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High School Performance of Cape Verdean Immigrant Students in New Bedford: A Linguistic Perspective

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**High School Performance of Cape Verdean Immigrant Students in New Bedford: A
Linguistic Perspective**

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Spring 2016

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High School Performance of Cape Verdean Immigrant Students in New Bedford: A Linguistic
Perspective

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Spring 2016

Abstract

The English language (EL) has become the world's lingua franca. It has entered a great number of countries' educational systems and it has become a requirement to succeed academically and professionally. Cape Verde is one of the countries that have included EL in their school programs; the quality of the learning process in English is a permanent issue for Cape Verdean schools. In this project, Cape Verdean immigrant students in New Bedford, Massachusetts, who started their high school education in Cape Verde and continued in the New Bedford High Schools will be interviewed in order to explore their integration in the New Bedford school and also discuss their academic performance in connection to their EL usage abilities. The objective of this study is to add to the discussion of how to better accommodate immigrant students and connect, if applicable, the Cape Verdean immigrant students' experiences, struggles, and performance to their EL acquisition process experienced back in Cape Verde. Struggles with EL during school program may greatly affect these youth's performance and jeopardize their achievement of the academic goals set by the Massachusetts' school system. The outcomes of this study contribute valuable information that could help in the ongoing improvements of the current programs in New Bedford high school and also could help in the amelioration, if needed, of Cape Verde high schools EL programs.

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Chapter I: Introduction and Professional Autobiography

I was born in Cabo Verde`s cultural center, the city of Mindelo on the island of Sao Vicente. Cape Verde`s greatest singer and cultural ambassador, Cesária Évora, was born just 5 minutes` drive from my house. The country is located 350 miles off the west coast of Africa; it is an archipelago with 10 islands, one of them not inhabited, and a population of around 500,000.

Given the fact that my country is very small in territory (1,557 square miles) and in population, one might think that we are isolated. Contrariwise, Cape Verde (CV) is a very cosmopolitan country. Strategically located in the Atlantic, CV has many visitors from all continents on vacations or in business trips. Furthermore, many Cape Verdeans live abroad; the number of expatriate Cape Verdeans exceeds in many thousands the ones that live in the country. For example, my mother and siblings all live in Portugal. This social environment has helped shape a society that is truly interested in what is happening in the world. I am not different, very early in my youth I showed interest in the English Language (EL). I was very curious to know what singers were saying in their songs and what some movie expressions meant; these reasons eventually led me towards using the EL professionally and also helped me shape the way I see the world and perceive other people.

I graduated in English Studies from the University of Cabo Verde in 2012 after 4 years of study. During this period, I had the chance to learn a great number of skills and participated in many research and teaching programs. In 2011, I participated in a scientific exchange program with Minas Gerais, Brazil that was offered to high achieving students. During my stay in Brazil, I became interested in knowing how well high school graduates in Brazil spoke and wrote the EL, after 4 or 5 years of learning it in the Brazilian public education system. I decided to write a paper

on that issue which was an enlightening experience and, therefore, I decided to research the same problem in Cape Verde for my undergraduate final research project. The results of my study in CV were very negative. Only 12% of the Mindelo high school graduates I surveyed were able to use the EL in real situations and maintain a basic conversation. I also had the chance to observe several EL classes, where I noted that the lessons were mostly taught in Portuguese, which inhibited the students' ability to recognize, practice and use the language they were studying, thus affecting the development of their communicative skills. In addition to that fact, the grammar based teaching methods, the systematic and predictable exercises and the drills practiced in the high schools appeared to be contributing to the low rate of EL speaking high school graduates in Mindelo as found in my research.

EL usage by high school graduates always intrigued me; especially given the fact that the students study it for several years (6 years in the public secondary education in Cape Verde). After travelling to countries like Germany and Spain where I had to use the EL to be understood for I don't speak German or Spanish I noticed that the learning of the EL is an essential tool for the Cape Verdean students and future professionals. I always thought of contributing to somehow improve the teaching and learning process in use in Cape Verde. With that idea in mind, after a great deal of difficulties I did something to contribute.

In 2012, during my last year of college, I founded the Kings English School (KES), a private English school with the purpose of continuing to research and find the best EL teaching and learning processes. Even though I was newly married, and the full-time national director of a humanitarian foundation, I started to teach and get more people involved in the project. The school grew in name and reputation during these 4 years, students like our conversation-based course programs, and more teachers are interested in teaching there. It is too soon to state any kind of

impact but the future looks bright and I hope KES will have a positive impact in the establishment of new and improved English teaching processes in Cape Verde.

I believe that in the future, with this master degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from Bridgewater State University, I will help my country become more proficient in speaking the EL. With new teaching techniques and processes, and expertise the ongoing teaching methods may be improved, since the current results are unsatisfactory which could negatively affect many students' lives.

Cape Verde is a country of socioeconomic characteristics that tends to focus on the relations with foreign countries, companies and institutions, thus the use of English has become virtually obligatory for all CV professionals. This fact leads me to wonder and investigate whether the high schools English programs of Cabo Verde education system are effectively helping the students and future professionals to master this language so essential. I intend to research and find out if the knowledge and the communicative performance of the EL may have some direct impact on the academic and professional growth and development of graduate students of high schools.

Research Problem and Hypothesis

Cape Verde has a high immigration rate. It is estimated that there are about half a million Cape Verdeans all around the world (Gois, 2006, p. 40). Capeverdeans have been dispersing throughout the world since the country's discovery in the fifteenth century. Cape Verdeans are in most continents and in a great number of countries, from Portugal to Macau. The idea of leaving the country in search for a better life is something that is almost innate in every Cape Verdean; it is one of its most ancient and stable social phenomena (Gois, 2006, p. 23). This geographic dispersion has originated CV communities in countries and cities all over the world including in the United

States of America. New Bedford, Massachusetts is one of them. With a very solid capeverdean community, New Bedford has become one of the primary destinations of Cape Verdean immigrants. Many youths accompany their parents in this migratory phenomenon. My interest, with this project, is to explore, in a linguistic perspective, these youth's integration in New Bedford's educational system and their academic performance.

Travelling to countries where I had to listen, speak, read and write in English rose in me the concern whether we Cape Verdeans were able to use the EL in an efficient and helpful way while abroad. Therefore, I want to add literature to this topic by clarifying and, if applicable, linking the high school integration of these immigrant students in New Bedford to the English learning process in Cape Verde's high Schools, hoping that the results might help give insights in order to improve Cape Verde high school's English program.

This project will focus on the hypothesis that Cape Verdean immigrant high schoolers will experience poor academic performance if, at the time of the arrival in the U.S., their EL proficiency levels are low and limited.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The English language in Cape Verde

The English language is taught in all secondary schools in Cape Verde; it is one of the core subjects that the students must master. The history of the English language (EL) in Cape Verde is not recent and is quite deep-seated in the country's society and culture. Trigueiros (2010) explains that learning the EL appeared naturally and spontaneously before later becoming a subject taught in the schools of Cape Verde. She pointed out various factors in this phenomenon: "the whale fishing, salt exploration in Maio and Boavista [islands of Cape Verde], the search for orchil, a violet-red dye obtained from certain lichens, the coal stations in Mindelo [main city of the island of Sao Vicente] and immigration". These activities brought many foreigners to the archipelago, so Cape Verdeans were "obliged" to learn the language in order to carry on their businesses. Correia e Silva (2005:47) cited by Trigueiros (2010) affirmed that by 1780 the North Americans were considered the most important commercial partner of the islands. And also, in 1750 Cape Verdeans began to immigrate in whale ships. In these conditions people need to communicate and so they started to learn the EL.

