced ESL programs and the learning of English. For example, there were calls for deporting aliens after five years if they hadn't learned English, a measure supported by Roosevelt himself (Baron, 1990). An ESL approach was developed in which English became the sole medium for teaching (Auerbach, 1993) and which warned teachers against the formation of "national cliques." (Baron, 1990, p. 160). Even though ESL programs are more embracing of foreign peoples and cultures, the English Only policy still remains under pedagogical claims.

Language-Learning Approaches

Perhaps the continued prevalence of English Only stems from a fear of forsaking the popular and accepted communicative approach for an ineffective and outdated grammar-translation method. Incidentally, nowhere in the philosophy of Communicative Language Teaching is it stated that any use of the L1 should be prohibited. Auerbach (1993) states that "there seems to be an all-or-nothing view" (p. 15). Since the grammar method is no longer considered appropriate and translation in general is seen as ineffective, "no alternative except the complete exclusion of the L1 in the ESL classroom is seen as valid" (p. 15). That philosophy is borrowed from another outdated approach called the Direct Method, in which no use of the mother tongue is permitted (Celce-Murcia, 2014). Butzkamm (2003) notes that it looks as though "the so-called direct method, now operating under the new banner of the communicative approach, has triumphed" (p. 29). It seems that because of this fear of falling into the outdated methods of translation, this all-or-nothing view is maintained (Auerbach, 1993).

Practical Reasons

There are other more practical reasons behind English Only policies. Harmer (2007) discusses the issue of teachers traveling from English-speaking countries and teaching students

whose L1 they themselves don't speak. He argues that this has contributed to the rise of the monolingual classroom (p. 132). In ESL contexts, where students from various L1 backgrounds are taught together, it is difficult, impractical, or maybe even impossible to use the students' L1 in class. At the same time, students who do share the same mother tongue may be missing out on learning opportunities because of English Only restrictions.

Lack of Control

Another reason for the prevalence of English Only policies is teachers' and administrators' fear of loss of control. Butzkamm (2003) states that the general wisdom among advocates of a monolingual classroom is "Give the devil an inch and he'll take a mile" (p. 32). Teachers are afraid that by letting students use their L1 they will lose control. As one teacher at a Japanese university expressed, "It should be avoided because it expands to everyone." Because of this, other teachers at this university believed that the L1 should only be used only in "the most extreme circumstances" because they didn't want them to use it "as a crutch to avoid trying" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, p. 257).

Rivers (2011) tested learners' ability to self-regulate their language use by allowing students at this university to choose the target amount of time they would speak English. After doing this, students were to record the actual amount of time they spent speaking English as well as the instances in which their L1 (Japanese) was used. The results showed that the primary uses of Japanese were to either (a) exchange casual remarks with little pedagogical value, and most importantly (b) to clarify aspects pertinent to their learning. Their English usage also hovered around 90% of the time (Rivers, 2011).

Learner Challenges

Shvidko et al. (2015) conducted research at an IEP at a large university in the western

United States where an English Only rule prevailed. They found that institutional, sociocultural, linguistic, individual and psychological factors hindered students from speaking English outside of class. For example, students who shared the same L1 struggled to speak English in the face of cultural expectations and peer pressure. Low-level students were also required to follow the English Only rule. This made it very difficult for them to communicate at all. Other students shared difficulties regarding their lack of confidence, personality type, or levels of stress that hindered their ability to communicate in English. It was concluded that these well-meaning and motivated students knew their particular circumstances better than anyone, therefore, "the English-only rule should not be forced among learners; instead, they themselves should be free to choose" (Shvidko, 2012, p. 64).

An Alternative to English Only

In response to this research, the IEP currently under study replaced its English Only policy with *Expect Excellence* initiatives. The philosophy behind these eight initiatives is to increase learner autonomy. In turn, the administration's role has evolved to that of facilitator. The stated objectives of the initiatives are to encourage English use by

1. helping students take responsibility for their language learning,
2. facilitating a positive learning environment,
3. creating situations that encourage English use, and
4. rewarding students for English use.

The philosophies behind these objectives were influenced by the aforementioned research, the administration's common sense and experience, and by some of the current research on the topics of motivation (Dörnyei, 2003) and learner autonomy (Scharle, 2000). Details on each initiative as it relates to each objective will be given below.

Objective 1: helping students take responsibility for their language learning. The initiative associated with this objective is intended to remind students of their role and to help them responsibly fulfill it.

Self-Regulation Lessons. This series of short lectures are taught periodically in class and educate students on how to become independent learners. These lessons cover topics such as self-motivation, better time-management and good study habits. Students receive packets that contain the information from the lectures as well as prompts for them to reflect and write down their insights.

