

Why do Hispanic Serving Institution Websites Need to Be Bilingual in Spanish?

Ximena Minaya

Faculty Introduction

Dr. Edna Velásquez

Ximena Minaya's paper investigates the accessibility of health information in Spanish on the websites of select Hispanic Serving Institutions located in the greater Houston area. To ensure her findings are accurate and relevant, Minaya incorporates the latest research into her manuscript. Additionally, she conducts interviews with students and administrative personnel from the health center at Sam Houston State University, providing valuable insights into her research. Bilingual websites play a pivotal role in reducing language barriers and enabling Spanish-speaking students, families, and community members to access essential healthcare information. The incorporation of firsthand perspectives from the Sam Houston State University Health Center enhances the practical implications of Minaya's research for educational institutions seeking to improve accessibility and inclusivity. Apart from her careful research approach, Minaya's commitment to making her manuscript available in English and Spanish demonstrates her dedication to linguistic inclusivity and meaningful engagement with diverse audiences.

Abstract

This study aims to investigate whether universities in the Houston area identified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) provide health promotion and disease prevention information in Spanish. The research involved analyzing the websites of the HSIs studied and conducting interviews with one student from an HSI and one health professional who works for an HSI. Additionally, interviews revealed challenges that Hispanic students face regarding their health and possible language barriers. The study findings suggest that there is a need to provide bilingual information to students enrolled in HSIs, whose parents would also benefit from it. Further, the results of the study indicate a need for additional research within the HSIs in the Houston area, more interviews with Hispanic students and their parents, and greater involvement of Hispanic students at their universities. Finally, the study shows that HSIs in Houston need to do a better job of providing information in Spanish on their Student Health Center websites about health promotion and disease prevention.

Several universities in the Houston area are Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). For a university to be considered an HSI, its enrollment must consist of 25% Hispanic students (Hesse & Jewett, 2022). This distinction guarantees economic benefits to the institution, as HSIs qualify to receive Title V Grant funds (Scott et al., 2022). Therefore, the main goal of HSIs should be to provide the best support possible to their Hispanic students.

Adults who primarily speak Spanish at home and do not know much English are not able to access to relevant health information on the internet (Millar et al., 2020). Although many Hispanics know the English language and speak it fluently, when it comes to receiving information about their health, it is reasonable that many would rather receive that information in Spanish, as medical terms doctors use may not be in their native language.

The health of Hispanics in the United States is a cause for concern for several reasons. In the Hispanic culture, people tend to go to the hospital only for emergencies, and it is not very common for them to go for routine exams. In addition, a lack of insurance can negatively affect the health of some Hispanics. Depending on their immigration status, some Hispanics may avoid going to the doctor because they are afraid of being deported (Cabral & Cuevas, 2020).

Typically, young people look up information on the internet. Thus, websites become the main information portal; institutions should provide the resources necessary for its current and future students. Medical experts Breena R. Taira and Aristides Orue (2019) claim the need for translation and interpretation services and the behavior of the medical staff towards their patients when they request language services are proof inequality still exists. Indeed, some healthcare providers do not provide the resources needed for their Hispanic patients, and some Hispanic patients experience differences in the medical care and attention they receive compared to non-Hispanic patients (Taira & Orue, 2019).

Tornatzky et al. (2002) argue the internet would be a significant, useful tool for connecting with Hispanic parents and for Hispanic parents to learn information about universities and their services; and in that way, the parent's issue of not having enough knowledge about universities would decrease, particularly if it were written in their native language.

A study conducted at Sam Houston State University, an HSI in the Houston area, found that: 1) approximately 5,334 students are Hispanic, which translates to 25.53% of the total enrollment, 2) 81% are 18-24-year-olds, 3) 71% are first-generation students; and 4) 90% want the Hispanic culture to be shown more openly in the facilities of their university (French et al., 2021). The Hispanic population is expected to become 24.6% of the US population by 2045 (Frey, 2018); Hispanic enrollment at colleges and universities has increased from 1.5 million in 2000 to 3.8 million in 2019, and it has continued to increase by 6% from 2019 to 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2022). Given these statistics, the rapid increase of Hispanic enrollment in universities across the US, and the relevance of language barriers to healthcare access among Hispanics, it is important to discover whether HSIs in the Houston area are doing a good job at providing information on health promotion and disease prevention in Spanish to their students. However, there are no known existing studies that address this topic, whether in the Houston area or in other locations in the United States. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following question: Do HSI universities in the Houston area provide health promotion and disease prevention information in Spanish? To investigate this question, data collection consisted of website analysis from the HSIs studied for this research, and interviews with one student from an HSI and one health professional who works for an HSI.

