

Spanish students' perceptions of how they demonstrate their teachers' positive impact on them to maintain their interest

Comfort Pratt

Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Texas Tech University, United States

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Abstract

Student attrition rates in K-12 and college Spanish programs in the United States continue to follow a disconcerting trend. While motivational and pedagogical interventions have been investigated, the student–teacher dynamic has not been sufficiently explored as a solution to the problem. A recent study (Pratt, 2023) on Spanish teachers' perceptions revealed that the indicators of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language are students' interest, motivations, feedback, teacher–student relationships, and engagement in classroom activities and academic success. This follow-up study ascertained what the students themselves believe they do to demonstrate their teachers' positive impact on them to maintain their interest. An online survey was administered to one hundred and one middle school, high school, and lower-level college Spanish students, and the findings revealed that the indicators are: (1) participate in class, do their work, ask more questions, and smile; (2) tell teachers when they are doing a good job; (3) show teachers respect and listen to them; (4) work beyond the requirements; (5) thank teachers and give them gifts; (6) do nothing; (7) talk to teachers often; (8) take more classes with teachers; and (9) rate teachers high in course evaluations. The role of these findings in the execution of effective counteractions to the problem cannot be underestimated.

Keywords discontinuation of the study of Spanish, indicators of students' continued interest, maintenance of students' interest in Spanish, Spanish students' perceptions, Spanish teachers' positive impact on their students

1. Introduction

In 1980, noted author Paul Simon wrote:

Perhaps we should erect a sign at each port of entry into the United States:

WELCOME TO THE
UNITED STATES
ONE OF THE FEW NATIONS
WHICH DOES NOT PROVIDE
ITS STUDENTS EXPOSURE TO
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The advantage of the sign would not be the information it would convey to our foreign guests—because they already know that—but the information it would convey to our own citizens. For at a time when the national need suggests that we should be increasing the exposure of our citizens to other languages and cultures, that exposure is declining. And the decline is costly to the nation. Cultural isolation is a luxury the United States can no longer afford. (p. 32)

Despite the findings of many studies over the course of many decades regarding the indispensability of foreign language literacy in the United States, in line with the

tradition in the rest of the world, the status of foreign languages in the country continues to be an issue of great concern as enrollments continue on a downward trend. According to the Modern Language Association (MLA), only 7.5% of college students were studying foreign languages in 2016, down from 8.1% in 2013, 9.1% in 2006, and over 10% in the 1960s and 1970s (Sylvia, 2020). Furthermore, the MLA reported that enrollments plummeted an unprecedented 16.6% between fall 2016 and fall 2021, with an approximately 236,000-student drop that diminished the head count to about what it was in 1998 (Quinn, 2023). Quinn (2023) also reported that between 2009 and 2021, the total percentage drop was 29.3%. According to the 2017 National K–12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey report (American Councils for International Education, 2017), only 20% of the school-age population were studying foreign languages, and only 11 states required foreign languages. There were no foreign language graduation requirements in sixteen states, and foreign languages could be replaced with other courses in 24 states. This is in stark contrast to other countries. Ninety-two percent of school children in Europe study foreign languages. Therefore, while the rest of the world is increasing its emphasis on foreign language study, the United States is experiencing reductions on all fronts, including program cancellations, teacher shortages, and demotivation among students.