Mindelo experienced the greater concentration of foreigners in the country with the coal stations around the Porto Grande Bay. Most of the population of Mindelo and other people coming from other islands spoke English to interact with the Englishmen living in in the city in order to get jobs and trades. It was also a matter of status for the *in holidays* immigrants, that returned to the country for vacation, to be able to speak something of the language of the *white people*. It is possible to find English words in the Creole of São Vicente such as *boys, man, all right, house* and

speed. All these factors make it clear that before a formal teaching of EL in Cape Verde, the Cape Verdeans had already got in touch with it and informally learnt it.

Thus, if we want to refer to beginning of a formal learning of EL we are led by Trigueiros (2010) to the year 1860 when the National Cape Verde High School curriculum had the EL as a school subject, although it is not clear that this curriculum had been put into practice at that time.

Later, in the year of 1892, the Seminary-School of São Nicolau changed its previous curriculum that didn't include EL. Therefore, in this new curriculum, EL was included along with French Language, Portuguese Language and Latin. According to Trigueiros (2010) from this period on most the secondary schools curriculum in Cape Verde contemplated EL as a subject. Secondary school students have the opportunity to study the EL throughout the 3 cycles of the secondary education having a total of 6 years of EL classes.

Thoughts on Language Acquisition, Communicative Competence and Academic Performance

The concepts of EL acquisition and performance and academic performance will center the discussions in this work. The primary focus is to explore the link between these two concepts in relation to the academic performance of Cape Verdean high school age immigrant student in New Bedford. It is a great desire that this project may motivate any necessary changes in the Cape Verdean education system, in order to help improve the acquisition of the EL by the current and prospective students of the Cape Verdean secondary education system. Stephen Krashen (1981) summarizes the goal of any second language or foreign language teaching program by stating that:

Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. (p. 1)

Language students immersed in second language teaching programs should, after acquiring the target language, be able to use it in an effective way that allows them to truly interact with others.

Adding to Krashen's contribution, Peregoy, Boyle, and Cardiero-kaplan (2013) introduce more layers to the concept of language acquisition. They expanded my understanding of the topic by exposing the roles of phonology, morphology, and syntax in an effective communication in a second or foreign acquired language and by highlighting the concept of communicative competence. Peregoy et al. (2013) explains that unlike the concept of language proficiency, communicative competence leads to the idea that "proficient language use extends beyond grammatical forms and meaning to include social conventions required for successful communication" (p. 41). This is where lies the Achilles' heel of the EL programs in the high schools in Cape Verde; there, EL is not taught to be efficiently used in communicative real situations whether academically or socially.

EL is taught in Cape Verde as a Foreign Language (FL). A FL is commonly known as a language indigenous to another country. It is also a language not spoken in the native country of a person. Trigueiros (2010), a Cape Verdean linguistics professor and researcher, refers to it as a learned language which is not frequently used in the learner's society. She explains that people in the community do not have the need of an FL for communication besides communication with foreigners or international communication. An FL could be used as a common code to mutual understanding between people from different countries and provenances. An FL such as the EL is

seen as extremely important for its role in the process of globalization, thus becoming indispensable to link the various countries and people around the world. It also permits people to get access to information that is available only in that specific language which is extremely useful to people that travel on business and pleasure, go to international schooling and many other activities.

Thus, the true acquisition of the language should be the goal of the English programs in the secondary education system in Cape Verde. As stated in their website (“Secondary Education”, n.d.), the CV Ministry of Education and Sports declares that:

Secondary education enables the development of knowledge and skills and the acquisition of new intellectual abilities and physical skills necessary for creative intervention in the society; it enables the acquisition of scientific and technological bases and cultural tools necessary to further education. (n.d. para.2)

By studying the EL communicative competence and performance of the Cape Verdean immigrant student and their impact, if any, on their academic performance, it will be possible to analyze and explore the effectiveness of the EL teaching programs offered, by the Ministry of Education and Sport in Cape Verde, in the acquisition of the EL.

But the Cape Verdean EL programs are heavily based on the Grammar Translation method (GMT). This very early method is based on the beliefs that language is primarily graphic, thus the foreign or second language acquisition is built on the knowledge of the structure of the language, and also, in this method the learner’s native language is constantly referenced. Chang (2011) notes that this method depends excessively on the teacher which makes that “the majority of the classroom time is spent on the teachers’ elaborate explanation of English grammar rules, while all

the students are either listening or taking notes. Thus little attention is paid to the development of English communicative competence” (p. 13). This is the experience that these Cape Verdean immigrant students and I have had back in Cape Verde; therefore, it is important that the current situation change for the improvement of the teaching and learning process of the English language in Cape Verde.

The Impact of Language Acquisition on Academic Performance

According to Chiswick and DebBurman (2004), second generation children, which are children born in the USA of immigrant parents, usually have greater academic performance than first generation children and native-born children. Nonetheless, those who arrive at the host country in young ages will perform at levels relatively close to those of second generation. For this study, the authors demonstrate that children who migrate as teenagers have fewer chances of continuing their studies compared to those that come to the United States of America in their pre-teen years. Kao and Tienda (1995) also demonstrate that second generation youth are better “equipped” to succeed academically, compared to foreign born youth, due to their greater English skills.

The subjects in this project are in the same situation as the teens mentioned by Kao and Tienda (1995); they have a greater chance to perform poorer and abandon school. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2013) highlight the fact that the age of the learner is extremely important in the acquisition of a second language. They establish that the acquisition of a second language demands more from the learner than did the acquisition of the first language; thus, the younger one is the easier will be the mastery of the targeted language (p. 435). In addition to the age of the learner, Hakuta (2009) adds the length of time necessary for a learner to fully acquire a second

language, and states that, based on his research, it takes 2 to 5 years for a student to become proficient in oral English and 4 to 7 years for proficiency in academic English. The participants of this study that has at least 2 years of English language instruction in Cape Verde should have had at least a basic knowledge of the English by the time they arrived in the U.S.

Due to these facts, this study is very pertinent; understanding the impact of the EL competence and performance acquired in the source country (in this case, Cape Verde) and connect it with their performance in the host country's academic system will provide valuable information related to this discussion.

My research will be focused in Cape Verdean immigrant students in New Bedford High School that had immigrated no more than 3 years ago. Cortes (2006) shows that the longer the student is in the US, the narrower is the performance gap compared to early age immigrant students or second generation students. As previously mentioned, the linguistic aspect is the aim of the project even though there are other aspects that may influence an immigrant student's social life and academic performance; for example, the community where the student lives, the years in the United States or whether the student enrolls in an enclave school or not and the parents expectations and cultural and social adaptation (Cortes 2006).