Methods

The HSIs from which data were collected were: Sam Houston State University (SHSU), University of Houston (UH), University of Houston-Downtown (UHD), University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), and University of Houston-Victoria (UHV). For each university, the data were collected from their websites. The key words used to find information in Spanish were “Español o Espanol.” The key words to find information in English about the services that the universities’ clinics offer was “Student Health Center.” Also, for this study, data were collected from interviews with a student and a SHSU employee. The most relevant information from these sources was then extracted. Finally, relevant information was summarized in a narrative form to describe the degree to which information was bilingual in Spanish.

Instruments

The interview questions asked to a health professional in the Student Health Center were:

- How many bilingual professionals work at the Student Health Center
- What are their roles?
- What is missing in the Student Health Center to help Hispanics?
- What can be improved to help Hispanics at the Student Health Center?

Similarly, a question asked to the SHSU student was:

- Have you been to the Student Health Center of your university? If so, how has your experience have been?

Data collection easily helped the participants discuss the Student Health Center at SHSU in detail, since most of the questions were open-ended.

Results

Website Data

Among the universities studied, those with information in Spanish on their Health Center websites were: UH (2023a), which contained forms in Spanish for UH Health Family Care Center, and UHCL (2023a), which had information in Spanish for the Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. Indeed, several universities in Houston either did not provide or provided little information in Spanish on their websites. This is especially problematic for students who do not speak or understand much English.

Among specific universities, SHSU (2022) offered services such as dental, pharmacy, and laboratory; however, this information found on its website was not in Spanish.

UH (2023b) had a pharmacy on its premises and a variety of services for students in its Health Center, such as medical examinations, treatment of minor injuries, sutures, surgeries, drainage, vaccines, sexual health

and family planning consultations, laboratory work, and specialists' referrals, but this information was not in Spanish.

UHD (2020) offered prevention services, routine exams, bandaging, first aid, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases testing, treatment for infection and minor injuries, laboratory tests, blood tests, blood pressure tests, and pregnancy tests, but this information was also not in Spanish.

UHCL (2023b) provided free nursing services, such as first aid, medical consultation, blood pressure testing, and health and wellness education, as well as free unit doses, which are free doses given to patients one time only. It also had a pharmacy, and they offered different types of vaccines and gynecological services. Again, this information was not in Spanish.

The common denominator of all these webpages was that they were easy to navigate and most of them provided large amounts of information regarding the services they offered and the cost for each service.

Finally, the only university where there was no information about prices or the medical services they offered was UHV ("Health Services," n.d.), which only provided basic information about the location of the clinic and the co-pay for each visit; however, this information was not in Spanish. Nevertheless, UHV ("Admissions," n.d.) had information in Spanish on its admissions page and partially on another page about the Bachelor's program in Spanish ("Spanish Program," n.d.).

Interview Data

An international business student (personal communication, 2023, February 24) from Sam Houston State University recommended the university add information in Spanish on SHSU's website, since many international business students only speak Spanish. On the other hand, she confirmed her experience at the university has been positive both in the Student Health Center and in the university itself. Indeed, her comments indicated the professionals at the SHSU Health Center provide students with a good experience and that the student's clinical treatment and the behavior of clinicians was not a problem. What's more, experts affirm some students think effective communication means clear and concise communication; others associate the warmth or

charisma of medical staff with effective communication (Adu Gyamfi, 2022).

Additionally, other factors such as wait time could influence a positive or negative experience. The international business student stated she was treated fairly by medical staff when she visited the SHSU Health Center and was given as much information as possible (personal communication, 2023, February 24). Similarly, she went to the Medical Center without an appointment and was seen quickly, which contributed to her having a positive experience. It seems that the student had not experienced discrimination or heard that other students had a negative experience or were discriminated within the university, which could be an indicator of the values and ethics of students, teachers, health professionals, and other professionals within the university.

A staff member at the SHSU Health Center (personal communication, 2023, March 3), noted Hispanic students have similar needs to students of other races or ethnicities, and the most common types of health problems at the clinic were colds, strep viruses, COVID, urinary tract infections, and sexually transmitted infections. He also pointed out that one of the problems faced by the Hispanic population is mainly type 2 diabetes, a disease that has a genetic component but can also occur if a person does not have an adequate diet or does not control their weight. Further, the employee assured that the SHSU Health Center has at least seven people who speak Spanish, which helps Hispanic students who feel more comfortable expressing themselves in their native language. Regarding the translation of documents, the SHSU employee stated that, up to this date, no patient has requested a Spanish translation, but their health records system can translate documents in case a patient needs information in their native language, which is beneficial for Spanish-speaking patients who need to fill out forms or need the translation of some documents.