Although Spanish has the highest enrollments at both the K–12 and college levels, it has also experienced substantial reductions in enrollments. Currently, Spanish has 69.21% of K–12 foreign language enrollments, totaling 7,363,125, and approximately half of the foreign language students at the college level, totaling 580,000 (Quinn, 2023), which represents a decrease of 18% from 5 years ago. Meanwhile, the status of Spanish continues to rise globally with about 486 million native speakers. It is used as the official language in 20 countries and is currently the world's second most-spoken native language after Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, it follows English, Mandarin Chinese, and Hindustani as the fourth most-spoken language overall in the world. Also of concern for the status of Spanish is the fact that students are still not studying it long enough to attain advanced and degree levels, because only a small percentage specialize in it. Barnwell (2008) reported that one out of three high school students who began to study Spanish discontinued it in a year, two out of three discontinued after the second year, and 90% dropped it before they reached the fourth year, meaning that most students discontinued the study of Spanish before they acquired communicative competence, or “worthwhile proficiency” as he described it (p. 236). Howard (2007), Pratt (2010, 2012), and Pratt and Rodríguez García (2022) also reported that the ratio of elementary to advanced Spanish in college was 5:1, meaning that for several years, out of every five students who study elementary Spanish, only one continues to advanced Spanish. The effect of these trends on the university degrees conferred is disconcerting. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' Institute of Education Sciences (2023) reports, while the total number of bachelor's degrees conferred has been increasing consistently over the years, the number of degrees in Spanish has been consistently falling. In 2004–2005, out of 1,439,264 bachelor's degrees conferred, 8,304 were in Spanish. In 2009–2010, out of 1,649,919 bachelor's degrees conferred, 9,138 were in Spanish, equivalent to a percentage change of 10%. However, while the overall number of degrees conferred increased to 1,894,969 in 2014–2015, degrees in Spanish decreased to 7,508, equivalent to a minus 17.8% change. Then in 2017–2018, while the overall number of degrees conferred increased to 1,980,665, degrees in Spanish underwent a further decrease to 6,011, which was a further percentage change of minus 19.94%. The repercussions on teacher shortage are tremendous, as fewer graduates leads to fewer qualified teachers. Federal statistics released in 2017 reported that 44 states in addition to Washington, DC have a shortage of qualified foreign language teachers (Stein-Smith, 2019).

While some of the causes of the discontinuation of the study of Spanish are dependent on administrative, political, ideological, and other external factors that have received some attention in the literature, the focus of this investigation is on the dimension that relates to classroom-based issues. In this regard, loss of motivation has been at the forefront due to the demonstrated relevance of motivational theories to the study of foreign languages, with particular reference to intrinsic, integrative, extrinsic, and instrumental motivations (Bateman & de Almeida

Oliveira, 2014; Busse & Walter, 2013; Clément et al., 1994; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 1991; Dörnyei, 1990; Dos Santos, 2021; Gallardo-del-Puerto & Blanco-Suárez, 2021; Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner et al., 1979; Kelm, 2017; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Myers, 1978; Noels et al., 2000; Pratt, 2010, 2012; Pratt et al., 2009; Ramage, 1990; Skehan, 1989). Teachers' target-language proficiency and instructional abilities have also captured substantial attention due to the ample literature pointing to deficiencies in the preparation of teachers, the low target-language proficiency levels among teachers, instructional incompetence, and inappropriate curricula (Barreneche, 2011; Egnatz, 2017; Hlas, 2016; Kissau et al., 2022; Leonard & Bonilla, 2022; Pearson et al., 2006; Pratt, 2018; Pratt & Rodríguez García, 2022; Salvadores Merino, 2019; Swanson, 2010, 2014; Van Patten & Simonsen, 2022; Vyn et al., 2019; Ziemann, 2016).

The literature also emphasizes the importance of the teacher–student dynamic for continuance, but its focus has been limited. Thus far, it has centered on the development of positive interactions and understanding, positing that it is more likely that students will continue studying Spanish if the student–teacher relationship is positive (Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Moore, 2005; Moskowitz, 1976; Moskowitz et al., 2022; Papalia & Zampogna, 1972; Pratt, 2010, 2023; Speiller, 1988; Tinto, 1975; Wei et al., 2009; Wesely, 2010). While this aspect of the student-teacher dynamic has captured attention over a long period of time, there is a dearth of research on another aspect of the dynamic that plays a central role in students' decision-making processes and must be explored thoroughly, in order to ensure that Spanish educators are not in the dark in terms of what indicators to look for to ensure that their students will continue to study the language. The aspect referred to here is how students indicate to their teachers that they are influencing them positively to keep them interested in the study of the language.

