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Are Adult ESL Programs in Northern Mississippi Meeting Student Needs?

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ARE ADULT ESL PROGRAMS IN NORTHERN MISSISSIPPI MEETING STUDENT NEEDS?

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS
December 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT
JESSICA JILL FLYNN: Are Adult ESL Programs in Northern Mississippi Meeting
Student Needs?
(Under the direction of Felice Coles)

As the immigrant population increases in the United States, there is a growing

need for adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Not only must these

programs be available, they must also be accessible to potential students based on

individual needs. This study investigates whether adult ESL programs in northern

Mississippi are satisfactorily meeting those needs. Literature in the areas of second

language acquisition, pedagogy, and adult ESL classroom research is reviewed, along

with statistical background information relevant to the investigated geographic region. A

qualitative methodological approach is employed, utilizing online, anonymous surveys to

measure program characteristics and student satisfaction. Discrepancies in program

coordinator versus student perception of program shortcomings are also investigated.

Results from six program coordinators and seven students of adult ESL programs

in the cities of Oxford and Tupelo, Mississippi indicate that transportation is not a

significant barrier to attendance for these students. Furthermore, although the majority of

students were females in their 20's and 30's, availability of childcare options during

classes is, likewise, not a significant barrier to attendance. Adult ESL programs in this

area are sufficiently improving students' English listening and speaking skills but are

perceived to be failing to provide adequate instruction to improve students' English

reading and writing skills.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.

Adult ESL programs are an important service offered to communities, and are of

particular consequence to immigrant populations (Dempsey et al., 2009; Eyring, 2014).

These classes allow English language learners to seek better employment, improve their

family's financial standing, connect with their children and neighbors, and improve their

quality of life (Eyring, 2014; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014; Meniado, 2019). Adult ESL classes

should be *accessible* to students based on individual needs, not simply *available* to the

general community. While availability is achieved by offering even just one class,

accessibility is obtained by catering program characteristics to student needs (Kouritzin,

2000). Without truly accessible adult ESL programs, non-native English speakers are at a

distinct disadvantage in communication and employment or educational opportunities as

compared to their native English-speaking neighbors, highlighting the necessity for

satisfactory adult ESL programs in every community.

Research suggests that adults experience more difficulty in acquiring proficiency

in a second language than children (eg. Bitterlin et al., 2003; Birdsong, 2006;

Cunningham Florez, 1996; Huang, 2009). Age of acquisition has a significant, negative

effect on morphosyntactic judgment and native-like pronunciation as age of acquisition

increases. In fact, age of acquisition is considered the most reliable predictor of second

language attainment (Birdsong, 2006). Additionally, adults face many more

responsibilities and obligations than their children, and in most cases, childcare and

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financial obligations take precedence over attending English classes (Wu, Wu & Le, 2014; Kouritzin, 2000; Hayes, 1989; Carter, 2016). Busier schedules and a lower aptitude for second language acquisition in comparison to their children means that adult immigrants face more challenges in learning English than their children. This disparity results in a heightened necessity for Community ESL (CESL) classes that cater to adult immigrants' busy schedules. This study explores the availability, accessibility, and student satisfaction of adult ESL classes in Northern Mississippi. Specifically, it surveys coordinators of adult ESL programs to identify programs' weaknesses and potential ways of improving them.

The following terms and abbreviations are used in this study. The term ESL stands for *English as a second language,* which is the title given to educational programs aimed at improving non-native English speakers' English competency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a context in which English is used as the language of wider communication. At times, the acronym CESL, or *community English as a second language*, may be used to refer to ESL classes that are offered to members of a given community. I have classified the adult ESL programs investigated by this study as CESL classes. The study of *second language acquisition*, or SLA, is the study of how one learns a second language and how that process differs from the process of learning one's first language. SLA usually only applies to learning a second language as an adult. Within the discussion of SLA theory, *L1* is one's native language, the one acquired from birth, and *L2* is one's second language. Likewise, in reference to immigration and the maintenance of native culture, *C1* refers to one's native culture, and *C2* refers to the

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culture of the native speakers of one's second language. In the case of ESL, C2 would

refer to the culture of native English-speakers, for example American culture in the

United States. Additionally, *first language acquisition* (FLA) refers to the process of

learning one's first language from birth. Wu, Wu, and Le (2014) point out that an "adult"

in adult education is difficult to define; for instance, in China, "adult education" is

defined as any educational program designed for students not currently enrolled in high

school courses, or never finished high school, but want to continue in higher education

(Wu, Wu & Le, 2014). For the purposes of this study, an 'adult' is defined as anyone

over the age of 18 years old, regardless of current or prior educational enrollment. I

chose to use this definition of 'adult' because IRB guidelines require parental consent for

research subjects under the age of 18 years old (IRB Application, 2019). I do not

investigate demographic characteristics of subjects, such as educational experience; I

only have verified that subjects are at least 18 years or older. Furthermore, language

proficiency is defined as the level of attainment a student has achieved in a particular

aspect of a language (Harklau, 2002). Accordingly, a student with a high English oral

proficiency would be able to speak with ease and would have a large vocabulary.