The staff member also stated that it is rare for a patient to request interpretation services, which suggests most Spanish-speaking students have not needed them. However, this can be due to many reasons. For example, some students might not be aware of the existence of the Health Center at their university, do not have health insurance, or receive treatment in other countries where it can be cheaper. Also, it may be that some students do not go to the Health Center at their

university for treatment because of financial reasons or because there is no information in Spanish on their website. In addition, he accentuated that he is not aware if changes are needed at the Health Center, but that if there were a need to make one, he would do so immediately. Likewise, the interviewee mentioned SHAC, which stands for Student Health Advisory Committee, a student organization in which students could get involved to improve the SHSU Health Center. In this way, it is shown SHSU is interested in helping Hispanic students; but also that Hispanic students need to get involved and participate more in these kind of student committees. Additionally, he commented that having Hispanic students on that committee is highly relevant and that there have been Hispanic students on the committee before.

Overall, it appears necessary changes can be made to help the Hispanic students at SHSU, but they need to give their perspective on the matter so their university is aware of their needs and can solve the problems they have. Through text messages exchanged with Campus Smiles Dental at SHSU (personal communication, 2023, February 27), it was found that they do not have bilingual staff in Spanish and they do not have any brochures with information in Spanish. However, they offered to contact a member of the university to help with the translation and interpretation needed in case a Hispanic student wanted to make an appointment with them. Even though these barriers exist, there are different solutions to the problems that exist within HSIs. The US is such a diverse country and, having a significant number of people who speak Spanish, all HSIs should be more inclusive with their students and put information on their webpages in other languages. For instance, some non-HSI universities, such as Washington State University (WSU), are already offering resources in Spanish for students and parents who feel supported by this initiative. WSU also provides “support initiatives for undocumented students” (2023).

Study Limitations

This study has limitations. First, it was not possible to collect information about the UH portal, because access is reserved only for their students. Therefore, it is unknown if their portal has information in Spanish or in other languages. Second, this study is based on data collected from the webpages of five universities and from interviews from only one of the five universities studied in this research. Several results were found

by putting the word: “Español” in the search engine, and other words were tested in the search engine; however, the only word that provided results in Spanish was “Español.” Third, the relevance of these data is likely to change over time because the university websites might remove information they currently have or, on the contrary, the information might be updated in the near future with information in Spanish as they will likely get a higher percentage of Hispanic students every year. Also, it is important to consider that university policies might change over time, or they might get new proposals for improving students’ access to information. Experts consider that “colleges and universities represent an important venue for helping prevent e-cigarette initiation, support cessation, and protect young adults from risks involved in e-cigarette use” (Jun & Kim, 2021). Likewise, information stated in the colleges’ and universities’ websites can prevent people for getting involved in risky behaviors, including contracting STIs and excessive drinking (Habel et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to add this type of information into colleges and university websites translated in Spanish and other languages.

Suggestions/Conclusions

Indicated by the existing literature and identified during the current study, it is important that HSIs in Houston have bilingual websites for different reasons: because the US lacks an official language; to improve disease awareness, prevention, and overall, more health knowledge within Hispanics; to accommodate the rapid Hispanic population growth within the US; because of the language barriers Hispanic students and parents face at universities; and because parents and students support bilingual websites. Therefore, all these reasons back up the relevance of this study and the need for potential solutions that are discussed below.

Although there is some information in Spanish on some webpages, the universities in the Houston area need to do a better job of ensuring this information is systematically provided for Spanish speakers, and thus there is an urgent need to include Spanish on these web pages. Moreover, the information found in Spanish on the websites of multiple universities researched within the Houston area was not easily accessible and had to be looked up with a specific term in the search engine of each university (e.g., “Español”). Similarly, other terms were searched, such as “Student Health Center,” “Health,” and “Spanish,”

but the information provided was in English. In particular, technology should be used to do something that benefits thousands of students and their parents. Parents would greatly benefit from this, since many of them are immigrants and do not have much proficiency of the English language. Certainly, they hope their children will be able to have equal access to health services at their universities as their English-speaking counterparts. “It is important to engage parents by creating programs that are culturally relevant” (Marquez, 2017). Although parents are not legally entitled to view adult students’ medical or educational records, it is common that parents and adult children exchange this type of information because information is openly shared between both within the Hispanic culture. Indeed, parental involvement is crucial for Hispanic students’ success (Marquez, 2017). Moreover, universities could have a translation button on their websites that is visible to everyone and stands out easily. This strategy was applied at St. Joseph Medical Center located in the Houston

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area. Its website has a translation button on the right side, which is easy to see, and it offers automatic translation not only Spanish, but in five other languages: Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Russian and Haitian Creole. It would be ideal if current students and future students who search the websites of the universities in Houston would be able to access information in Spanish without any inconvenience.

