

NAVIGATING SPANISH INSTRUCTION FOR HERITAGE LEARNERS IN MIXED CLASSES: EXPLORING LANGUAGE OPTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract:

In the United States, Spanish courses frequently include heritage learners – students who grow up speaking or hearing Spanish at home but may not fully develop proficiency. Teaching these students presents unique challenges, particularly regarding which linguistic variety to teach. Spanish encompasses many regional and social varieties, each with distinct vocabulary, grammar, and cultural associations, often shaped by communities' historical and regional ties. This study reviews recent perspectives on teaching Spanish to heritage learners, balancing the use of 'standard' Spanish, as recognised by the Royal Spanish Academy, with approaches that integrate the diverse varieties learners may feel connected to. By comparing models that promote standardisation with those that embrace pluralism, this review aims to clarify how different methods impact heritage learners' educational experience, cultural identity, and sense of belonging. The findings underscore that fostering linguistic competence for heritage learners involves not only language instruction but also a nuanced approach to identity, culture, and multilingualism.

Keywords: *Heritage learners; Spanish varieties; International Spanish; Sociolinguistics; Applied linguistics.*