Pratt (2023) investigated Spanish teachers' perceptions about their ability to impact their students positively to keep them interested in the language, and reported that the student behaviors that the teachers believed indicated to them that they were succeeding in maintaining the students' interest in Spanish were their interest in their classes and the language, their motivation toward the language, their feedback, the teacher–student relationships, and the students' engagement in classroom activities and academic success. However, teachers' perceptions of students' intentions have been questionable due to significant disparities that have been reported by many studies (Horwitz, 2000; Papalia & Zampogna, 1972; Pratt, 2010; Pratt et al., 2009), which have called for some sort of meeting of the minds so that teachers and students can be on the same page. In view of this, the study recommended that there should be a follow-up study involving students to investigate their perceptions and determine where they coincide with the teachers and what the differences are. Therefore, the goal of this study was to address this lacuna in the literature by investigating the students' own perceptions regarding what they do to indicate to the teachers that they influence them positively to keep them interested in the study of Spanish.

The focus on students in this study is of utmost importance. As Van Wart et al. (2020) emphasized, “While there are different perspectives of the learning process such as learning achievement and faculty perspectives, students’ perspectives are especially critical since they are ultimately the *raison d’être* of the educational endeavor” (para. 1). Dawson et al. (2019) added that when it comes to students’ education, the critical nature of their perspectives cannot be underestimated, because they provide first-hand and invaluable insights into their expectations, experiences, and outcomes (para. 1). The research questions were:

1. Do Spanish students believe that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language?
2. What do Spanish students do to indicate their teachers’ positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the students’ perceptions and those of their teachers?

Given the overwhelmingly positive response given by the teachers in Pratt (2023) regarding their impact on their students, the hypothesis was that the students’ response would be overwhelmingly positive. Furthermore, based on the results of previous comparisons between Spanish teachers’ and students’ responses regarding their behaviors and intentions (mentioned previously), the author also hypothesized that there would be differences between the students’ and teachers’ perceptions.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited through their school districts and college announcement platforms. One hundred and one middle school, high school, and lower-level Spanish students participated. The participants completed via Qualtrics an online survey developed by the researcher. The participants were diverse in terms of age, gender, grade level, and ethnic affiliation. Respondents who answered just a fraction of the questions were eliminated, and 82 participants were included in the study. Sixty of them (73.17%) identified as female and 22 (26.83%) identified as male. Twenty-seven (32.93%) were in the 10–15 age range, 48 (58.54%) were in the 16–21 age range, and the remaining participants were between the ages of 22 and 50. All the participants were between 10 and 50 years old, and the highest percentage was in the 16–21 age group. Forty-four (53.66%) identified as Hispanic, 29 (35.37%) as Caucasian, five (6.10%) as Asian or other Pacific Islander, three (3.66%) as Black or African American, and one (1.22%) as Native American. In terms of their levels of education, 49 (59.76%) were in high school, 17 (20.73%) were in middle school, and 16 (19.51%) were in college. The number of years they have been studying Spanish ranged from less than 1 year to 17 years. Twenty-five (30.49%) were native speakers of Spanish and 57 (69.51%) were non-native speakers. Twenty (24.39%) were fluent in Spanish and 62 (75.61%) were not fluent. With regard to the effectiveness of their Spanish classes, 12 (14.63%)

indicated that they were very effective, 55 (67.07%) believed they were effective, eight (9.76%) thought they were neither effective nor ineffective, three (3.66%) indicated that they were ineffective, and three (3.66%) reported that they were very ineffective. Sixty-four (78.05%) indicated that they wanted to continue studying Spanish, 17 (20.73%) responded in the negative, and one person did not respond.

2.2. Instruments

One survey instrument was used for the study. It was an online questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. Ten of them were multiple-choice and the other 10 were open-ended. They were used to solicit information regarding both demographics and academic experiences (see appendix for the entire questionnaire). The instrument was developed by the investigator based on previous research on the continuation/discontinuation decision among students of foreign languages (Mouradian, 2021; Pratt, 2010, 2023; Pratt et al., 2009; Ramage, 1990; Ryan, 2018; Snow, 2017; Speiller, 1988; Wesely, 2010).