Objective 2: facilitating a positive learning environment. The initiatives associated with this objective aim to create an environment more conducive to language learning.

Expect Excellence Posters. Every two weeks, a notable individual's picture and quote on excellence is displayed in the walls of the campus. The teachers are also notified and asked to incorporate the quote into their lectures.

Defining Excellence Contest. Once a semester students have the chance to have their own quote and picture be displayed at the school. This contest aims to motivate every student to reflect on what excellence means to them.

English Etiquette Videos. These six videos are periodically shown in class to educate students on proper English "etiquette" when interacting with their peers. They use the school's own students and experiences to show how their L1 use might offend or exclude someone with a different L1. The videos are intended to help students choose to use more English for the sake of others.

Objective 3: creating situations that encourage English use. Rather than dedicating its efforts on forcing students to speak the target language, the administration is focusing on

providing opportunities for meaningful English use.

English for Lunch. During this weekly event, students come together to participate in an activity and to receive a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The activity gives students a fun and different reason to use English. This opportunity also aims to create a safe culture where all students, regardless of L1 or country of origin, can speak English.

TalkAbouts. This initiative allows students to be interviewed by native English speakers. Interviewers (usually interns) ask students questions related to topics such as learning and excellence. These interviews aim to inspire students with increased confidence to engage in future conversations with native English speakers.

Objective 4: rewarding students for English use. Rather than punishing L1 use, the administration aims to reward students for using the target language.

English Thank You Cards. These cards work as vouchers for prizes at the institution. Teachers hand them out as they encounter students in the hallways speaking English. These cards are also given out for participating in English for Lunch and TalkAbouts.

Expect Excellence Scholarships. These half-tuition scholarships are given to students who exhibit excellence in academics, attendance, English use, and who actively participate in other Expect Excellence initiatives.

Table 1 summarizes the Expect Excellence initiatives.

Table 1

The Expect Excellence Initiatives

Objective	Initiative	Description
Helping students take responsibility for their language learning	Self-Regulation Lessons	In-class lectures designed to help students become independent learners.
Facilitating a positive learning environment	Expect Excellence Quotes	Famous people's quotes on excellence displayed in the halls of the school.
	Defining Excellence Contest	Students write quotes on excellence. Winners' quotes are displayed in the halls.
	English-Etiquette Videos	Videos demonstrating situations in which L1 use may alienate or offend peers.
Creating situations that encourage English use	English for Lunch	A weekly activity during lunchtime. Students work in groups and use English.
	TalkAbouts	Students are interviewed by native speakers.
Rewarding students for English use	English Thank You Cards	Reward cards for English use that are traded in for prizes.
	Expect Excellence Scholarships	Half-tuition scholarships rewarding excellence in academics and English use.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Expect Excellence initiatives as a possible alternative to English Only. This study addressed the following question: According to the teachers and students, to what extent are the Expect Excellence initiatives' objectives being met?

Methodology

Context

The study was conducted in an IEP in a large University in the western United States. There are two programs available at the school. The Foundations Program, (intended for lower-

level learners seeking to improve basic level skills), and the Academic Program (intended to prepare students to enter an English-medium university). These two programs correspond with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency scale (ACTFL, 2012). Each program is divided into several levels. Students typically move from one level to the next in the course of a semester. The *Foundations Program* (Foundations Prep, A, B and C) corresponds with the ACTFL proficiency levels ranging from *novice low* to *intermediate high*. The *Academic Program* (Academic A, B, and University Prep) corresponds with the ACTFL proficiency levels ranging *from intermediate mid* to *advanced mid*. Students are able to transition from the Foundations to the Academic Program as their English skills improve.

The student body is comprised of students from distinct L1 backgrounds and nationalities with Latin America being the most represented. The most represented language at this institution is Spanish. Portuguese, Korean, and Chinese speakers also comprise a sizeable portion of the student body. During the semester that the study was completed, 248 students were enrolled in the school. The majority of the students are young adults in their early twenties although older adults are also part of the student body.

Rationale and Instrument Design

Data was gathered using surveys, focus groups and interviews. While basic quantitative analyses (averages, percentages, rank order) were performed on the results of the survey, the research was qualitative in nature. This follows the methods used by Shvidko et al. (2015) in which the effects of the school's English Only policy on the students were explored.