Likewise, a student with a *limited English proficiency* (LEP) would have a smaller

vocabulary and would experience more difficulty in English communication than

students with higher English proficiencies.[1] Furthermore, within language proficiency,

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[1] LEP is considered by some to be a pejorative term because some native English speakers may be considered LEPs due to the use of slang, colloquial phrases, etc. More often, the term ELL (English language learner) is used interchangeably with LEP to avoid stigmatizing any group. While not all LEPs are ELLs, all ELLs are LEPs. To avoid confusion and to keep terminology consistent with the sources, the term LEP is used in this research study in the same context as ELL, as defined by Barzallo (2019).

literacy specifically refers to an individual's language proficiency in reading and writing (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). An individual is considered literate if they are able to read and write, however one's degree of literacy can vary based on level of education. TESOL, which stands for *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*, is an organization committed to research and providing standards for ESL programs worldwide (TESOL Mission and Values, 2019). When referring to ESL program demographics, specifically in relation to religiously-sponsored programs, a *congregation* is defined as a body of people who meet regularly for religious purposes at a predetermined location such as a mosque, church, temple, or any other meeting place (U.S. Religion Census, 2019). *Motivation*, while a complicated construct, is defined in the context of SLA as 'the extent of active, personal involvement in foreign or second language learning' (Oxford, 1996, p.121). The concepts of *ambivalence* and *reluctance* are compared in the context of students' perceived barriers to attending adult ESL classes. *Ambivalence* is an uncertainty caused by an individual's contradictory attitudes or feelings (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), while *reluctance* is defined as a mental state of unwillingness or hesitation (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Ambivalence about learning English may lead to reluctance to enroll in an ESL class, for example.

Within contemporary research on adult ESL programs, there have been studies on the barriers that current students experience in regard to attending classes (for example, Hayes, 1989; Kouritzin, 2000; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014), but there is not much research on whether programs are aware of these barriers and if they are implementing solutions to rectify these barriers. Furthermore, there is existing research comparing adult ESL

program efficacy and characteristics across states (Eyring, 2014; Williams, 1995), but fewer investigations that compare programs within states. The aim of this study is to fill this information gap by specifically asking program coordinators about their evaluation of the efficacy of adult ESL programs in Tupelo and Oxford, Mississippi and to provide suggestions for program improvement within these areas.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter Two reviews the relevant current research, providing a theoretical framework for this study and identifying gaps in previous studies that this investigation attempts to fill. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach, identifies the research questions, and previews the results. Chapter Four is a detailed, qualitative explanation of each result, and Chapter Five evaluates and discusses the significance of these results in comparison to relevant literature. Finally, Chapter Six concludes with a summary of the key findings of this study, limitations, and implications for further study.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW.

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature concerning the pertinent topics to this study. These topics include background information about adult ESL in the United States, second language acquisition, second language pedagogy, and challenges faced by ESL programs and students.

The first section of this chapter reviews basic background information that is needed to understand the basis of this study. It consists of two subsections, the first of which is Demographics, detailing the relevant statistical background of the geographic areas of study: Oxford and Tupelo, Mississippi. Furthermore, general characteristics of adult ESL programs are discussed and reviewed in relation to this specific geographic area. The second subsection, Reasons for Adult ESL, gives context to the importance of this study and why the field of adult ESL matters.

The second section begins with the theoretical background pertaining to this study. In this section it is necessary to include the differences in second language acquisition between children and adults because different pedagogical techniques are employed to teach these two distinct age groups. Differing theories of the best methods of second language acquisition for the adult age groups are discussed.

Thirdly, pedagogical techniques for the second language classroom are reviewed, highlighting the importance of utilizing different strategies and how they relate to SLA

theory. Furthermore, the real-world value of other classroom strategies, such as writing development, is revealed as they pertain specifically to adult ESL learners.