Summary

Acquisition of a foreign language implies the usage of such language in "normal" situations, to understand and to be understood, especially when that is the only means of successfully communicate and the implicit goal of any language teaching program is to enable students to do so. The analysis of Cape Verdean immigrant students' EL performance and its implication on their academic performance will provide important information regarding the issue

of linguistic effects on school performance. Furthermore, this work aims to provide to Cape Verdean English teachers and decision makers with evidence of the need for changes in the EL teaching programs offered in the secondary education system in Cape Verde.

The following key words were used in the search: *language, language acquisition, language performance and academic performance, and immigration and academic performance.*

The found works reviewed for this project refer to the English skills as one of the main factors for the academic success or failure of the youth although they focused, primarily, in social and anthropological issues whereas this project is linguistically centered.

Chapter III: Methodology

This section will present the investigation procedures used in order to obtain the information related to the Cape Verdean immigrant students' EL competence and, if possible, connect it with any influence in their academic performance.

Approach and Data Collection

A qualitative approach was followed to obtain a narrative and a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. The data for this research was collected and conducted through one-on-one interviews with the students at the New Bedford High School (see Appendix A). This type of interview is extremely useful when it is intended to obtain, from the participant, a self-view of a particular subject and richness of detail is encouraged. Additionally, the use of interviews provides the study with personal insights by the participants and to explore their own thoughts and provide the research with valuable information to better understand the students' points of view. I intended to get the story behind the students' experiences both in Cape Verde and in the US and promote the meaning analysis of the participants' answers. It was mostly used open-ended questions, and I dedicated my time understanding and exploring these students' experiences, thence these following questions will help in the research process:

- What is the percentage of the students that had and hadn't mastered the EL before coming to the USA? For those that had mastered it before, how did they acquire it?
- What was the high school English programs' role in their English learning process in Cape Verde?
- What were the factors that inhibited the mastery of EL acquisition from the students' perspective?

- What was the impact, in their academic life, whether they had or had not mastered the EL?

Sample

The participants in this study include Cape Verdean immigrant youth students that are currently studying at the New Bedford High School (NBHS). This particular high school was chosen due to the fact that it is situated in the city of New Bedford that has a great Cape Verdean community and has been for many years the host city for many Cape Verdean immigrants.

The sample of students was selected according to the following criteria:

- They had to be immigrants from Cape Verde;
- They had to be living in the New Bedford area while in NBHS;
- They had to have been enrolled in the NBHS in the same year of arrival in the USA;
- They had to have had English as a subject in the Cape Verdean secondary education system.

This study focused on 17 Cape Verdean immigrant high school students; 10 girls and 7 boys. Their ages ranged from 14 to 21 year olds. One of the participants was a freshman (9th grade), four of them were sophomores (10th grade), seven of them were juniors (11th grade), and the last five were seniors (12th grade).

Methods for assuring protection of human subjects (IRB)

The participants of the study were not at risk of any harm. There was no physical exercises conducted which could have inflicted any danger to the participants. Informed consent were

requested to the parents or the legal caretakers (see Appendix B), for under age participants, and also to adult NBHS students (see Appendix C) that met the selection criteria in order to request their permission to participate in the study. The informed consent form included the purpose of the study so that students and parents were informed of the procedures. Furthermore, the participant's private information were protected. It was assured that if any student or parent decided not to participate in the study in any of its stage, their request would be accepted and it would not affect, in any way, their academic program.

Chapter IV – Data Analysis and Findings

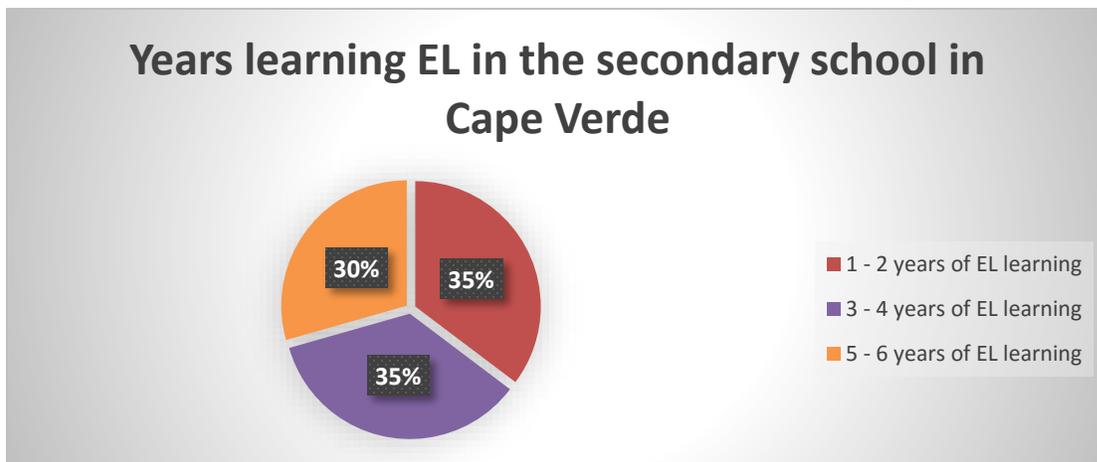
The methodology described in the previous chapter provided the foundation for the collection of data. This chapter will focus on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected for this study; and, the presentation of the data is based on the questions used in the one-on-one interviews conducted at the New Bedford High School which were hand analyzed by the researcher.

Based on the hypothesis that Cape Verdean immigrant students will experience poor academic performance provided that their English Language communicative competence levels be low and limited, these interviews were purposely directed towards these students own point of views; they are the end result of the efforts put on the EL programs. For this project, it is relevant to take into consideration these students' ideas and possible recommendations to the improvement of the English programs both in Cape Verde and in the U.S.A.

The participants in this research had to have had at least a year of English language classes in the Cape Verdean secondary public education system for them to be admissible to this research. The educational system in Cape Verde operates on a structure of six years of primary school (1st – 6th grades) and six years of secondary school (7th – 12th grades) that consists of three cycles of two years in which the 1st cycle encompasses the 7th and 8th grades, the 2nd cycle 9th and 10th grades, and finally the 3rd cycle 11th and 12th grades.

Age and length of the learning process in EL proficiency

All the one-on-one interviews started with this question: *How many years of English classes did you have in the public secondary education in Cape Verde before you immigrated to the United States of America (USA)?* As portrayed in Figure 1 the interviewed students were divided into 3 groups related to the number of years that they had studied the EL in Cape Verde. From the total of 17 students, 6 had had 1 to 2 years of EL classes; the same number of students had had 2 to 3 years of EL classes; and 5 of them had had 5 to 6 years of EL classes. It was expectable that these three groups were in different stages of the EL learning process. The ones with more years of EL training should be more fluent than those with fewer years of EL training. However, the answers obtained in the interviews showed a different reality.



Graph 1

Hakuta's (2000) study found that the acquisition of a second language, in this case the English language, approaching native speaker performance may take up to 7 years in the following manner: 2 to 5 years of learning for oral English and 4 to 7 years for academic English. Hence, theoretically, the students with 5 to 6 years of EL training should be approaching fluency on both oral and academic English. Nevertheless, the length of the EL learning process is intrinsically related to the age of the learner.