The surveys were intended to capture a broad picture of students' feelings towards the Expect Excellence initiatives through evaluating students' level of involvement with and attitudes towards the initiatives. The survey also sought to gauge the impact of these on the

learning environment of the school. The focus groups served as a way to hear opinions and perspectives from representative samples of students. The interviews gathered in-depth perspectives from the teachers and administrators regarding the changes that have transpired since the institution of the Expect Excellence initiatives. Since the number of people present during the time of English Only as well as Expect Excellence is small, conducting interviews seemed like the optimal way to gather this data. Both the focus group and interview questions were semi-structured in order to open up conversation between students and between teachers and the researcher regarding the Expect Excellence initiatives and the environment in the school building.

Participants and Procedure.

Survey participants were current students of all levels. In order to account for students' lower language proficiency, the questions were written in simplified English. In addition, the responses of the students in the lower levels (Foundations Prep and Foundations A) were not analyzed. Out of the 248 students invited to respond, 177 completed the survey. However, the analysis focused on the results of the 94 returning students who had a least a semester's worth of experience with the initiatives. Students were invited to participate via email and received a reward of two English Thank You Cards for their completion of the survey.

Focus group participants were part of the Academic Program in order to ensure sufficient English communication skills to participate. They also had at least a semesters' worth of exposure to the school and its initiatives. Three groups with four to seven participants each were formed. One group was comprised of Spanish-speakers (the dominant L1 at the school). The other groups were mixed-language groups comprised of three of the most represented languages at the school (Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese), as well as representatives from minority languages

(Kinyarwanda and Persian). One group had students with at least two semesters of experience at the institution and the other had students with one semester of experience. The students were invited to participate via email and received pizza as compensation for their time.

The four interview participants were instructors and administrators who were involved at the institution both during the period where an English Only policy was upheld and during the time of the Expect Excellence initiatives. This was done in order to attain perspective on the environment both before and after policy changes.

Data Analysis

The survey analysis focused on the 94 returning students' responses. The data from the survey was exported into MS Excel. Data were analyzed using advanced filtering and pivot tables to identify how experience at the IEP, proficiency, and L1 background related to students' knowledge and opinions of the initiatives.

The recordings of the focus groups and interviews were carefully excerpted and tagged in relation to the research questions. This was done using Dedoose (Lieber, Weisner, & Taylor, 2016), an online application intended to help organize data for qualitative analysis. As more data was analyzed, key excerpts were transcribed, new excerpts and tags were created and existing ones were reviewed. After all the recordings had been analyzed, the excerpts were reviewed and the tags were organized and refined. This work led to the discovery of several patterns, themes, and categories that provided answers to the research question of the study. The results of the survey helped inform the researcher as focus groups and interviews were conducted and analyzed.

Results

The surveys, interviews and focus groups show generally positive opinions regarding the

effectiveness of the Expect Excellence initiatives. Teachers believed in encouraging English while letting students take charge over their own language use. They also preferred the philosophy of rewarding students' use of English rather than punishing L1 use. Students that took the survey were overwhelmingly positive regarding all of the initiatives and the students from the focus groups shared various positive interactions with Expect Excellence. Detailed below is the extent to which each objective was met.

Objective 1: Facilitating a Positive Learning Environment

The philosophies of learner autonomy, rewarding the good, and creating an expectation of excellence have all contributed to a positive change in the environment.

The English Only environment. Even though only a handful of teachers at the school have experience with both the English Only policy and Expect Excellence, they all talked about a stark contrast in the environment between the two programs. All of the teachers interviewed commented on the negative environment present during the time of the English Only policy. A major reason for the negative environment was identified as the policy's focus on students' punishment. For instance, in order to enforce the policy, teachers were expected to hand out "red cards" as punishment for L1 use. These could accumulate and create academic consequences for the students. Teachers reported feeling stress, anger and frustration when upholding the rule and policing the students. One administrator remarked that the policy created a negative environment by putting the teacher in the uncomfortable position of rule-enforcer. This generated anxiety in many of the teachers and even caused some teachers to avoid enforcing the rule at all. This difficult position also encouraged teachers to look for the negative in their students and contributed to strained student and teacher relationships. As one administrator expressed, "the student needs to trust the teachers and feel confident and comfortable with the teacher… and so

you start to erode that relationship and sometimes it creates problems and those problems ultimately impact learning." The policy and its challenges came to be "frustrating for everybody". This negative atmosphere has been largely eliminated through the institution of the Expect Excellence initiatives.

The philosophy of autonomy. Turning the responsibility over to the students has lowered teachers' stress level and increased positivity. Students' language choices in the halls have also ceased to negatively impact student and teacher relationships. While teachers often remind students of their goals and engage them in conversations in English, they reported an absence of the anger and stress that they used to feel when they felt responsible for their students' language-use choices. This is due, as one teacher remarked, to the bottom-up approach to language policy that the school now uses. The teachers' role has evolved from rule-enforcer to facilitator, and the students, as an administrator stated, "feel like we're empowering them to use their intelligence to make a decision." One teacher noted that when they engage with students regarding their language use, they are "really just trying to get them to reach their best, rather than trying to micromanage or control." This has positively impacted the relationships between teachers and students.