Lastly, challenges faced by adult ESL programs and students are presented in detail. The specific needs of middle-aged female English learners are highlighted, as this group comprises the majority of adult ESL students in many areas (Dempsey et al., 2009), including the areas investigated in this study.

Demographics

According to a 2010 study, an estimated 54% of immigrants with children 18 years or younger have a limited competency in English (Chao & Mantero, 2014). As of 2015, there were a total of 13,250,000 immigrants given permanent legal status estimated to be living in the United States (Baker, 2019). This means that potentially, there are millions of limited English proficiency (LEP) speakers in the United States that could benefit from ESL classes. While there is a huge need for ESL programs, the adult education system in the United States is extremely underfunded and unregulated (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2019; Eyring, 2014). Moreover, many adult ESL programs are failing to meet student needs in providing acceptable classroom materials and services.

It is common across communities to see adult ESL classes offered by religious congregations (Chao & Mantero, 2014), and within the state of Mississippi, a sizable proportion of adult ESL programs are facilitated by religious groups. According to the 2010 US Religion Census, 59.92% of Tupelo residents and 40.40% of Oxford residents are members of a religious congregation (Grammich et al., 2010). The state of

Mississippi ranks number six in the nation for the highest percentage of the population that are members of a religious congregation (Grammich et al., 2010).

Reasons for Adult ESL

Adults choose to learn English as a second language for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason is to improve their quality of life in some way (Wu, Wu & Le, 2014; Meniado, 2019), which could be as simple as making daily tasks, such as grocery shopping, easier. Other reasons for learning English include career improvement and continuing one's education.

The vast majority of jobs in the U.S. require employees to speak, read, and write in professional English, but many adult ESL programs only focus on listening and speaking rather than reading and writing. While some employers offer English in the workplace programs, which are designed to allow employees to learn English while already working for companies, these programs have the capacity to stigmatize employees, isolating them socially and creating a disincentive to continue to attend these classes (Kouritzin, 2000). According to a 2002 study, employees that are fluent in English can earn up to 17% higher salaries than their non-English speaking or LEP counterparts (Chiswick & Miller, 2002). As many people immigrate to the U.S. to find work, learning English is essential to support their families. Moreover, the demand for bilingual employees is increasing at a rapid rate (Subtirelu, 2017), so learning English will not only help non-native English speakers find jobs, but it may also make them more desirable to employers than native English speakers who do not speak a second language (Subtirelu, 2017). Some ESL programs have added vocational ESL classes, which are

unfortunately not widespread, but existing programs have been very successful and report both higher student retention rates and enrollment rates than basic adult ESL programs (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008).

Another reason to learn English is to continue one's education. American universities continue to attract a growing number of international students each year (Rose & Weiser, 2018), yet few courses, with the exception of foreign language classes, are offered in languages other than English. Pursuing higher education is another way that English language learners can improve their quality of life, but this pursuit cannot be completed without first obtaining a level of English proficiency that enables an individual to communicate in English with relative ease. Due to the trend of decreased emphasis on writing compared to speaking in ESL classrooms, it is possible to attain an acceptable proficiency in spoken English in these classes, but it is quite difficult to achieve the level of proficiency required to take a university class designed for native English speakers (Fernandez et al., 2017). If students with limited English competency attempt to enroll in University level coursework, they may be forced to first enroll in developmental English composition courses to improve their English writing ability before taking degree-earning credits (Zafft et al., 2006; Williams, 1995). While these developmental courses offered by universities cost money, many adult ESL classes are free of charge, offering a way for English language learners to prepare to earn a degree without paying tuition for prerequisite courses.

Second Language Acquisition

In order to understand the different theories of how an ESL classroom should be run, one must first delve into the field of second language acquisition. Second language acquisition (SLA) is the study of how people learn a second language. Some researchers believe that SLA is cognitively, physically, and socially different from native, or first, language acquisition (Klein, 1996). Every human is born with a relatively comparable innate language capacity—the ability to learn one's first, and subsequent, languages (Patkowski, 1994). However, it is up for debate whether this innate language capacity is necessarily available to L2 learners. An infant has the capacity to learn any language at birth; however, in many cases, once that child reaches a widely-debated age ranging from five years old to puberty, that capacity becomes limited to native-like proficiency in only languages that share the same group of phonemes as the native language (Birdsong, 1992; Long, 1990). First language acquisition (FLA), with the exception of lexical expansion, which continues throughout the entire course of one's life, is generally considered to be completed by puberty (Klein, 1996). Second language acquisition most notably differs from first language acquisition in the way it is learned. While one's first language is learned through immersion and inference, second languages are most commonly learned elsewhere, which may not follow the same order as FLA (Klein, 1996). Consequently, conscious pedagogical decisions must be made by a second language instructor to decide how students will most accurately and productively learn the language. Fascinatingly, SLA also differs from FLA in the aspect that SLA rarely reaches the same "full" acquisition as one's first language when learned after age five or six, which is when the

human physical phonological capacity becomes rigid (Klein, 1996; Huang, 2009; Cunningham Florez, 1998). However a second language is learned, the adult language learner must have easy access to the target language in order to acquire it: this is done most easily in second language classrooms, such as in adult ESL classes.