2.3. Analysis

The analysis was conducted using a mixed-method approach, and SPSS was used for the statistical analysis. First, the participants’ responses to Question 13 were used to answer Research Question 1: “Do Spanish students believe that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language?” Then the inter-variable correlations were determined. The responses to Question 14 were extracted and coded inductively and used to answer Research Question 2: “What do Spanish students do to indicate their teachers’ positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language?” Thematic analysis was conducted due to the exploratory nature of the study. Given the need for the specific answers of the students to be highlighted, the process codes were used instead of creating themes. The students’ responses to Research Question 2 were then compared to the teachers’ responses in Pratt (2023) to answer Research Question 3: “What are the similarities and differences between the students’ perceptions and those of their teachers?” In order to facilitate the comparison, the students’ semantic themes were recategorized into the themes that were developed in Pratt et al. (2020) and Pratt (2023).

3. Findings

3.1. Do Spanish students believe that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language?

For this question, out of the 82 participants who completed the survey fully, 75 of them (91.46%) answered in the affirmative and 7 (8.54%) answered in the negative, demonstrating that the students overwhelmingly believed that the teachers influenced them positively to keep them interested in the language. A more detailed review of those who responded positively revealed that 55 (73.33%) of them were female, 41 (54.67%) identified as Hispanic, 26 (34.67%) were Caucasian, five (6.67%) were Asian or

Pacific Islander, two (2.67%) were Black or African American, and one (1.33%) was Native American. Forty-four (58.67%) were in high school, 16 (21.33%) were in middle school, and 15 (20%) were in college. Twenty-two (29.33%) were native speakers of Spanish and 19 (25.33%) were fluent speakers of Spanish. Their ages ranged from 10 to 50 years, and they had studied Spanish for periods ranging from less than 1 year to 17 years. With regard to the effectiveness of their Spanish classes, 12 (16%) believed they were very effective, 55 (73.33%) believed they were effective, three (4%) thought they were neither effective nor ineffective, three (4%) said they were ineffective, and two (2.67%) said they were very ineffective.

Regarding the students who answered in the negative, 71.43% were female, 42.86% identified as Hispanic, 42.86% as Caucasian, and 14.29% as Black or African American. Regarding schooling, 71.43% were high school students, 14.29% were in middle school, 14.29% were in college, 42.86% were native speakers and 14.29% were fluent speakers. Their ages ranged from 11 to 21 years, and they had studied Spanish for periods ranging from 3 to 5 years. With regard to the effectiveness of their Spanish classes, 14.29% believed they were very effective, 28.57% indicated that they were effective, 57.14% thought they were neither effective nor ineffective, and 14.29% said they were very ineffective.

The analysis demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between whether or not students believed

their teachers had a positive impact on them to maintain their interest and the level of effectiveness of their Spanish courses ($r = .26, p < .05$). That means the more effective the classes were, the more positive the teachers' impact on them was to maintain their interest. There was also a marginal significant relationship between whether or not the teachers had a positive impact on them and their desire to continue studying Spanish ($r = .20, p = .079$). That means the more positive the teachers' impact on them was, the more likely they were to continue to study Spanish. There was a significant correlation between native Spanish speaker status and students' grade levels ($r = .49, p < .001$), meaning that native Spanish speakers were more likely to study Spanish at a younger age. Native speaker status also significantly correlated with whether or not they wanted to continue studying Spanish ($r = .28, p < .05$), which means native Spanish speakers were more likely to continue to study Spanish. Fluency in Spanish correlated significantly with age ($r = .48, p < .001$), meaning that older speakers were more fluent in Spanish. Fluency in Spanish correlated significantly with students' desire to continue ($r = .23, p < .05$), meaning that students who were fluent in Spanish were more likely to continue studying the language. Finally, the level of effectiveness of the classes correlated significantly with the desire to continue to study Spanish ($r = .33, p < .01$), meaning that the more effective the classes were, the more likely the students were to continue to study Spanish (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlation coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Positive impact	1	.024	.000	-.029	.047	-.261*	.199
2. Age		1	.724**	.390**	.482**	.045	.076
3. Level of education			1	.488**	.571**	.094	.057
4. Native speaker of Spanish				1	.796**	.121	.279*
5. Fluent in Spanish					1	.068	.225*
6. Level of effectiveness of Spanish classes						1	-.327**
7. Continuation of the study of Spanish							1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

3.2. What do Spanish students do to indicate that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language?

Due to the fact that the study sought to reveal the students' voices directly, inductive coding was used for the qualitative data. One hundred and fifteen excerpts were extracted from the data. Care was taken to ensure that no a priori codes were used in order to prevent any influence from the previous study on teachers' perceptions (Pratt, 2023) and to be able to explore thoroughly this unexplored issue. Given that survey Question 14 required a direct answer to this research question and the requested information was not hidden, descriptive coding in the form of process coding was used. In a few cases where the information was not obvious, interpretive coding was used.