The philosophy of rewarding the good. Focusing on and rewarding the positive rather than punishing the negative is also central to Expect Excellence. Instead of handing out red cards as punishment, rewards for speaking English are given in the form of "English Thank You" cards that can be traded in for prizes and special meals put on by the school. This change of mindset has had a positive impact on the environment and on teacher and student relationships. Teachers are encouraged to walk down the halls of the school and hand out cards to students who are speaking English. This in essence is encouraging teachers to look for the positive in their

students. This contrasts the stress and avoidance exhibited by teachers during the time of English Only. One teacher summarized the change in the environment by saying, “you can focus on learning and having a good learning environment instead of looking for ways to catch people and impose artificial consequences for speaking their native language.”

English Etiquette Videos. In addition to improving the relationships between teachers and students, the Expect Excellence initiatives have also had a hand in working to improve the environment among the students themselves. The English Etiquette Videos encourage students to speak English by playing out several scenarios in which speaking one’s L1 might be offensive or alienating for a peer from a different language background. The primary objective of this initiative is to encourage students to use more English, and indeed in the survey 73% of students agreed that the Etiquette videos motivate them to speak more English. Additionally, the videos are also helping improve the learning environment as students learn how to better respect each other. In talking about this aspect of the videos, one teacher said, “Helping students…to be sensitive to other learners who don’t speak their L1 adds to the positivity of the environment.” A student described the effect of the videos as a reminder to be respectful to other students, and 80% of survey participants indicated that the English Etiquette Videos help them want to respect students from other countries.

Expect Excellence Posters. The ideas of positivity, rewards and agency center around the atmosphere of excellence that the institution is hoping to create. During the time of English Only, placards that prohibited native-language use were posted at several points around the building. Those placards have been replaced with Expect Excellence Posters. These posters display quotes defining excellence that are written by notable individuals. For example, the following quote by Steve Jobs, “We don't get a chance to do that many things, and every one

should be really excellent" (Morris, 2008). The teachers are also notified and asked to incorporate the quote into their lectures. While one teacher and a few students in the focus groups were doubtful as to whether the posters were making much of a difference, other teachers and many students in the survey were optimistic about their impact. One teacher stated that the impact of the posters simply lies in the "change of labeling" that is helping immerse students in a culture of excellence. In the survey, the students indicated that the posters were indeed making an impact. Almost 70% of students agreed that the posters were helping them desire to become better students and almost 80% said that they help them think about what excellence means.

Defining Excellence Contest. Alongside famous individuals' posters, students' quotes and pictures are also displayed. These students' quotes are selected as part of the Defining Excellence Contest**.** This initiative has allowed students to reflect more on the concept of excellence. A recent submission illustrates the thought students put into their quotes. This student wrote "Excellence is not perfection, but seeking to improve every day in the little things."

Teachers commented on the value of having students reflect on what excellence means to them. One teacher indicated that the contest is another of the several things that are contributing to a better learning environment and a culture of excellence. The students echoed the feelings of the teachers. One student in the focus group reflected on how much he enjoyed reading other students' perspectives on excellence, which were all different than his own. He stated "I think it was a great experience. It's just amazing. I love it." His comments aligned with the opinions of nearly 80% of the survey respondents who indicated that the Defining Excellence Contest helps them think about what excellence means and about how they can become better students.

Objective 2: Creating Situations for Language Use

Due to the new roles of teachers as facilitators, the time and resources previously used for rule-enforcement are now being used for encouragement. In order to encourage English use, two initiatives were designed to provide opportunities for students to use English outside of class: English for Lunch and TalkAbouts.

English for Lunch. Once a week, an activity is held during lunch time that prompts students to use English in fun and varied ways. Some examples of activities held in the past include games such as paper airplane contests, teamwork activities such as puzzles students must solve together, board games and trivia. In terms of numbers, this is a very successful initiative. The survey results indicated that only two respondents had not attended the activity over the previous semester, and the majority of the survey respondents had attended more than once. Teachers reported that 30 to 40 percent of the student body attended on any given week.

All teachers spoke positively about the activity and emphasized the enthusiasm that they encountered in their students in relation to this initiative. Student-reported reasons for attendance included being with friends, participating in the activities, meeting new people and practicing English. Students in both the survey and the focus groups reported that the activities were enjoyable. Some students at the focus groups echoed that as well. One student stated "I can just spend my time doing something else…but I prefer to participate in English for lunch."