Age of Acquisition

Typically, unless a second language is learned simultaneously with one's first language (known as "bilingual first language acquisition," (Klein, 1996)), it is rarely possible for a second language learner to achieve native-like proficiency of a language, in particular regard to pronunciation (Cunningham Florez, 1996; Birdsong, 2006; Huang, 2009). The lack occurs for three reasons: firstly, due to differing levels of biological development between children and adults. Children are physically capable of uttering all phonemes until the age of five or six, and once a phoneme is not used in speech by that age, most individuals experience extreme difficulty in uttering that phoneme with the same quality as an individual who regularly uses that phoneme in their native language. This phenomenon is most famously linked to the Critical Period Hypothesis of language acquisition, which proposes that language acquisition ability is inextricably tied to age, becoming more difficult after the "critical period" has passed (Lenneberg, 1967). The duration of the "critical period" is widely debated among linguists, however many have argued that because phonological capacity fossilizes around five or six years old due to declining capacity to acquire new neuromuscular functions (Cunningham Florez, 1998). Furthermore, because neurological "lateralization," which assigns linguistic functions to distinct brain hemispheres, occurs by puberty (Cunningham Florez, 1998), the critical

period in SLA is generally agreed to fall somewhere between the age of five and puberty (Klein, 1996; Huang, 2009; Cunningham Florez, 1998; Birdsong, 1992; Long, 1990). Therefore, because adults do not acquire their L2 during the critical period, SLA during adulthood is fundamentally different than SLA during childhood up to puberty. Secondly, on a more abstract level, a level of social development takes place in FLA that does not typically occur in SLA, which means that an individual adopts cultural mannerisms, colloquial phrases, and social cues of the culture of his or her first language. Conversely, many second language learners choose not to put in the effort required to adopt these mannerisms as completely as native speakers. Thirdly, differences in levels of cognitive language fundamentally change how language is learned (Klein, 1996). This topic is further explained in the section *L1 Knowledge Transfer*, Chapter 2.

In cases of adult second language learners, age of acquisition does not generally matter. It is, rather, the total number of years of language study, among other factors such as L1/L2 linguistic congruence and individual motivation, that determine the degree and success of acquisition (Birdsong, 2006; Carroll, 1967). Within a class of students that are the same age, students who began studying the same language at an earlier age should have a higher level of proficiency in the target language than their peers that began L2 study at a later age. Proficiency, then, is not a measure of age of first exposure to the language, but rather a measure of the total number of years dedicated to study. For instance, a 40-year-old who has studied Spanish as a second language for 20 years, beginning at age 20, should have a higher proficiency in Spanish than an 18-year-old who has studied Spanish since age 12.

Lastly, adults often decide to learn an L2 with a specific goal in mind. For example, they may need to learn the specific words needed for a job, or to improve one's reading and writing ability enough to take a university class. Adults often continue to take L2 classes after these initial goals are accomplished. Some L2 learners, however, simply want to learn enough just to get by, especially those with a finite horizon on their time in the L2 country, which is common in immigrants who have temporary work visas, and plan to return to their home countries once the visa expires (Meniado, 2019). Adults with specific and tangible goals in mind for SLA may feel more motivated to attend L2 classes than children learning a second language in school, who typically have no choice in whether or not they attend. This self-motivation has been significantly linked with success in SLA, and conversely, a lack thereof is a barrier to successful SLA (Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Meniado, 2019; Gardner, 1985; Birdsong, 2006; Wang, 1999). Additionally, adults typically have a longer attention span than children, which plays a role in each individual's degree of self-motivation for study (Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014).