In vivo coding was used in order to capture the students' actual words and use them to derive the code names, thus capturing the essence of what the students were communicating. The coding and sorting were conducted with Microsoft Word Review. The original coding produced an initial set of 18 codes, and the subsequent line-by-line coding facilitated the refinement of the codes and the capture of further details that pertained to them. The process produced a final set of nine semantic themes that specified exactly what the students believed they did to show their teachers' positive impact on them. Semantic themes were used because the author was more interested in what the participants explicitly wrote than in identifying latent meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After that, the frequencies were assigned (see Table 2).

Table 2. Semantic themes

Semantic Themes	No. of Excerpts	Percentage of Total Number of Excerpts
1. Participate in class, do their work, ask more questions, and smile.	40	34.78%
2. Tell them when they are doing a good job.	30	26.09%
3. Show them respect and listen to them.	12	10.43%
4. Work beyond the requirements.	11	9.57%
5. Thank them and give them gifts.	7	6.09%
6. Do nothing.	7	6.09%
7. Talk to them often.	6	5.22%
8. Take more classes with them.	1	0.87%
9. Rate them high in course evaluations.	1	0.87%

Participate in class, do their work, ask more questions, and smile referred to the students making a conscious effort to participate fully in class, stay engaged in the activities, do the work they were required to do, and ask more questions in order to learn more. *Tell them when they are doing a good job* referred to when the students told teachers directly that they were doing a good job, when they met with their teachers during office hours, at the end of the course, and when they enjoyed an assignment. *Show them respect and listen to them* included various things the students did to show the teachers how much they respected them for their positive impact and listening to what they said and following directions. *Work beyond the requirements* encompassed the attempts the students made to use the language even when they were not required to do so and reading unassigned books to learn more. *Thank them and give them gifts* included the efforts they made to express their gratitude either by telling the teachers or writing notes to them and giving them gifts. *Do nothing* referred to when the students did nothing to show their interest in continuing to study the language. *Talk to them often* referred to the efforts the students made to ensure that they communicated constantly with the teachers. *Take more classes with them* referred to when they chose to take more classes with the teachers who had a positive impact on them. Finally, *rate them high in course evaluations* referred to the students giving high points to the teachers in official course evaluations at the end of the semester.

3.3. What are the similarities and differences between the students’ perceptions and the teachers’ perceptions?

The semantic themes were recategorized based on the themes that were used in Pratt et al. (2020) and Pratt (2023) in order to facilitate the comparison of the students’ perceptions to the teachers’ perceptions (see Table 3). Eighty-eight excerpts were recategorized. There were similarities between the students’ perceptions and the teachers’ perceptions with regard to classroom engagement and academic achievement, positive feedback, student interest, motivation, and teacher–student relationships.

Table 3. Students’ Perceptions Based on Previous Themes

Students’ Perceptions	No of Excerpts
1. Engagement and academic achievement	40
2. Positive feedback	24
3. Student interest	10
4. Motivation	8
5. Teacher-student relationships	6
6. No impact	0

However, the students also had other indicators of their teachers’ positive impact on them that the teachers did not mention. Twenty-seven excerpts did not fit into any of the predetermined categories (see Table 4). They were *show them respect and listen to them; thank them and give them gifts; do nothing; and rate them high in course evaluations* (see explanation under 3.2 above).

Table 4. Semantic Themes Not Covered by Teachers’ Perceptions

Students’ Perceptions	No. of Excerpts
Show them respect and listen to them.	12
Thank them and give them gifts.	7
Do nothing.	7
Rate them high in course evaluations.	1

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study was conducted in order to ascertain if Spanish students believe that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language, determine what the students do to indicate that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the study of Spanish, and compare the students’ perceptions to the results of a previous study on teachers’ perceptions.