One way to help Hispanic students who do not have a good level of English yet is to provide them with information in Spanish virtually about the different health services offered by the university where they attend, or simply by giving health and wellness advice and tips. For example, Texas Southern University (2022), a historically Black university (2021) and not a Hispanic Serving Institution, offers information in Spanish in its online magazine about diseases that commonly affect the Hispanic community, such as diabetes. They also created lung cancer awareness and recommend certain types of foods to encourage a healthy lifestyle. It is crucial to create awareness in both colleges’ and universities’ Health Centers and their websites about different diseases and translate that information into other languages.

Hispanics are going to form part of the largest ethnic group by 2060; and, therefore, more studies should be done about their unique health needs (Herrera et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is essential that students

take a little initiative so they break down the barriers that stand in the way of their education, health, and well-being; and, at the same time, it is important that they are heard in their institutions. Another way to help Spanish-speaking students and their parents could be through translation and interpretation in their native language. An example of this is at Washington State University (WSU), which has information in their website in Spanish (in their orientation tab). They have a program called “La Bienvenida,” which is in Spanish, and its goal is to help Hispanic families get in contact with other Spanish-speaking parents and staff members, and to provide them with resources in their native language. The feedback from students and parents of this program, which promotes diversity and inclusion, is positive. Parents and students feel supported by WSU since it is providing them with resources they need (WSU, 2023).

Further, because Hispanic parents influence whether their children will transfer to a university, their perspectives need to be considered. Experts explain that “the lack of familiarity with and knowledge about higher education on the part of students and their parents” is one of the many barriers college students face when they want to transfer to a US university (Garcia & Alexander, 2012). Another challenge is the language barrier, because they are not able to understand the information about a university or to talk with university professors,

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advisors, and other academics if it is in another language (Tornatzky et al., 2002). Therefore, if there were more bilingual resources available for Hispanic students and their parents, universities may experience higher enrollment rates of Hispanic students and potentially come closer to accomplishing their mission as HSIs.

Another way to help Spanish-speaking students and their parents would be through the creation of bilingual health services forms, which UH (2023a) has on their website and can be found on the eligibility forms’ page, including four types of forms in Spanish about the Sliding Fee Discount Program, the statement of support, statement of self-employment income, and the wage verification form to access health services. The relevance of adding this type of information falls into statistics: research suggests that 56% of Hispanics use the internet, and

one of the main reasons why other Hispanics do not use the internet is because they do not speak English (Fox & Livingston, 2007).

Moreover, the creation of an online chat with a representative who speaks their native language would be helpful. Indeed, it would be convenient to follow the example of a hospital in the Houston area. For instance, the Houston Methodist (2023) website offers an online chat to its patients, where they can talk to someone in Spanish or Arabic and add files within the chat in case they need specific assistance with a document or have questions about a particular document. This is crucial to help Hispanics communicate better, since researchers affirm that 47% of Hispanics are Spanish dominant, 23% are English dominant, and 30% are bilingual (Fox & Livingston, 2007).

Further, the implementation of more information in Spanish both at their university's Health Center and online about disease prevention, the importance of vaccination, and other information about their health and well-being would be helpful for current and future students and their parents. Consequently, it could greatly improve their health just by reading articles about recommendations on how to take care of themselves and how to prevent diseases. Moreover, if they decide to look for treatment at the university's Health Center or somewhere else, it is likely to still create an impact on their health and the health of the Hispanic population, since any individuals may access the website. Likewise, mental health should not be left aside, and the necessary measures must be taken to have successful results. Experts guarantee that people can access information on the internet that helps them improve their mental health (Guanipa et al., 2002). Undoubtedly, mental health is a subject that is sometimes neglected, and should be given the same importance as physical health. A good example of this is Texas Southern University (2022); it has a PDF of a magazine on its website that contains some parts in Spanish, including several phone numbers of mental health and suicide hotlines that students could reach out for help.

In conclusion, more information in Spanish should be added into the websites of the Health Centers of the universities so students can better understand the online material, and so, in this way, they are informed about how to improve both their physical and mental health. Similarly, further research should be conducted in other universities, with a focus

on interviewing more Spanish-speaking students. This will allow them to provide their perspectives on the measures that should be implemented in their respective educational institutions. Indeed, it is recommended that both the institutions and the students make changes, and that a substantial change depends on the cooperation of both. ■

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Student Biography

Ximena Minaya graduated in summer 2023 with a major in Spanish and a minor in Health. She also served as a CHSS ambassador, whose members act as liaisons between CHSS students and the university. Throughout her career, Ximena read numerous academic articles about the health of Hispanics in America, which sparked her interest in helping the Hispanic community. When Dr. Velásquez told her about *The Measure*, Ximena immediately wanted to get involved by submitting one of her research articles developed in Dr. Velásquez' class about Hispanic Serving Institutions during her last semester at SHSU. Ximena plans to continue her involvement in research and to work for a university in the Houston area.