According to Fromkin (2013), the learners' age group is extremely important in the acquisition of a second language. The older the learner is the hardest it is to acquire a native speaker level of proficiency, however, it is possible for an adult to learn a second language even if it is not at the level of a native speaker. Fromkin (2013) states that:

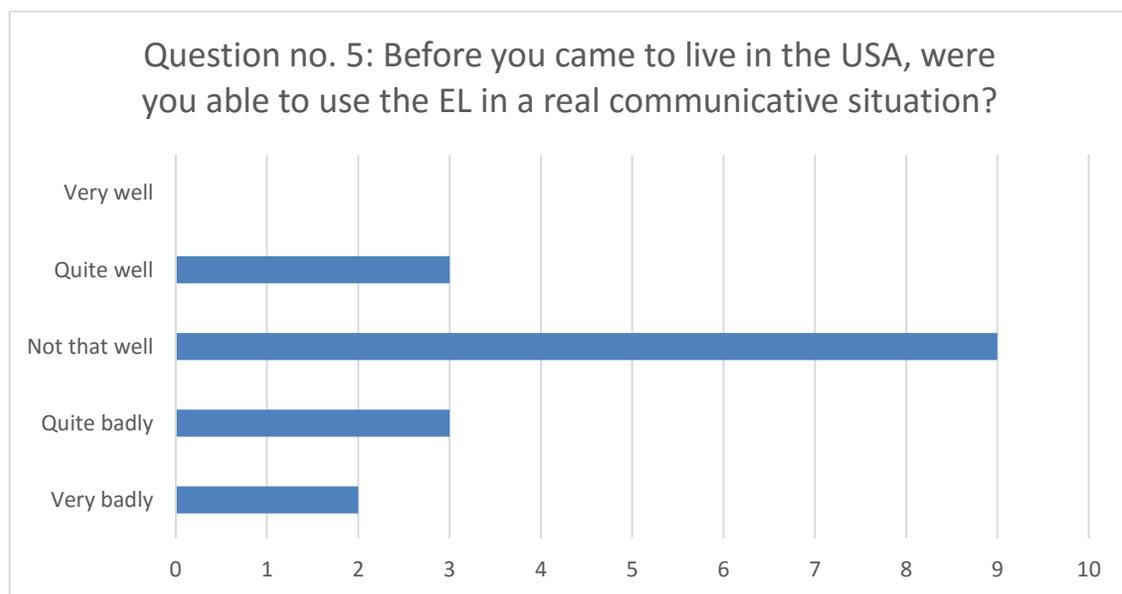
It is more appropriate to say that L2 acquisition abilities gradually decline with age and that there are "sensitive periods" for the native-like mastery of certain aspects of the L2. The sensitive period for phonology is the shortest. To achieve native-like pronunciation of an L2 generally requires exposure during childhood. Other aspects of language, such as syntax, may have a larger window. (p. 435)

Therefore, a student that starts learning a second language at the age of 12, as most of the participants of this study, are in disadvantage compared to a student that starts this process at the age of six for instance.

For the participants of this study, these two factors (age and length of the EL learning process) do not combine to induce a single outcome related to their English acquisition process, either positive or negative. First of all, in Cape Verde the students start having English classes only in the 7th grade when the students are 12 years old or older. As mentioned before, this factor negatively impact the students' ability to achieve a level of communicative competence close to the native speakers; the younger one is the better he or she will acquire a second language. On the other hand, given the fact that a student in Cape Verde has the possibility to study the EL for 6 years, there is a great chance of an exponential learning process that could lead to the mastering of the EL, depending, certainly, on the quality of the teaching process (a subject to be discussed later on in this research). For immigrant students, their capacity of speaking, listening, writing, and

reading the EL is essential for their academic success in an English speaking country such as the U.S., where they would have to keep pace with the native English speakers.

The question no. 5 of the interview was made in order to evaluate the students' ability to speak the EL and interact in communicative real situations. The focus could not be put on academic English, since the EL in Cape Verde is taught as a foreign language (FL), therefore the main goal of the English programs in CV high schools is to provide the students with language skills to successfully communicate.



Graph 2

None of the 17 interviewees stated that they spoke English very well at the time of their arrival in the USA, not even the 5 that have had English classes for 5 or 6 years. It is a fact that 65% of the participants (as shown in Graph 1) had had 3 or more years studying the English language, however, none of them spoke it very well. Of this group of 11 students (with 3 or more years of EL learning), 3 of them answered saying that they communicated quite well upon their

arrival in the U.S.: one had had 3 years of EL learning, another one had had 4 years, and the last one had had 6 years of EL learning.

Upon request to explain their answers, 3 of the interviewees agreed to comment on the reasons for their English levels at the time of their arrival. I will call them Student 1, Student 2, and Student 3. Student 1 learned the EL for 6 years in the secondary education and answered that the reason for the success in communicating in EL was dedication. The effort put on the work developed in the classroom and hours of reading and studying helped her acquire a base of language skills which allowed her to communicate in a comfortable level in English. She continued saying that even though she fairly succeeded most of her colleagues weren't as successful as they could have been for "the lack of dedication and self-discipline", as she put it. Students 2 and 3 had had both respectively 6 and 5 years of EL in the secondary education system and had very similar comments to their EL competence levels at the arrival in the USA. They both answered that their EL skills were not very well when they came. Student 2 stated that he "could have done better"; I asked why and he continued: "I didn't pay enough attention as I should have had in the classes". Similarly, Student 3 says she "wasn't focused in learning"; she concludes by saying that she "ignored the importance of the EL when in high school in Cape Verde". It is fascinating to notice that at this point on the interviews, most of the participants attribute responsibilities to themselves when it comes to determine the reasons for their achievements or deficiencies in their EL skills.

As portrayed in the Graph 2, a total of 9 students claimed that their EL skills levels at the time of their arrival in the USA were not that well, also 3 students stated that their levels of EL proficiency were quite badly, and finally 2 students confirmed that their levels were very badly. Out of 17 students, 14 of them say they had great difficulties communicating in English or even

could not do it at all. Of the Cape Verdean immigrant students that participated in this study, 82.3% were unable to effectively communicate in the English language at the time of their arrival in the United States of America. Additionally, the number of years in the EL programs in the secondary education system proved to be irrelevant to the acquisition of EL communicative skills. Independently of the length of participation in the EL programs, in the secondary public education in Cape Verde, the chances of a student acquiring the necessary skills to successfully communicate in English are very poor.

Peregoy et al. (2013) defined language proficiency as “the ability to use a language effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social, personal, school, and work situations that comprise daily living” (p. 41). They added that the goal of teachers of language is to help “students become competent in four language processes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (p. 41), and also it is to provide that students “acquire the sense and sensibility to choose the best words and phrasings to achieve whatever purpose they wish as they speak and write” (p. 41).

It is fairly safe to say that if an English language program does not help the students achieve the above mentioned level of proficiency, or better saying communicative competence, this program is failing in its purpose. Even after 5 to 6 years in the secondary public education taking English classes the great majority of students are unable to perform in a level that allows them to properly communicate. The small 16.7% of the participants of this study that achieved an acceptable level of EL skills do not attribute to the programs, the school nor the teachers their success. The English language programs in the secondary education in Cape Verde by not helping the students acquire the EL is jeopardizing their students’ academic and professional future.