L1 Knowledge Transfer

Cummins (1979) introduced the "iceberg theory," which hypothesizes that the acquisition of different languages, particularly L1 and L2 acquisition, are interconnected regardless of linguistic differences between the two languages. Cummins argues that a morphological and semantic understanding of one's L1 allows second language learners to develop a more profound understanding of their L2 more quickly than in their first language acquisition. On a more simple level, this could apply to the transfer of reading skills between one's L1 and L2, for example between two languages that use the same

alphabet, such as English and Spanish (Bialystok, 2002). On a more complex level, a L2

Spanish learner could make the connection that the Spanish suffix -*mente* signifies the

word is an adverb, and is analogous to the English suffix -*ly* when used in the same

morphological context. This phenomenon, specifically known as "affixation

knowledge," has, indeed, been found to transfer from the L1 to L2 (Karlsson, 2015).

This connection allows the L2 learner to understand how these words are used

syntactically, and deduce the meaning of unknown words, with more ease than the first

language learner. L1 literacy has been directly linked to ESL students' ability to learn to

read in English, providing evidence for Cummins' Iceberg Theory (August, 2006; Hinkel,

2004; Bialystock, 2002; Harrison & Krol, 2007; Song, 2006).

August (2006) notes that while that L1 knowledge transfer affects SLA, the

process of L1 to L2 knowledge transfer may differ between children and adults. Adults

begin SLA with a baseline knowledge of L1 linguistics, including phonetics and basic

reading skills. Some adults also have an explicit syntactical awareness. Children, on the

other hand, lack some, if not all, of this baseline knowledge; therefore, the results of L1

transfer to L2 studies cannot be assumed to apply to all age groups.

Time in Classroom & Immersion

The level of communicative ability achieved by second language learners

correlates positively with the amount of authentic, conversational exposure, *not* with the

amount of time spent in classroom study of the language as a subject (Stern, Swain &

Maclean, 1976). In other words, language study is more successful in communicative

contexts, such as immersion settings and conversational classrooms, than in

memorization contexts, such as vocabulary recall. While a baseline understanding of L2 vocabulary and grammar is essential for SLA, Stern, Swain & Maclean (1976) argue that class time should be dedicated to conversational practice in the L2 rather than the study of these subjects. Wang (1999) found that female adult ESL students in their study were motivated to learn English, but this motivation was dwindling due to limited opportunities to practice speaking English via authentic conversation. Second language acquisition differs from traditional classroom learning because while most subjects simply require explicit knowledge of the subject matter and repetition of facts, SLA requires a conversion of knowledge from explicit to implicit form to achieve linguistic success. Explicit knowledge allows a language learner to translate between languages; it is implicit knowledge that actually allows a learner to speak the language (Ellis, 2008).

L2 immersion has been found to positively influence the speed and quality of SLA strongly (Carroll, 1967; Meniado, 2019; Stern, Swain, & Maclean, 1976). Carroll (1967) found that students who had studied abroad for at least one year scored an average of ten points higher on a second language listening test than their peers who had never studied abroad. This finding supports Carroll's hypothesis that second language acquisition is affected by the total number of hours spent in the classroom, not by how those hours are divided. However, Stern (1985) notes that while this theory may prove to be true, immersive L2 programs often yield a higher total number of hours of instruction than shorter, more infrequent classes. Therefore, Carroll's (1967) theory should not be interpreted to imply that frequent, short classes are just as effective as long, infrequent

sessions, but that greater hours of instruction, many times attained through immersion

programs, positively correlate with improved L2 proficiency.

This theory has been supported by various SLA studies (Serrano, 2011; Netten &

Germain, 2004; Dolosic et al., 2016). Serrano (2011) found that intermediate L2 learners

benefit more from infrequent, "intensive" sessions that are longer in duration than

shorter, more frequent second language classes, creating a mini bubble of immersion,

which mimics the immersion of studying abroad for those who are not able to do so.

Short, frequent sessions in the L2 classroom have been found to be ineffective in

improving L2 communicative ability (Netten & Germain, 2004), whereas longer sessions

have been found to be very successful in SLA (Serrano, 2011; Netten & Germain, 2004;

Stern, 1985).

Social Interaction Inside & Outside the Classroom

Doise & Mugny (1984) describe the benefits of social interaction in the second

language classroom, as well as methods for the facilitation of these interactions. As a

pedagogical strategy, instructors may initiate *sociocognitive conflict,* which refers to

dissidence between group partners during a social activity in the classroom, leading to

debate. Sociocognitive conflict increases the cognitive activity of the learner, and when

induced between peers, allows students to become explicitly aware of acquired

knowledge, and explaining their perspective allows students to think critically. However,

the scholars do note one important condition for this to occur: "It is only when a new

cognitive instrument is being introduced that group work will be superior to individual

work, and that the cognitive levels reached during this interaction between individuals

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will be superior to those of isolated individuals," (Doise & Mugny, 1984, p. 158). In other words, social interaction in the second language classroom promotes increased cognition, and possibly faster uptake, for new topics, but once students have developed a critical understanding of the subject matter, students benefit more from individual exercises.