TalkAbouts. Another initiative provided opportunities for English use on a more individual level. TalkAbouts allowed interns to interview students on several thought-provoking topics related to language learning and provided students with the opportunity to interact with a native speaker. However, these interviews have not been conducted for some time. Consequently, there is no data to speak of in order to determine its level of success. Even though English for Lunch provides students with a successful weekly opportunity for English use, it is currently the only

opportunity actively and regularly being provided at the school.

Objective 3: Recognizing Students for English Use

In addition to providing opportunities for English use and rather than creating punishments for L1 use, the administration has focused on providing rewards for English use. Two kinds of rewards are offered: English Thank You Cards and Expect Excellence Scholarships.

English Thank You Cards. These cards are a direct answer to the punishment cards used during the time of the English Only policy. As discussed earlier, these cards, which are traded in for prizes, are used to reward English use as well as participation in other initiatives such as English for Lunch and TalkAbouts. Teachers indicated how these cards are very motivating for the students. They also spoke of their own motivation to hand them out. One teacher mentioned, "Sometimes we'll just kind of stand by the door and listen…so that we can give cards." Teachers remarked that they enjoyed rewarding students and expressed general approval of the initiative. In the survey, 76% of students indicated that these cards increase their desire to speak English, and in the focus groups some students indicated that the cards are good motivators. These examples contrast the reported frustration that teachers and students felt surrounding the previously-used punishment cards.

Expect Excellence Scholarships. Every semester several Expect Excellence Scholarships are offered. These half-tuition scholarships are offered to students who, in addition to possessing excellent grades and attendance, are examples of excellence in English use and learning. In their interviews, teachers spoke very positively regarding the scholarships and believed them to be extremely motivating to the students. Out of all the initiatives discussed, the scholarships seemed to ignite a great deal of pride in the teachers. They felt that these awards were unique, generous, and they were happy to have the opportunity to provide such an impactful reward to students. In

the survey, the students also reported a high level of motivation to receive them. Almost 90% of the survey respondents indicated that they want to become better students in order to receive a scholarship. This was echoed in the focus groups, where students reported strong motivation to speak English whenever possible, keep perfect attendance records, become involved, and maintain high grades in order to be considered for an award.

Objective 4: Help Students Take Responsibility for Their Language Learning

The principle of learner autonomy is central to the philosophy behind Expect Excellence. The rewards and opportunities provided all exist in order to encourage students' proper use of their autonomy. Students are expected to take responsibility over their learning while the teachers' role is to be a facilitator. In the discussions with the students and teachers, it was clear that students were reminded of, and understood their and their teachers' roles. Teachers were unified in stating that students are in charge of their language use, and, at several points throughout the focus groups, students remarked on their knowledge that their success is in their own hands.

Self-Regulation Lessons. A structured way in which teachers communicate students' responsibilities and goals is through the Self-Regulation Lessons. These lessons are designed to teach students how to study effectively and become self-regulated learners. Students and teachers both felt positively towards the lessons. Teachers spoke of the power they have to help students understand their responsibilities. One teacher observed that many students with whom he has been in contact come from backgrounds in which students' success is seen as the teachers' responsibility. He commented that the principles taught in these lessons have helped some students have a change of perspective as they learn to become self-regulated learners.

Survey respondents indicated that they use the ideas learned in the lessons in their own

personal studies (72%), and felt that these lessons help them become better students (84%). Some students in the focus groups commented on the renewed sense of purpose they acquired as they received the lessons. One student remarked,

> They say, okay you are here to learn English, you are here to achieve your goals and you are here to go to the college. So when they give me those lessons I feel like, okay I need to focus. I need to stop speaking Spanish. So that helped me a lot.

English Use

Even though the actual amount of English that students are speaking in the halls is beyond the scope of this research, it is worthwhile to explore the data collected. There was no consensus as to whether English use has increased with the implementation of Expect Excellence. Students' self-reports of English use in the school building are evenly spread from 0% of the time to 100% of the time, and there is no English-use data from the time of the institution's English Only policy to which to compare these numbers. However, by allowing students to be responsible for their own learning, measuring success is not as simple as calculating the amount of English being spoken. One administrator summarized it best by saying, "If the metric is, are people speaking English less or more, I can't say that I'm confident in there being a significant change one way or another, but if the measured difference or outcome is just a difference in tone or in positivity, then [there is] definitely more of a positive, encouraging culture."

Implementation Concerns

As with any program, meeting the individual needs of every student and perfectly executing every initiative will always continue to be a work in progress. The challenges discussed below can serve as information for educators considering English Only alternatives.