Cape Verde has an economy highly based on its tourism segment and foreign trades. The national job market is constantly in search for professionals that have the EL as a functional tool in their repertoire. And also any professional formed in the islands that would like to work abroad would necessarily dominate the English language as the current global language. Another segment of the students in Cape Verde will eventually leave the country to continue its study in countries such as China, Australia, Japan, and definitely the United States of America. It is imperative that the school system effectively prepare its student to face the academic and professional world with confidence and success. Peregoy et al. (2013) state that:

Language proficiency also includes pragmatic knowledge. *Pragmatics* refers to the social conventions of language use, such as how to start and end a conversation smoothly; how to enter a conversation without interrupting other individuals; how to show politeness in language; how and when to use informal expressions such as slang as opposed to more formal ways of speaking; and how, whether, and when to establish a first-name basis in a formal relationship. (p. 41)

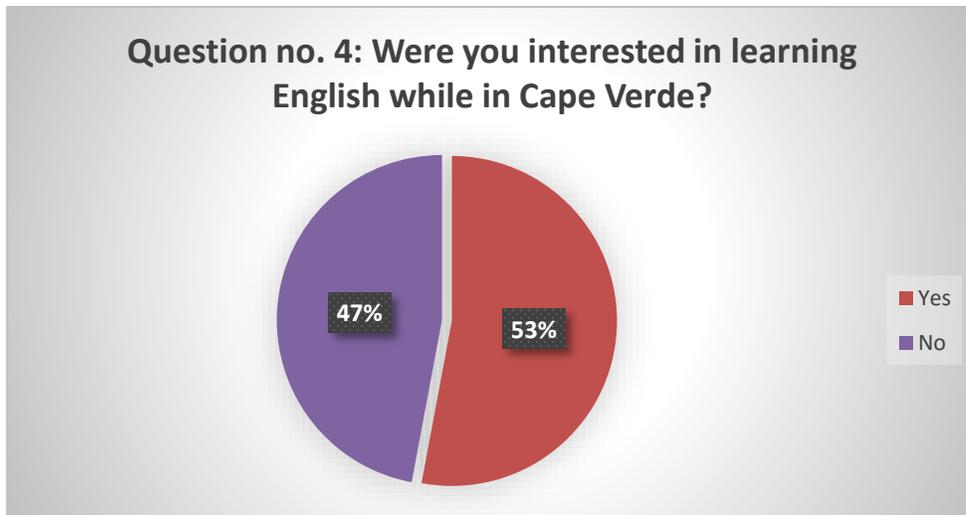
With these additions by Peregoy et al. (2013) to the concept of proficiency in English that had previously been exposed in this research, it increases the urgency to analyze empirically the teaching process of the English language in Cape Verde and make all the necessary changes for the improvement of this process. The acquisition of a second language is a fairly complex process and it should be taken into serious account by the decision makers; however, the students desire to embrace this learning process plays an important role in the success of this process.

Importance of learning the English language

The responses obtained from students confirms what was mentioned earlier in this paper regarding the importance of English to students' social, educational and later future laborer life. The information provided also show that students had a strong belief of the importance of the learning of the EL back in Cape Verde because it is a great tool for integration in today's globalized society and it contributes to their social and cultural development. When questioned (question 3 of the interview that can be found in Appendix A) if they considered learning English an important subject in high school, all 17 students answered: yes. When prompted to elaborate their answers they claimed that the EL was important for their formal education because they believed that learning EL would allow them:

- to communicate with people from other countries;
- to prepare for college abroad;
- to, in the future, integrate the labor market;
- to prepare for the move to the United States of America.

While all students recognized the importance of learning the EL, not all of them admitted to be interested in learning it, as shown in the Graph 3 below.



Graph 3

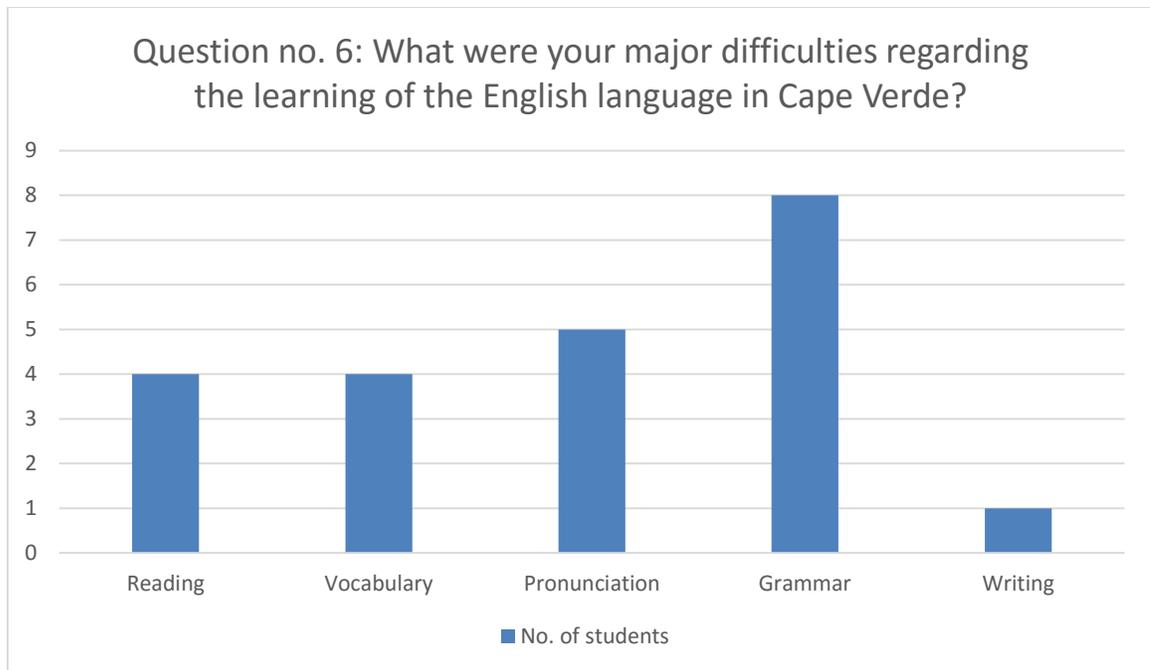
Following up regarding the yes or no question on their interest in the learning of English in Cape Verde, I asked those who answered no to explain the reasons for their disinterest. It was almost unanimous that they perceived the English language class as just one of the many classes that they had to attend. On the other hand, the students that answered yes stated that they used many other forms and strategies to try to learn the EL. They resorted, besides going to class, to movies, American TV shows, and mostly music. Using these means of entertainment, one of the participants said: “this way I was able to improve the vocabulary intake and pronunciation, which helped complement the structure and grammar learned at school”. Also, 2 of the students that expressed interest in the EL in Cape Verde had enrolled in private English schools, however for a short period of time: in one case for just a month and the other one for about a schoolyear. As for the rest of the students, they alleged that the expensive cost of private classes and the scarcity of private English schools prevented them to seek extra help beyond the EL classes at their high schools.