Outside the classroom, social support from fellow students and native speakers has been found to increase uptake and improve student motivation to continue L2 study (Meniado, 2019; Chao & Mantero, 2014; Chappell, 2014; Birdsong, 2006). Having a friend with whom to attend ESL classes holds students accountable and makes classes more enjoyable, increasing attendance rates. Mentorship and academic support provides ESL students with additional resources outside the classroom for extra L2 practice and an opportunity to get questions answered. Additional supplemental programs are an easy way for ESL programs to improve their students' sense of community, support system, and motivation to persevere in their language study, especially when typical barriers to attendance arise (Chao & Mantero, 2014).

Pedagogy

Teachers in public and private schools, as low as the kindergarten level, are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree in Education and a state teaching license in the United States, yet there are very few regulations or legal standards for privately funded adult education programs (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2019; Eyring, 2014). Different pedagogical strategies are discussed, along with the respective benefits and disadvantages of each technique.

Communicative Strategies

Second language acquisition scholars have praised the benefits of opportunities for natural conversation in the L2 classroom, as it mimics an immersive learning environment (Chappell, 2014; Meniado, 2019). Students have more opportunities to learn and correct mistakes if they are interacting with someone with a higher level of proficiency than they would have while working individually. This approach is not limited to student-on-student interaction; feedback or corrections from an instructor in real time during a speaking opportunity, also known as *instructor mediation*, allow students to identify their mistakes and quickly adopt more natural speaking patterns in a second language classroom. Instructor mediation allows students to adopt cultural mechanisms, such as colloquial phrases, which involve "specifically higher human cognitive functioning" (Chappell, 2014, p. 7). These cultural mechanisms are very difficult to learn without the use of social interaction, as context is often essential to comprehension.

One ESL program at Pacific University in Canada emphasized the importance of problem solving through dialogue. However, it was noted that "instructors must be open to exploring and challenging their own values [and] assumptions. If instructors are not open to doing this, there is the tendency to infantilize students" (Lee, 2015, p. 85). Instructor mediation, while proven to be invaluable in second language classrooms, can become detrimental to the attitudes of the students if they feel patronized or disrespected. Many students already may feel anxious when learning a new language, so it is essential to create an environment that is welcoming and comfortable to students.

One commonly utilized activity for facilitating dialogue in the second language classroom is cross-cultural comparisons (Lee, 2015). Lee proposes that language is best learned *through* culture, as opposed to culture learned through language. Learning language through culture is best accomplished through immersion in a L2-speaking country, but can be applied to the L2 classroom by putting cultural conversations at the epicenter of lesson plans, rather than as an afterthought. Cross-cultural comparisons can help immigrant students find parallels between their native culture and the culture of their new country, as well as make sense of unfamiliar phenomena in their new environment.

However, comparisons must be facilitated carefully, because there are a number of dangerous pitfalls to avoid in discussions of such a sensitive topic. People often, usually subconsciously, conflate culture with race as a result of cultural stereotypes, which presents a potential problem with conversations comparing cultures. If classroom discussions are not carefully mediated by an instructor who is aware of this potential pitfall, one individual's experience or personal opinions may be misunderstood as a cultural or racial characteristic that in reality does not have a broad application at all. In addition, initiating a cross-cultural comparison can create an expectation of difference or "otherness" for immigrant students (Lee, 2015).

ESL classes do not serve the sole purpose of teaching a second language; it is equally as important to give students a sense of comfort in their communities to feel accepted and unafraid to maintain their native cultures. Cultural conversations in the second language classroom are therefore essential to accomplishing a goal of acceptance.

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Both students and instructors must check their cultural biases in order for these conversations to be beneficial (Lee, 2015).

Written Strategies

Despite compelling arguments for the importance of peer conversation and instructor mediation in second language classrooms, some instructors prefer a more individually-focused approach to SLA. Many researchers have argued that a focus on writing in second language classrooms is an often overlooked, but key part of understanding second language acquisition (Harklau, 2002; Hinkel, 2004; August, 2006; Rossiter, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2017).

