

ABSTRACT

The agriculture industry in United States has seen a historical increase in its Spanish speaking workforce (*Expanded Data for Detailed Hispanic or Latino Groups Now Available, 2023; Farmworker Justice, 2022*). This has presented the industry with profound linguistic and cultural challenges that have created communication gaps among veterinarian, managers, Spanish-speaking caretakers, and Hispanic workers (Martinez Aguiriano et al., 2024; Stup & Molaney, 2003). These barriers have led to miscommunications, safety risks for animals, a decrease in workplace harmony, and cultural challenges (Martinez Aguiriano et al., 2024; Stup & Maloney, 2003). The industry is in high demand for professionals able to bridge this cultural and linguistic gap in effective ways (Landau et al., 2015; Martinez Aguiriano et al., 2024; Roman-Muniz et al., 2004; Mattson, 2019; Stup & Maloney, 2003).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine how Spanish language instruction at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in undergraduate agriculture programs can help meet the demand in the agriculture industry for professionals capable of working with a Spanish-speaking and Hispanic workforce.

DEFINITIONS

Hispanic-Serving Institutions:

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2023) are higher education institutions that enrolls at least a total of 25% Hispanic students.

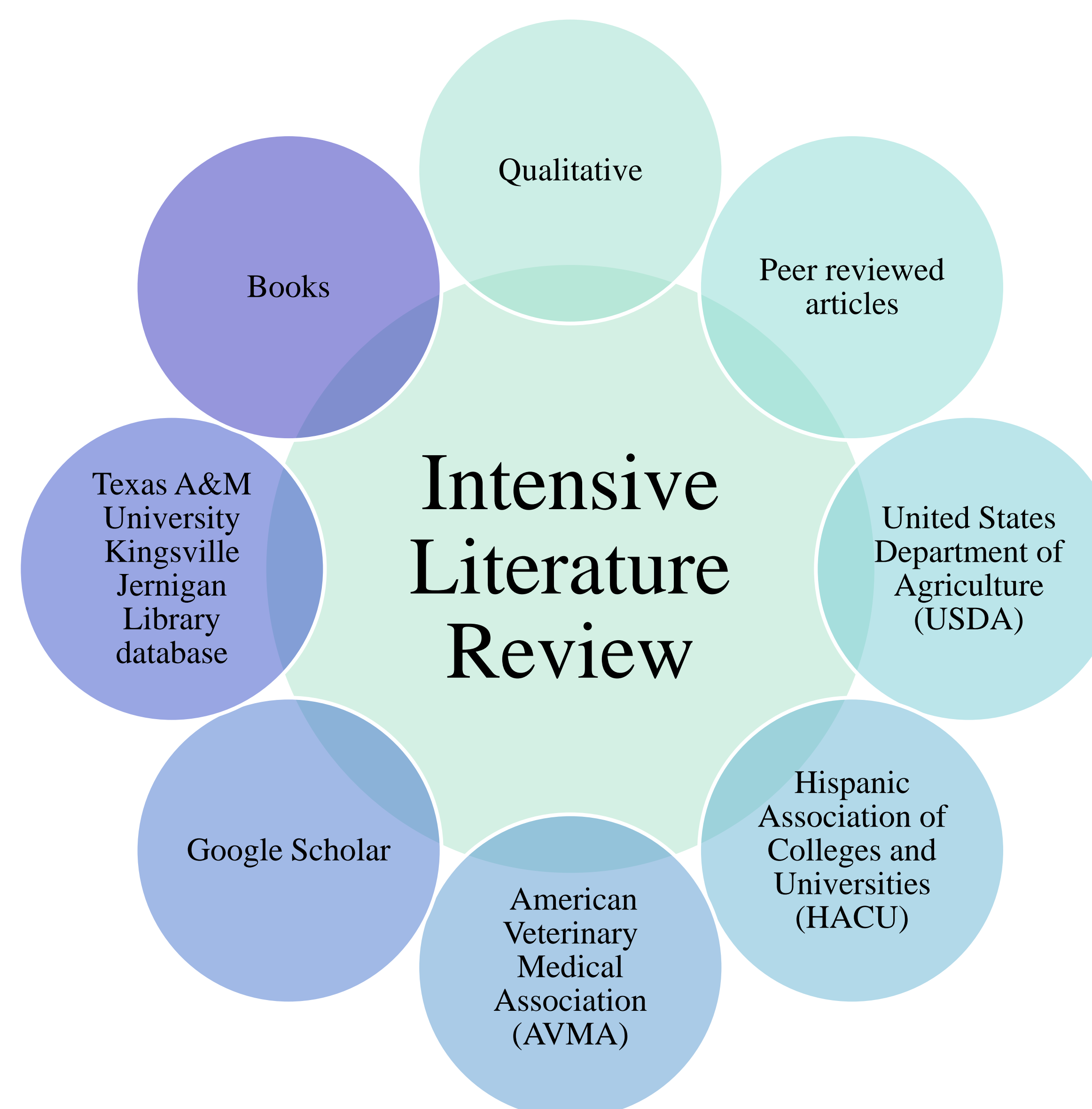
Language barriers:

For this research, a linguistic limitation that hinders communication between individuals that work in the Agriculture industry affecting the exchange of information between parties.

Agriculture Industry:

According to United States Department of Agriculture, it is a diverse and complex industry that includes "food and beverage manufacturing; food and beverage stores; food services and eating/drinking places; textiles, apparel, and leather products; and forestry and fishing" (Ag and food sectors and the economy, 2023, para. 2) as well as biotechnology, crop and livestock practices.

METHODS



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

- 1) Language barriers and communication gaps have led to misunderstandings, reduced productivity, and challenges in effectively training and managing workers in the agriculture industry. In addition, this has affected animal welfare and effective operation among farms by veterinary professionals. Lastly, language barriers impede effective communication in the workplace conducting to worker injuries.
- 2) A key finding in our research is that the Universities that have responded to this issue and have instituted Spanish courses have not been HSI institutions.
- 3) Many HSIs with Colleges of Agriculture, may require a language and/or philosophy component in their curriculum but there is no explicit requirement of Spanish classes for agriculture majors, or a foreign language component.
- 4) The USDA has developed grants to strengthen HSIs by enhancing development and teaching programs to better prepare and serve undergraduate agriculture students. However, these grants do not cover the instruction of the Spanish language.
- 5) I contend that by tapping their diverse nature, HSIs could play a critical role in solving the language and cultural barrier within English-Spanish speakers by incorporating advanced/specialized Spanish classes to agriculture majors.

CONCLUSIONS

- Integrating Spanish language and cultural competency skills for agriculture students is essential, as one-third of the workers in this sector only speak Spanish.
- The United States is facing a continuous increase in the Hispanic population, signaling that Hispanic workers, and Spanish-speaking workers will remain a growing trend.
- Departments of Agriculture at HSIS should focus on both culture and language instruction among undergraduate students. Their diverse student bodies allow these institutions to develop future agricultural leaders by enhancing professional development through a linguistic approach.
- Initiatives adopted by universities, such as Colorado State University, Rutgers University, University of Wisconsin, and Penn State University, that have already implemented programs to address language barriers in agriculture could serve as models for Agriculture programs at HSIs.

REFERENCES



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