It is relevant to highlight these particular results because they are highly related to question no. 5, which inquires if the students are able to use the language in real situations, which outcome

is quite interesting. Although recognizing the importance of the EL 82.3% of the students answered that they could not deal with a real communicative situation in English. Something is failing in English language education in CV and it is critical to find out what it is.

Challenges in learning the English language

The challenges that students have with the EL will depend on a variety of difficulties such as the numbers and types of their L1 or other L2, for example. The acquisition of the EL will, naturally, be easier to learn if the learner already has knowledge of a language or other languages that has EL's same Germanic roots. And this principle works the same way on the opposite situation. Cape Verde's national language used in education is Portuguese, and this language having Latin roots creates natural obstacles to the Cape Verdean EL learners, especially with pronunciation. Fromkin et al. (2013) explain that "L2ers - especially at the beginning stages of acquiring their L2 - seem to rely on their L1 grammar at some extent" (p. 432). Also, besides grammar, the learners "may transfer the phonemes, phonological rules, syllable structures, stress placement or intonational patterns of their first language to their second language" (p. 432). In this section of this study, I look at some of the specific difficulties the EL posed to this study's participants while learning it back in Cape Verde as a foreign language.



Graph 4

The answers to the question 6 of the interview proved to have a range of answers that were not limited to just one skill. The participants were asked to list all the areas in the EL that represented their major difficulties in learning it back in Cape Verde. They listed the following areas: *reading, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, and grammar*. These data leads to two major conclusions: first, the problems the students are facing are varied and englobed most of the EL skills, and secondly, it is critical that grammar appeared to be the greater difficulty listed by the participants since EL classes in Cape Verde's high schools are mostly grammar based.

Pronunciation, reading, and vocabulary alongside grammar (the greatest difficulty) and writing (the least difficulty listed) comprised the areas mentioned by the interviewees. The ability to know the right pronunciation for words in English can indeed be extremely difficult as it is not always straightforward. For example, let's take into account the words *choir* and *chair*. It is predictable that an EL learner might face great difficulties to pronounce these two words only

based on their spelling; there is no indication on the words that their pronunciation would be drastically different besides the vowel sounds. Without proper teaching methods, the achievement of a successful acquisition of EL will be exceptionally hard. The same concept applies to the other EL areas mentioned by the students in this research, although grammar is by itself a different case.

The curriculum for the English language classes in all of the high schools in Cape Verde requires grammar teaching to be included as part of the program. However, based on the participants of this study's account and my personal experience as a student in Cape Verde, grammar, ultimately, predominated and took most of the time in the school year. Nonetheless, it is notable that grammar, even though heavily taught in Cape Verde, is the area of the EL that, according to the data, presents the most difficulties while being learned. Although the EL teaching and learning process has experienced many changes during the past decades, the current EL teaching in the Cape Verdean high schools is still characterized by the adoption of the traditional teaching method, which is known as the (GMT) Grammar Translation Method (Trigueiros, 2010, p. 86). According to Chang (2011), in this teaching model, the teacher usually presents the grammar materials and afterwards they are practiced in spoken or written drills and exercises in the classroom, at home or in other learning environments.

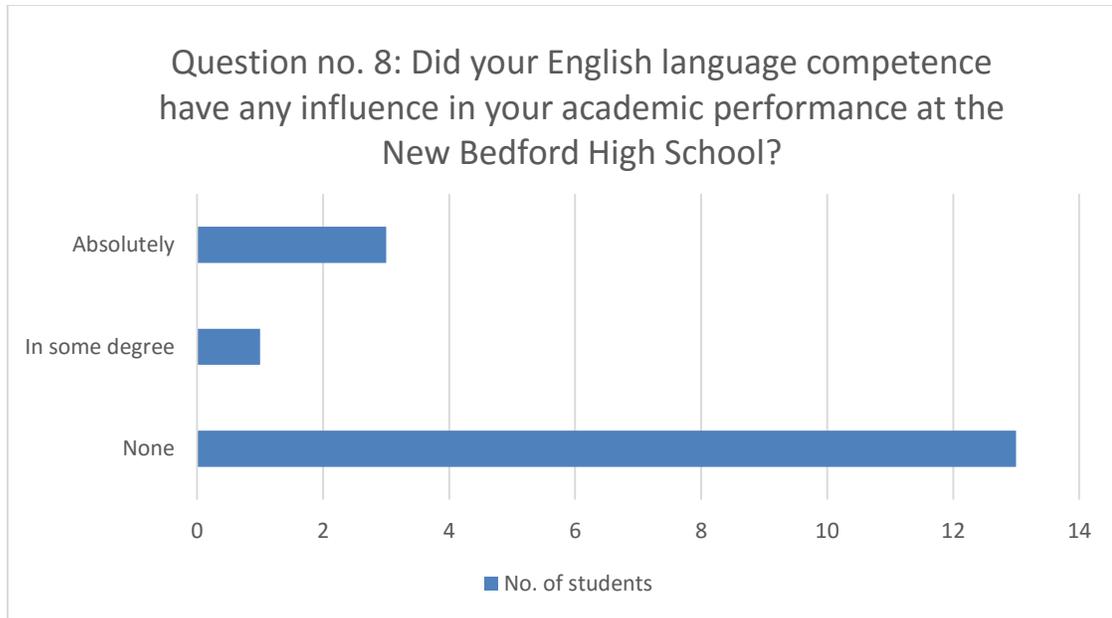
Notwithstanding the GMT helps the students achieve an improvement in the mastery of the grammatical rules, they cannot use these rules in a flexible and appropriate manner in real situations of communication. In Cape Verde's case, this method is not helping the students achieve acceptable levels of communicative competence in English and is actually presenting grammar as a boring and difficult feature of the EL, which is leading to a growing dislike and stigmatization of the EL by the learners. Krashen (1981) states that when there's an excessive focus on structure, on the right or wrong, will "place the student on the defensive" (p. 137), which can highly affect

their ability to learn the language. He continues by saying that by using simple exercises and focus them on “communication and not form (...), allows the input to strike more deeply and thus be more effective intake for acquisition” (p. 137). All these different facts are preventing the EL classes’ students, in Cape Verde, from developing their communicative competence that is essential to the EL acquisition.

Academic performance impact

It is important to refer that the information was gather solely based on the interviews to the students and no official school records were consulted and thus, the interpretation to the collected information is grounded on the participants accounts of the their own experiences. The interviews were conducted on the premise of high trust, therefore the data is perceived as such.

The answers to question no. 8 of the interview were fairly surprising. Based on the hypothesis which states that Cape Verdean immigrant high schoolers will experience poor academic performance if, at the time of the arrival in the U.S., their EL communicative competence levels are low and limited; it is was expected that the data collected supported the hypothesis. However, the information gathered point to some different analysis.



Graph 5

As shown in Graph 5, close to 77% of the students interviewed stated that their English proficiency level had little to no impact over their academic performance at the New Bedford high school. It is important to note that the percentage of students that declared that, at the time of their arrival in the USA, their English levels were low or limited was of 82.3%. They claimed that they were unable to maintain a basic conversation in English, therefore the fact that their academic performance was not affected is quite surprising.