Teachers' implementation. When asked regarding the objectives of the Expect Excellence initiatives, teachers' responses were unified. However, the objectives were not officially articulated or put on paper until this research was being conducted. In addition, some uncertainty among some teachers was noted as to which initiatives were part of the Expect Excellence effort. Among the students, a sometimes inconsistent implementation of some in-class initiatives was communicated. For example, there were instances in which individual teachers glossed over or forgot to implement the quotes contest or the self-regulation lessons. In this instance these initiatives made little impact in theses students' academic lives. These issues reflect the fact that these programs are still relatively new and need to continue to be fine-tuned.

Extrinsic Rewards. A couple of issues arose among the students as Thank You Cards and Scholarships were discussed**.** Some students mentioned that standing outside of teachers' offices and speaking English would help them quickly accumulate more cards. While not inherently problematic, a subset of less motivated students had been known to engage in this behavior and then promptly start speaking their L1 in other parts of the building. On the other hand, other students speaking English in various parts of the building were at times not recognized for their efforts. Even though focus group participants expressed that the true reward was (and should be) in the language gains themselves, some still felt that a revision to the way the cards were distributed would be welcomed.

In the focus groups as in the surveys an intense motivation was expressed to be excellent in order to be considered for a scholarship. However, teachers reported that in some students, this drive decreased after they received a scholarship.

Opportunities for Academic-level students. As mentioned before, English for Lunch successfully provides opportunities for English use. However, Academic-level students wished

that there was an opportunity more suited to their academic level and goals. As a result, they preferred to study on their own or tried to create their own opportunities for English use. While the behavior of these Academic-level students illustrates the culture of excellence that the institution is working to establish, these students still wished that there were academic opportunities for them at the institutional level.

Due to the always challenging task of bringing hundreds of students and teachers together to learn, every institution and program will have difficulties at any given time. However, despite these flaws stemming from individual teachers and students, the results indicate that Expect Excellence and its initiatives are meeting their stated objectives.

Discussion

Notwithstanding the current success of this effort, the objectives of the Expect Excellence initiatives could be better met if some implementation issues can be addressed. Below are suggestions addressing the issues discussed in the focus groups and interviews.

Rewarding True Excellence

In their interactions with the reward initiatives of Expect Excellence, some focus group participants indicated that they lost desire to participate when (1) they felt that their efforts were not recognized, and (2) when they felt that other students were recognized by taking advantage of the system. In order to minimize this loss of motivation the following suggestions are given.

Even Distribution of English Thank You Cards

The school can assign a different teacher or administrator to walk the halls of the school building at different times each day can create an unpredictable way of rewarding students who consistently use English in the building. Teachers can also be encouraged to spend more time outside their offices and interact with students throughout the day.

Adjust Expectations of Extrinsic Rewards

Even though every precaution can be taken in order to fairly give out rewards, mistakes (real or perceived) will be made. In order to help students adjust their expectations regarding the extrinsic rewards offered at the school, it would be beneficial to stress the fact that an expectation of excellence is to be maintained regardless of extrinsic rewards received, even when, in the students' opinion, rewards may seem unfairly given. Facilitating a paradigm shift in the students where rewards are seen as extra or bonus tokens of appreciation for contributing to the school's environment of excellence, would perhaps less deeply impact motivation levels when rewards are not acquired as desired.

Teacher Education

Many of the previously discussed issues seemed to stem from individual teachers' inconsistent or incomplete implementation of the initiatives. This seems to suggest a need for increased education for the teachers about the initiatives and their proper implementation. In order to ensure that all teachers properly implement all of the initiatives, a teacher training on the initiatives can occur before the start of classes. During this training, the objectives and initiatives can be detailed. Expectations can be communicated and a plan for follow-up can be outlined.

Another way to ensure that the initiatives are consistently and expertly executed is to perhaps select certain teachers to be in charge of teaching a particular Self-Regulation Lesson, or introducing a particular etiquette video to a few classes. This might be more beneficial than one teacher teaching all lessons and introducing all videos to one class. Alternatively, assemblies introducing some of these concepts to the student body at large may also be practical.

Academic-level Opportunities

Focus groups participants communicated a desire for academic-level opportunities. A

return of the TalkAbouts initiative may address this lack. The opportunity to interact with a native speaker on a deeper level would indeed benefit both Foundations and Academic level-students. Alternatively, opportunities for mentoring and leadership would be available if academic-level students were to conduct TalkAbouts. Another possible opportunity is to invite professors or other professionals from the community to speak in an ongoing lecture series. This would give Academic-level students the opportunity to hear genuine academic English, and to practice note-taking and listening skills. Teachers can also incorporate these lectures into their curricula by assigning written summaries or organizing group discussions. Other opportunities for Academic-level students might include academic reading and discussion groups, or essay contests on topics important to the school such as excellence.