Traditionally, classroom-based second language acquisition research focuses on spoken output and conversation as the best measure of student progress (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). However, in some cases, levels of student spoken output are low, so other measures of student progress must be developed. Harklau (2002) found that most students did not generate very much spoken output in conversations with peers or instructors at all. Many students reported that they preferred to learn from written sources than from oral sources because it was easier to understand phonetically and review (while oral conversations and lectures could not be reviewed at a later date). In addition, the classrooms were generally not designed to maximize spoken student output; rather, the majority of class time was monopolized by the instructor speaking and the students eliciting one-word responses, if anything at all (Harklau, 2002). Student spoken output is an important facet of an ESL classroom because it provides students with the opportunity to practice speaking and forming sentences at a much more rapid rate than in

writing. Despite this deficiency, there were ample opportunities for both written output

and explicit written feedback—something that the spoken conversations were lacking,

which could suggest that ESL programs with written assignments and assessments yield

higher levels of student satisfaction than programs without written assignments or

assessments.

Importance of Writing

For more advanced ESL students, fine-tuning writing skills are even more

important. These students are likely seeking employment where they must have the

ability to read, write, speak, and use computer programs in English with little to no

difficulty. In such cases, a focus on writing exercises in the second language classroom

takes precedence over practicing face-to-face communication (Fernandez et al., 2017).

Despite the demonstrated need for writing instruction in ESL classes, multiple studies

have confirmed that ESL classes are lacking in the development of writing skills

(Fernandez et al., 2017; August, 2006; Rossiter, 2001; Crandall & Sheppard, 2004).

Fernandez et. al (2017) found that over half of surveyed ESL instructors spent one hour

or less per week on writing exercises. Students in these programs were not oblivious to

the unbalanced curriculum: the same study found that 57% of students believed their

programs valued the importance of writing less than reading, speaking, and listening

skills. Furthermore, ESL programs that implemented innovative curricula that focused on

reading and writing skills reported increased levels of student satisfaction (Greenfield,

2003). It remains unclear whether it was the focus on reading and writing or the

innovative method that drove the increase in student satisfaction, however the two variables are not mutually exclusive in the research study.

For English learners who are attempting to earn a college degree, those without a high level of writing ability are forced to first enroll in developmental English composition courses that are neither free nor count for academic credit (Zafft et al., 2006), which can become a permanent roadblock to earning a degree for many L2 English speakers. Basic oral proficiency in English has been shown not to be sufficient for student academic success (Song, 2006), so developmental English composition courses become essential for LEP students in earning a degree at an English-speaking university. According to a 2008 study at a community college, 56% of English learners in these types of developmental courses did not advance a single level over a period of seven years (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008). After wasting hundreds, or thousands, of dollars attempting to qualify for even basic general education college classes, many English learners simply give up on higher education (Fernandez et al., 2017)

In some cases, the lack of adequate English reading and writing ability is not due to a lack of such instruction in ESL classes, but rather a lack of information on the type of reading and writing exercises that classes should teach. Some ESL instructors are not adequately trained in second language acquisition, and may incorrectly assume that because ESL students already know a first language, *all* writing skills will transfer to their second language, English (see *L1 Knowledge Transfer,* Chapter 2) (August, 2006; Hinkel, 2004). In addition to a lack of skill transfer, not all English learners have the

same aptitude to learn to read and write in a second language. An ESL student's ability to learn to read in English is directly linked to L1 literacy (August, 2006; Hinkel, 2004; Bialystock, 2002; Harrison & Krol, 2007; Song, 2006). As a result, students with low levels of formal education can become disadvantaged and stigmatized by programs that do not offer classes differentiated by proficiency level. If these students do not receive adequate instruction and emphasis in reading, writing, and grammar, they often fall behind and may feel neglected by programs because they don't have a higher level of education. Wang (1999) found that female adult ESL students in the study were not satisfied with their reading abilities nor their program's ability to improve their literacy, and cited this shortcoming as a major barrier to attendance.

Focus on Form

There is evidence that students in this environment learn more efficiently when there is a focus on linguistic form initiated by the students rather than by the instructors (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001). 'Focus on form' is a type of instructor mediation and refers to instructor feedback on a student's understanding of linguistic elements, such as pronunciation or verb conjugation. Focus on form specifically refers to this feedback in the context of classroom dialogue, and does not disturb the natural flow of conversation. Instructor feedback is therefore clear and concise, and students are aware that the quick corrections are simply interjections rather than lectures. Lessons continue to focus on comprehension and communication, not explicit linguistic form. Ellis et al. (2001) found that learner uptake in classrooms with focus on form was more successful

than in immersion classrooms. Learner uptake refers to a student's response to instructor feedback and is used to demonstrate understanding of the explanation (Ellis et al., 2001).