First of all, the study discovered that the students overwhelmingly believe that their teachers influence them positively to help them stay interested, because most of them responded in the affirmative. This result coincides with Pratt et al. (2020) as foreign language teachers also overwhelmingly responded positively, as well as with Pratt (2023), which revealed that Spanish teachers also overwhelmingly responded positively. A comparison of the students who responded in the affirmative and those who responded in the negative showed that there was a

significant relationship between whether or not students believed their teachers had a positive impact on them to maintain their interest and the level of effectiveness of their Spanish courses, so the more effective the classes were, the more positive the teachers' impact on them was to maintain their interest. There was also a marginal significant relationship between whether or not the teachers had a positive impact on students and the students' desire to continue studying Spanish, so the more positive the teachers' impact on them was, the more likely they were to continue to study Spanish. The results also revealed that native Spanish speaker status correlated significantly with students' grade levels, which showed that native Spanish speakers were more likely to study Spanish at a younger age and were also more likely to continue studying Spanish. Fluency in Spanish also correlated significantly with age, meaning that older students were more fluent in Spanish, and also with the desire to continue, meaning that students who were fluent in Spanish were more likely to continue studying the language. Furthermore, a significant correlation between the level of effectiveness of the classes and the desire to continue to study Spanish demonstrated that the more effective the classes were, the more likely the students were to continue to study Spanish.

These results confirm the investigator's assertion that the teachers' positive impact on the students to maintain their interest in the study of the language should be thoroughly investigated as an essential component of the solution to the discontinuance problem. This point of view is what led to the need for this study, in order to bring awareness to the need to capitalize on research into this aspect of the teacher–student dynamic and ascertain different ways in which the data can be implemented to achieve the needed outcomes. The confirmation of the correlations between the positive impact, the effectiveness of the classes, and the continuance of the students by this study provides an opportunity to investigate further these variables, thus contributing significantly to the solution. Further studies must therefore be conducted to investigate these correlations further in order to determine what concrete steps must be taken to put in place strategies that draw from these findings to ameliorate the downward trend. The findings also reiterate the need for all students to start the study of the language at an early age and continue for a long time as these factors together also lead to continuance. These findings therefore fill an important gap in the literature on the discontinuance of the study of Spanish.

With respect to the central issue under investigation, which is how the students indicate that the teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest in the language, the study discovered that the students believed that they did the following: *participate in class, do their work, ask more questions, and smile; tell them when they are doing a good job; show them respect and listen to them; work beyond the requirements; thank them and give them gifts; do nothing; talk to them often; take more classes with them; and rate them high in course evaluations*, in that order.

As stated previously, the most prominent indicator, *participate in class, do their work, ask more questions,*

and smile, grouped together behaviors exhibited by the students in the classroom. Some of the specific responses given by the students were the following: “I pay attention in class, smile, participate in activities and volunteer for reading or pronunciation requests”; “I make sure that I participate regularly”; “I try to answer every question”; “I try to participate and show interest”; “I stay focused”; “I stay engaged”; “I engage in her teaching”; “I pay a lot of attention in class”; “I stay interested”; “I try to participate as much as I can”; “I actually try and allow myself to make mistakes so that my Spanish teachers can correct me and I can learn”; “Do my work”; “Do my best to keep up in class”; “I try to do well on my work to show them that I understand the material”; “I study and do well on my tests”; “Do good on tests and assignments”; “I try my best in every opportunity. I know that to display my interest and continue to do my best in learning, enthusiasm is key”; “Always get good grades”; “Work hard”; “I show her I am trying to learn and speak more proficiently during class”; “In my opinion I do all the things the Spanish teachers want me to do in order pass classes”; “Doing my work for her class”; “Always work hard”; “Try to learn from my mistakes showing that I am learning”; “Continue to show my improvement through written and oral tests”; “Highlight my progress”; “I ask questions about the culture and how the language differs among Spanish-speaking countries”; “Both answer and ask questions”; “Ask for help”; “I try my best in Spanish”; and “I ask them extra questions about themselves and their cultures.”