Conclusion

In an effort to improve its learning environment, a large IEP in the western United States has discontinued an English Only policy in favor of the Expect Excellence initiatives. While not without its flaws, this change has been generally well-received and has created a positive influence on the environment at the school. In addition, it has been shown that the other stated Expect Excellence objectives of providing students with autonomy and opportunities for English use as well as rewarding students for their language use are being met.

The changes in policy that this IEP has made can serve as a model to other schools who are reconsidering their language policies. This study shows that when implemented well, initiatives such as these can help schools improve their environment by lowering stress, increasing positivity, and encouraging a more supportive and harmonious relationship between teachers and students, all without sacrificing a high standard of learning.

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Appendix A

Student Survey

ExpectExcellenceSurvey

What is your level at the English Language Center (ELC)?

▼

What is your native language?

- Spanish
- Korean
- Portuguese
- Chinese
- Japanese
- Other (write below)

For how many semesters have you studied at the English Language Center (ELC)?

- I am a new student
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

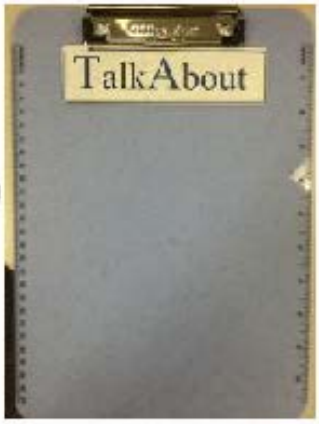
Which of the following Expect Excellence initiatives do you know about? (Check the boxes on the left of the pictures)

Self-Regulation lessons

English Thank You cards

Principles of Self Regulated Learning:
Developing Language Learning Plans

Talk Abouts



Expect Excellence Scholarships

Expect Excellence posters

Defining Excellence contest

English for Lunch

English Etiquette videos

I don't know about any of these initiatives

Drag the bar to show how much you know about the following ELC initiatives:

	Almost nothing	A little bit	Some	Quite a bit	A lot
	1	2	3	4	5
English Thank You cards					
Talk Abouts					
Expect Excellence posters					
Defining Excellence contest					
English for Lunch					

English Etiquette videos				
Self-Regulation Lessons				
Expect Excellence Scholarships				

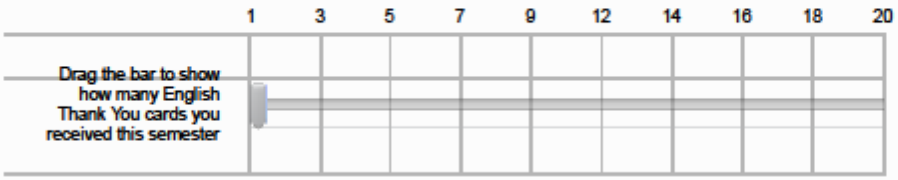
How and where can you receive English Thank You cards? (Check all that apply)

- [ ] Speaking English in the ELC (outside of class)
- [ ] In my classes from my teacher
- [ ] At English for Lunch
- [ ] Doing a Talk About
- [ ] Other (write below)
- [ ] I don't know how or where to receive English Thank You cards

How did you receive English Thank You cards last semester? (Check all that apply)

- [ ] Speaking English in the ELC (outside of class)
- [ ] In my classes from my teacher
- [ ] At English for Lunch
- [ ] Doing a Talk About
- [ ] Other (write below)
- [ ] I did not receive English Thank You cards this semester

How many English Thank You cards do you think you received last semester



How many Talk Abouts did you do last semester?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

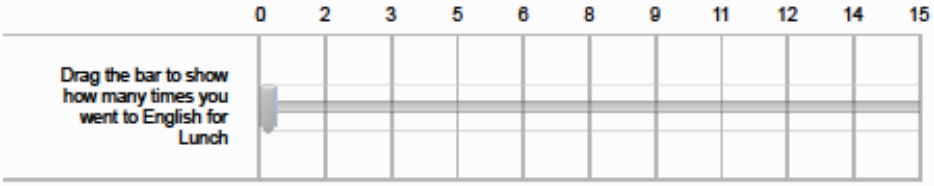
Why did you not do a Talk About?

- I didn't know how
- I was too busy
- I was nervous
- It wasn't important to me
- Other (write below)

Why did you do a Talk About?

- To get a thank-you card
- To get an answer to a question
- To get help with homework (or a conversation log)
- To talk with a native speaker
- To make a new friend
- Other (write below)

How many times did you go to English for Lunch last semester?



Why did you not come back to English for Lunch?