This result refutes the hypothesis that they would have poor academic achievements when they joined the NBHS. When asked to elaborate on their answer, many (I will use the explanations of some of the interviewees: Student 4, Student 5, Student 6, Student 7, and Student 8) explained that there are a few reasons that their grades did not negatively change and in many cases they actually improved. First of all, Student 4 explained that he gives most of the credits for his good performance to his teachers. He states that his teachers at NBHS took the time with him in order to better assimilate the subjects and the materials in the classroom and textbooks. He adds by

saying that the after school program at the school were imperative in his progress. Student 5 corroborates this claim and adds that her personal efforts to improve her grades were extremely important; she also, in a mixture of joke and seriousness, says: “school in Cape Verde is tougher than school here in the U.S.”. It seems that the programs at the NBHS are successfully working to accommodate the Cape Verdean immigrant students, at least the ones I had the chance to interview. According to Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2013) with the The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 “more attention is paid to providing better educational opportunities for the learners and monitoring their language proficiency growth and academic performance’ (p. 8). It would be valuable for future studies, in this matter, to examine in more detail the programs offered by the schools which accommodate Cape Verdean immigrant students given the fact that this study was set to analyze the students’ answers and experiences. Cortes (2006) helps to understand this phenomenon when she states that “immigrant attainment increases with increased duration in the U.S. and more acculturation to American society” (p. 7). Being from a country of immigrants, Cape Verdeans seem to be very adaptable, and this can be seen in these students at the NBHS.

Divergently, 4 other students (Graph 5) claimed that their poor level of had a negative impact on their academic performance. Student 6 has been a student at the school for a year and a half and he is still struggling with the language (although he agrees that it has improved) and mostly with his grades that have been constantly lower than the grades he had back in Cape Verde. Subjects such as History and others in which he would need to read a lot have been especially difficult for him to succeed. On the contrary, Student 7 explained that the negative impact was just in some degree as it only lasted a couple of months after her arrival (she arrived in September of 2015) and shortly after that period of time she started to have better performance.

However, Student 7 appeared to be extremely disappointed regarding her school experience at the NBHS. She exposes that her situation is peculiar but not uncommon. She graduated high school in Cape Verde and upon her arrival in U.S. she tried to enroll in a university. She had her transcript to prove it, nonetheless, she was placed back to 11th grade. According to her story, this placement happened mostly because of her inability to communicate in English rather the lack of specific credits which was the school's claim. In this group of students that were interviewed for this study, another student is facing the same issue. She graduated back in Cape Verde, however, she was placed back in 12th grade at the NBHS. Again, this student firmly believes that her poor English skills were the reason for the placement.

In connection to question no. 8, I asked them about their English skills abilities at this moment. All the interviewees take part of pull-out English as a second (ESL) language classes and participate in after school English improvement programs, and 100% of them answered that their English levels are better than when they arrived. All of them have experienced some degree of improvement being it grammatical, pronunciation, or other.

Chapter V – Conclusions and Recommendations

Nowadays, the EL is the most widely spoken language and it goes side by side with globalization. Therefore, its knowledge is essential for any student and professional, especially for the Cape Verdean ones, as the EL is used in many international domains. And, Cape Verde being a country turned to the international world both culturally and economically, it is expected that the EL programs effectively help the learners communicate in English. However, as shown in the chapter 4 of this study, 82.3% of the students stated their ability to communicate in English when they arrived in the U.S. was not very well, and some were actually very bad.

It is imperative that the EL programs in Cape Verde's high schools evolve and adapt their content and teaching method for the development of the students communicative competence for when they are in situations where they will definitely need it; such as these students that now are in a country's education system that requires them to speak English in order to succeed. And this situation is not exclusive to the student immigrants; professionals that deal with English in their daily routine, and Cape Verdean college students in countries such as China or Australia also depend on an effective system that is able to provide a high quality English teaching program for their success.

Through the interviews that were carried out at the New Bedford high school to 17 Cape Verdean immigrant students providing valuable data, significant considerations were made regarding their EL proficiency at the time of their arrival and their academic performance in the U.S. which is the focus of this paper. According to the data and as stated before, the hypothesis that poor English proficiency would lead to poor academic performance was not proved with this study; steps to better study this phenomenon should be taken. However, this fact does not

downgrades the abysmal number of students (82.3%) that were unable to speak English at the time of their arrival even though having had at least 2 years of training in Cape Verde, some have had 5 and 6 years. These interviews led to the conclusion that the teaching-learning process of EL in the Cape Verdean secondary education system is still very different from the reality desired by the students. According to their stories, some factors contribute to this situation.

First of all, the interviewees that assumed that their EL proficiency was not very well upon their arrival in the U.S. declared that their own interest was not very high in the EL classes; they assumed lack of focus and concern regarding those classes. The following information might help explain this lack of interest. During our interviews many of the participants stated that the EL lessons are mostly taught in Portuguese, and sometimes in Creole. It is important to say that, through these students statements and my own experience, there are not many places outside the classrooms where they can practice the English they learn in school. Therefore, promoting the use of Portuguese and creole in the classrooms obstructs the students' ability to recognize, practice and use the English language they are studying, which leads to continuum lack of interest in a class that does not help them and also presents no practical use, thus affecting their development of communicative skills.

Secondly, as stated in this study, basing the teaching process on the Grammar Translation Method in the high schools, where the systematic and predictable exercises and drills (to the point of becoming routine and cut-and-dried) are overdone, do not help the learning of EL. The mastery of a foreign language, in this case English, is a result of an effective, meaningful and contextualized teaching practice; the communicative competence increases by promoting the practical aspect of the speaking and listening skills without giving an exaggerated focus to structured aspect of the target language. Besides, based on the Graph 4 this especial focus in grammar and structure, by

the teachers and the programs in Cape Verde, is not improving the students proficiency. The graph shows that the greatest difficulty faced by the students when learning English was, in fact, grammar.

Another factor was also lightly mentioned: the overcrowding of the classes. In such classes the teacher is unable to provide the necessary attention the individual students. The level of care and attention provided by the teachers to individual students with specific needs have a tremendous effect in the success or the lack of it in the student's learning process. In fact, many of the participants of this study referred to teachers' attention and care as one of the major reasons for why that they have actually improved their academic performance in the U.S. Nonetheless, 4 of the participants had to be placed in lower grades because of credits, but they believe it is mostly because of their poor English abilities.

Recommendations

The absence of ability for students to use the English language in real situations, after a certain period of formal education in the high schools of Cape Verde is a fact that should be faced with seriousness and good will. The current situation is mutable; changing it is not a utopia. It is possible to provide students with a higher quality teaching-learning process so they can participate actively in real communicative situations in the English language. However, in order to do so, the committed involvement of the Ministry of Education is imperative as well as that of schools and teachers.