The second most prominent indicator that their teachers have a positive impact on them to maintain their interest, which was *tell them when they are doing a good job*, comprised students telling the teachers that they were doing a good job verbally or in writing in class, during office hours, when they enjoyed an assignment, or at the end of the semester. Some of the students' answers were: “Tell her that I love her class”; “email to show them I am trying”; “I speak with my teachers directly about what I have enjoyed or where I may need to feel more supported”; “I tell her how far she has helped me come to show my gratitude”; “I tell them in my one-on-one meetings”; “I talk to them about how important Spanish can be in cultures”; “I tell them of their success in teaching me”; “I tell them I am learning”; “I let her know how fun her class is”; “I tell them that I enjoy and appreciate the work they do to gear us to be good Spanish speakers”; “I spoke with my previous teacher a little bit about how I am a Spanish minor and would love to continue learning the language so that I am fluent, but other than that I really haven't expressed my gratitude for my Spanish teachers”; “Talk about it with her”; “I tell her how much I look forward to her class”; and “I tell her how much I enjoy her class”; “I tell them”; “compliments via email”; “I usually talk to them to tell them how much they have helped me”; “Have feedback for them regularly”; “Feedback at the end of the year, in office hours, sometimes”; and “At the end of the year, I write letters/emails to the teachers who had a positive impact on me, and whose classes I enjoyed attending.”

The third indicator, *show them respect and listen to them*, included behaviors that were directly geared toward respecting the teachers, including listening to them and doing what they say. The students' responses included the

following examples: “I am respectful”; “I respect her”; “I listen to what they have to say”; “I listen when they speak”; “I listen to her when she is talking”; “I also try to actively listen to my Spanish teacher to let her know that I am motivated to learn Spanish”; “I listen to what she tells me and never interrupt her”; and “I listen and do what the teacher says.”

The fourth indicator, *work beyond the requirements*, referred to the attempts the students made to do extra work, such as speak Spanish outside class, above and beyond the course requirements. Some of the students’ specific answers were: “I speak to her in Spanish outside of class whenever I see her”; “I speak Spanish to her”; “I practice saying simple phrases and questions in Spanish”; “I also try to speak with them in Spanish even though my vocabulary and grammar is still at the beginner level”; “I try to always talk Spanish and not English”; “I talk fluently about what we are learning in class”; “Greet them and say goodbye in Spanish”; and “I only speak to them in Spanish to encourage me to practice.”

The fifth indicator, *thank them and give them gifts*, included directly thanking teachers and showing them gratitude, which included bringing them gifts. Some of the students’ responses were as follows: “I thank her and let her know that I’m appreciative”; “By showing them gratitude”; “I appreciate them and thank them”; “I send an email thanking them”; “Sometimes I bring little gifts for my teachers to show my appreciation for them and all that they do”; and “I have gotten my teacher a gift.”

The sixth indicator, *do nothing*, referred to when students failed to do something to show the teachers that they were influencing them positively, and their regrets for not doing so. The responses included the following: “I do not do anything”; “I don’t”; “Nothing”; “Sometimes I don’t”; “I don’t, and I should be much better”; “Now thinking about it, I want to thank them because I know their job isn’t easy.”

The seventh indicator, *talk to them often*, referred to talking to teachers as well as being kind to them, and consisted of responses including the following: “I talk to her and smile every day”; “Talk to them a lot”; “Engage in conversations with her”; “Be friends”; and “I attempt to be kind.”

The eighth indicator was *take more classes with them*, and the response was as follows: “I also took her class 2 years in a row.”

Finally, the last indicator, *rate them high on course evaluations*, refers to formal surveys on the teachers’ performance that the students complete at the end of the semester or year, and the response was: “I rate my Spanish teachers on the surveys at the end of the class to let them know that they have made a positive impact on my learning.”

These indicators provide very important information regarding what Spanish students do to demonstrate that their teachers influence them positively to keep them interested in the study of Spanish. This is a powerful tool that educators can use to guide them as they attempt to increase the number of Spanish students who continue the study of the language and reduce the attrition that pervades Spanish programs. Given that the students spend a good amount of time with their teachers, the

implementation of measures that focus on ensuring attention to these indicators will impact significantly the resolution of the continuation/discontinuation dilemma.