- [ ] I was too busy
- [ ] I didn't have anyone to go with
- [ ] I didn't like the activity
- [ ] It was boring
- [ ] I didn't understand
- [ ] I felt nervous
- [ ] Other (write below)

Why didn't you go to English for Lunch?

- [ ] I was too busy
- [ ] I didn't have anyone to go with
- [ ] I didn't like the activity
- [ ] It was boring
- [ ] I didn't understand
- [ ] I felt nervous
- [ ] Other (write below)

Why did you go to English for Lunch?

- [ ] To get a Thank You card
- [ ] To get food
- [ ] To be with friends
- [ ] To play the games
- [ ] To meet new people
- [ ] Other (write below)

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I understand why the ELC has English Thank You cards	○	○	○	○	○
English Thank You cards help me want to speak English in the ELC	○	○	○	○	○
If there were no English Thank You cards, I would speak less English in the ELC	○	○	○	○	○
If I am speaking my native language in the ELC and I see a teacher coming, I start speaking in English in order to get an English Thank You card	○	○	○	○	○
I understand why the ELC has Talk Abouts	○	○	○	○	○
I want to do more Talk Abouts in the future	○	○	○	○	○
After doing a Talk About, I feel less nervous about talking with a native speaker	○	○	○	○	○
Doing Talk Abouts help me want to be a better student	○	○	○	○	○
I understand why the ELC has Expect Excellence posters	○	○	○	○	○
The Expect Excellence posters help me want to be a better student	○	○	○	○	○
The Defining Excellence contest helps me think about what excellence means	○	○	○	○	○
The Defining Excellence contest helps me think about how I can become a better student	○	○	○	○	○

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

	» Strongly Disagree	» Disagree	» Neither Agree nor Disagree	» Agree	» Strongly Agree

I understand why the ELC has English for Lunch	○	○	○	○	○
I understand why the ELC has English Etiquette videos	○	○	○	○	○
The English Etiquette videos help me want to speak English more often	○	○	○	○	○
The English Etiquette videos help me want to respect classmates from other countries	○	○	○	○	○
I understand why the ELC has Self-Regulation lessons	○	○	○	○	○
The Self-Regulation lessons help me know how to be a better student	○	○	○	○	○
When I study English, I use the ideas I learned from the Self-Regulation lessons	○	○	○	○	○
The Self-Regulation lessons help me want to be a better student	○	○	○	○	○
I am a better student because of the Self-Regulation lessons	○	○	○	○	○
I understand why the ELC has the Expect Excellence scholarships	○	○	○	○	○
I want to become a better student so that I can receive an Expect Excellence scholarship	○	○	○	○	○

Drag the bar to rate these questions from 0% to 100% of the time

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
In the ELC, what percentage of the time do you speak English? (outside of class)											
In the ELC, what percentage of the time do you speak English with people who have the same native language as you? (outside of class)											

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know what the Expect Excellence initiatives are
The Expect Excellence initiatives motivate me to become a better student	○	○	○	○	○	○
The Expect Excellence initiatives motivate me to speak more English	○	○	○	○	○	○
The Expect Excellence initiatives help me meet my English-learning goals	○	○	○	○	○	○

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

	strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am motivated to study English	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. Let's talk in general about the Expect Excellence initiatives. (Give examples of what the initiatives are). What do you think of them?

2. Can you tell me in your own words the overall goals/objectives of the Expect Excellence initiatives?

3. Let's now focus more on these three initiatives (English Thank You cards, English for Lunch, Talk Abouts). Can you tell me about your experiences with them?

4. Let's now focus on these initiatives (English Etiquette videos, Self-Regulation lessons, Expect Excellence quotes and contest, scholarships). Can you tell me about your experiences with them?

5. Let's talk about speaking English in the ELC building when you are not in class. What are the rules? How do you balance speaking your native tongue and English in the halls?

6. Finally, let's talk about the environment in the halls of the ELC. For example, how do you feel when you talk with your friends or study in the halls? How do you feel when you are in the halls and you see a teacher?

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me in your own words the overall goals/objectives of the Expect Excellence initiatives?

2. In your own words, what is the ELC English use policy outside of class?

3. How do you react to students speaking their native tongue in the halls of the ELC?

4. Can you describe the learning environment in the halls of the ELC during English Only and during Expect Excellence?

5. Have you noticed any changes in the teachers/students since the start of Expect Excellence? What do you attribute this to?

6. What initiative have you seen create the most change in the school or in a student? What change did it make?

7. Do you think that the Expect Excellence initiatives affect students' language use outside of class? If so, how? Which initiatives in particular?

8. Is there anything else you'd like to mention?