The question no. 10 in the interview challenged the participants to express what they would recommend for the improvement of the English programs in the high schools in Cape Verde. The answers that were mostly pronounced were expectable. They suggested that the EL classes should

be more focused on the communicative aspect of the EL. Therefore they believe that the speaking skill should have primacy over grammar and other more structured areas of the teaching-learning process of the EL; with this idea most of the students recommended that the classes should be more practical which would allow the students to develop their communicative skills that at the moment is not happening. In addition, the participants, pertinently, advocated that the cultures of the countries associated to the EL, such as the USA or the UK, should be also added to the lesson plans and units in the EL programs. Finally, the students proposed that the EL should be taught starting in the elementary school (1st to 6th grades). They argue that the early the students start to learn the language the easier it will be for them to acquire it. As referenced in this study by Fromkin et. al (2013), they are not far from the truth, at all. Therefore, I join them and subscribe to all the suggestions and recommendations they proposed.

Adding to the above, and after a thorough analysis of data collected through the interviews to the Cape Verdean immigrant students who participated in this study, the following recommendations to help improve the EL programs in Cape Verde are hereby made.

First of all, the grammar translation centered programs, syllabuses, teaching methods and approaches that are currently used and practiced in the high schools should be shifted for more communicative approaches in order to allow secondary education students to apply the language skills they have gained in academic life in their future social and professional life and achieve a higher level of communicative competence.

Secondly, teachers should prioritize the use of the English language in the classrooms instead of Portuguese or Creole. By using the target language in the classroom during the lessons

the teacher provides the student with a great opportunity to use the language that, otherwise, he would not use anywhere.

Finally, the number of students in one classroom should be reduced. At the present moment the classrooms in the high schools have a minimum of 36 to 40 students. Overcrowded classrooms go against giving the necessary attention to the students' particularities in order to promote an effective learning and later the ability to communicate in the target language.

Limitations and Future Studies

Despite the fact that this research was carefully conducted, there are limitations and deficiencies. First and foremost, the size of the sample used in the research is small. Only 17 Cape Verdean immigrant students might not be preponderant enough to represent the total of students that fall into the criteria for the selection. It would be useful that, for further studies, the researchers expand the sample in size and also in boundaries. There are other communities where Cape Verdean immigrant students could be used in the study, such as the cities of Brockton and Dorchester in Massachusetts, and also Pawtucket in Rhode Island. In fact, for this study there was a genuine attempt to cover students from the Brockton High School but such was not possible for reasons beyond my control.

Another limitation that can be mentioned is the fact that the data in this study was mainly self-reported by the participants. Even though, gathering the participants' points of view in the matter was the initial intention, it proved in the end that with more school records for example, the conclusions would have been more reliable. In this study we had to take what the students said at face value. For instance, when the students declared that they are having better academic performance here in the U.S. than when in Cape Verde which refuted the hypothesis of this study,

it would have been useful to prove that specific data with some school records. Also, they declared to have greatly improved their English proficiency since their arrival; a quick diagnostic English test would have been relevant. Thus, further studies should take this fact into account and get fact data from the participants.

Finally, as recommendation for future studies, the U.S. schools' programs for immigrant accommodation, such as pull-out English classes and after school programs should be evaluated in order to assess their actual impact in the participants' academic performance. In addition, it would be suitable to interview the teachers at the host schools that are constant contact with the Cape Verdean immigrant students and thus, get valuable data regarding the effectiveness of the programs and real assessment of the participants' overall linguistic and academic performance.

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Appendix A

One-on-One Interview Questions

1. How many years of English classes did you have in the public secondary education in Cape Verde before you immigrated to the United States of America (USA)?

2. Did you attend any English program in the private system in Cape Verde or other country (s) before you immigrated to the USA? Specify.

3. While in Cape Verde did you consider learning English important? Why?

4. Were you interested in learning English while in Cape Verde? If yes, why? If no, why?

5. Before you came to live in the USA, were you able to use English in a real communicative situation?

_____ Very well

_____ Quite well

_____ Not that well Please explain your response in more detail.

_____ Quite badly

_____ Very badly

6. What was your major difficulty regarding the EL at that time?

7. Were the high school English programs important in your English learning process in Cape Verde? Why?

8. Did your English competence have any influence in your academic performance at the New Bedford High School? If yes, why? If no, why?

9. Have your EL abilities improved since you arrived in USA? How?

10. Is there anything you would recommend to the students and teachers of EL in Cape Verde? Specify.

Appendix B

Bridgewater State University Parental Consent Form

Title of Research: High School Performance of Cape Verdean Immigrant Youth in New Bedford: A Linguistic Perspective

Researcher: Mauro Reis

You are being asked permission for your child to participate in research. For you to be able to make an informed decision about whether you want your child to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your child's personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your child's participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

This study is being done because the researcher proposes to study the connection that might exist between the English programs that your child participated in the secondary education system in Cape Verde and his/her academic performance in the United States of America. If you agree to allow your child to participate, your child will be asked to answer a series of open questions in an interview conducted by the researcher.

Your child's participation in the study will last for no more than a 20 minute interview.

No risks or discomforts are anticipated.

This study is important for the educational system in Cape Verde and also the Cape Verdean community in New Bedford because it will provide vital information so that changes in the system are made in order to provide students in Cape Verde better conditions to learn the English language and use it effectively.

Confidentiality and Records

Your child's study information will be kept confidential by not disclosing his/her name and other personal information. Pseudonyms are going to be used. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your child's study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

- * Representatives of Bridgewater State University, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at BSU;

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Mauro Reis at mdosreis@student.bridgew.edu and (857) 243 7825.

If you have any questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, please contact The Institutional Review Board, Bridgewater State University, (508) 531 2154.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered

you are 18 years of age or older

your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary

your child may leave the study at any time. If your child decides to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to your child.

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Child's Name _____

Bridgewater State University Child/Minor Assent

I _____ understand that my parent or guardian has given permission (said it is okay) for me to take part in this study about academic performance under the direction of Mauro Dos Reis. I am taking part because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at any time I want to and nothing will happen to me if I want to stop.

Appendix C

Bridgewater State University Adult Informed Consent

Title of Research: *High School Performance of Cape Verdean Immigrant Youth in New Bedford: A Linguistic Perspective*

Researchers: Dr. Joyce R. Anderson, Humanities and Social Sciences, College of English

Mauro Dos Reis, TESOL MA Graduate Student

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Bridgewater State University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and purpose of the Project

This study is being done because the researcher proposes to study the connection that might exist between the English programs that you participated in the secondary education system in Cape Verde and your academic performance in the United States of America.

2. Explanation of the Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of open questions in an interview conducted by the researcher. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts while participating in this study. Your participation in the study will last for no more than a 20 minute interview.

3. Benefits

This study is important for the educational system in Cape Verde and also the Cape Verdean community in New Bedford because it will provide vital information so that changes in the educational system, if needed, are made in order to provide students in Cape Verde better conditions to learn the English language and use it effectively.

4. Confidentiality

Your information will be kept confidential by not disclosing your name and other personal information. Pseudonyms are going to be used. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with: Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research and representatives of Bridgewater State University, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at BSU.

Refusal/Withdrawal

Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. By signing below I am indicating that I understand that it is not possible to

identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Participant Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date

Any questions regarding the conduct of the project, questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or research related to injury, should be brought to the attention of the IRB Administrator at (508) 531-1242. Any questions about the conduct of this research project should be brought to the attention of the principal investigator: Mauro Dos Reis (857) 243 7825