With regard to the comparison between the perceptions of the students and the teachers, the investigator’s hypothesis was confirmed, because although there were some similarities, there were also important differences. The similarities included *classroom engagement and academic success, positive feedback, student interest, student motivations, and teacher–student relationships*. This demonstrates that the teachers do observe successfully certain aspects of the students’ behavior that are indicative of their positive impact on them to maintain their interest. That, together with the overwhelming agreement among the students that the teachers do have a positive impact on them, confirms that the student–teacher dynamic has some positive outcomes with respect to the continuation of the study of the language even if it has not been investigated and cultivated.

The study also revealed additional indicators that the teachers did not mention, demonstrating that there are other important factors that the teachers are unaware of and therefore do not take into consideration. The additional indicators were: *show them respect and listen to them, thank them and give them gifts, do nothing, and rate them high in course evaluations*. Emphasis needs to be put on all the indicators, but especially the ones that were not perceived by the teachers. The implications of this for Spanish programs and educators is invaluable as this meeting of the minds will make it possible for students and teachers to derive the best from their dynamic. The indicators that were not perceived by the teachers provide crucial information, as those could be the factors that teachers are most likely to not be conscious of and look out for. It must also not be assumed that the fact that the teachers’ data produced a number of themes that coincided with the students’ perceptions means that all the teachers had knowledge about all those indicators, so it is not only the indicators that were not produced by the teachers that the educators need to become aware of, but rather every indicator that was revealed by this study. The discovery of these indicators also highlights the need for students to reflect on how they communicate their perceptions to their teachers as the teachers need to receive a clear message that can inform their instructional practices and subsequently their effectiveness and ability to influence them positively to lead to their continuation of the study of the language.

The findings of this study fill a gaping hole in the literature with respect to the discontinuation trend that is eroding the study and status of the Spanish language in the United States, as they draw attention to important indicators that must be brought to light and emphasized in an attempt to keep students in Spanish programs longer and give them an opportunity to at least acquire communicative competence. With the exception of Pratt (2023), who studied the perceptions of Spanish teachers regarding their beliefs about how their students demonstrate their positive impact on them, none of the previous studies on the continuation/discontinuation decision investigated any aspects of this issue. Therefore, these findings are a new addition to the field and a

beneficial follow-up to the findings revealed by Pratt (2023), as both sides of the dynamic have now been revealed. The indicators are valuable tools that constitute a point of departure in the right direction to ensure that what is intended by the students is clearly perceived by the teachers and that educators and programs put into effect the necessary efforts to ensure that these indicators are present to confirm the continuation of students in the programs. The author by no means intends to presume that the list of indicators revealed in this study is exhaustive. On the contrary, follow-up studies are strongly recommended as there is still more to be discovered in the exploration of the indicators and how the results can be utilized to identify solutions to the discontinuation problem, as well as the subsequent development of effective strategies for their detection and incorporation.

5. Limitations of the Study

This study has revealed significant information about how Spanish students demonstrate that their teachers are influencing them positively to help them stay interested in the study of Spanish. This information is extremely useful for increasing continuance of the study of the language. However, the participants do not represent all the levels of the study of Spanish as they were middle and high school and lower-level college students. Additionally, given that the students' fluency levels were self-reported and not assessed, they may have interpreted fluency differently, and that could have skewed the results of the inter-variable associations.

Dr. Comfort Pratt received her Bachelor of Arts with Honors degree in Spanish and French with a minor in Linguistics at the University of Ghana, a Graduate Certificate in Translation at Complutense University in Madrid, Spain, a Master of Arts Degree in Modern Languages at Texas A&M University, and a Ph.D. in Romance Linguistics and French at Louisiana State University. She is currently an Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas Tech University. Her areas of specialization include foreign language education, second language acquisition, bilingual education, and sociolinguistics. She is the author of *El español del noroeste de Luisiana: Pervivencia de un dialecto amenazado* (2004), and *In-Class Communicative Projects* (2008). Her recent articles include "Creencias de autoeficacia y principales desafíos docentes de profesores de español como segunda lengua" (2022), "Foreign language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and perspectives about maintaining their students' interest" (2021), and "Spanish teachers' perceptions about their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest" (2023).

Email: c.pratt@ttu.edu

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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