Explicit vs. Implicit Instructor Feedback

Instructor (or native-speaker) feedback, a type of instructor mediation, is essential for SLA (Meniado, 2018). However, it is possible that students who attend ESL classes may feel nervous and prefer to ask if something is correct rather than have the instructor correct their errors (Ellis et al., 2001; Panova & Lyster, 2002). Thus, Panova and Lyster (2002) found that students in adult ESL classes preferred implicit corrections over explicit corrections. While students expressed this preference based on comfort in the classroom—a subject not to be ignored, implicit corrections were found to be less effective overall when compared to explicit corrections. The most common form on instructor correction was *recasting*, which is an implicit rewording of the student's utterance in the target language. For example, when a student incorrectly pronounced the word 'convention,' the instructor repeated the word in English using the correct pronunciation, so the student was able to correct her error (Panova & Lyster, 2002). While the goal of this move is to identify the student error without deviating from the language of instruction, this correction went unidentified by the students 60% of the time. In fact, this correction strategy was found to be the least successful in eliciting learner uptake (Panova & Lyster, 2002).

If a student's proficiency in the target language is low, he or she may have trouble identifying an implicit correction because it is not a question. Students may also misidentify recasting as positive affirmation, believing the teacher's response to be a

rewording of their already-correct statement. Conversely, more explicit instructor feedback, such as clarification requests or repetition of the error, had 100% success rates in learner uptake. However, a major problem identified by this study is that instructors are not correcting student errors often enough. Only 48% of erogenous student moves were corrected by instructors, and a mere 8% of student errors were repaired after instructor feedback (Panova & Lyster, 2002).

If teachers choose to use implicit methods of instruction rather than explicit ones, students will have to deduce the meaning of certain words for themselves. A language learner's vocabulary is obviously limited, but especially so in a non-immersion setting. One benefit of ESL programs in English-speaking countries like the United States is that students have plentiful opportunities for immersion outside the classroom. Regardless of the learner's situation, he or she will certainly encounter times when a word's meaning must be derived based on context. This process is more difficult when encountering written or pre-recorded material versus spoken words, because a student can simply ask the speaker what a word means if it is particularly important to a conversation. Cain (2007) found that students who were asked to explain how they derived the meaning of a word based on context improved their ability to correctly derive meaning over time. This study investigated children in their native language, but is still relevant to the second language classroom because the words they were asked to define were made up. The made-up words in this study are equivalent to unknown words in a second language. If instructors choose to employ implicit feedback to errors, and students must derive meaning based on context, this implicit feedback would be best coupled with an explicit

elicitation of the student's thought process in correcting the error or deducing the definition.

Challenges Facing Programs and Students

According to a 2010 study, an estimated 54% of immigrants with children 18 years or younger have a limited competency in English (Chao & Mantero, 2014), which, in theory, means that there is a large percentage of the adult immigrant population in the United States could benefit from ESL classes. Despite this, many adult ESL programs suffer problems with low attendance rates. Researchers have investigated the cause of this problem (Kouritzin, 2000; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014; Hayes, 1989; Carter, 2016; Oberg, 1993), and additional research is still needed to properly identify and propose solutions to the barriers that keep students from attending adult ESL classes. Some of the potential barriers that have been studied include time conflict (Kouritzin, 2000; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014; Hayes, 1989, Carter, 2016), cost (Eyring, 2014, Carter, 2016), transportation (Hayes, 1989; Carter, 2016; Kouritzin, 2000), personal contradiction (Kouritzin, 2000; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014; Chao & Mantero, 2014), ambivalence (Hayes, 1989, Kouritzin, 2000; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014), and an inability of programs to meet student curricular needs (Oberg, 1993; Jackson & Martinez, 2017). In order for adult ESL programs to sufficiently serve their community, raising awareness of these problems is essential to program growth and student satisfaction.

Reasons for Low Attendance Rates

One of the greatest challenges facing adult ESL classes is low attendance rates. Barriers to attendance can be broken into two categories: barriers to student retention, and

barriers to new student recruitment. These two categories are not mutually exclusive of each other, and may reflect the same barriers for both attendance issues. Spurling, Seymour & Chisman (2008) point out the need for further study in this area, but recognize that it is difficult to investigate because communication with potential students and former students is limited, which can result from either student attrition due to dissatisfaction or other conflicts, or a communal lack of awareness of available courses. One of the guidelines for a satisfactory adult ESL program, according to TESOL, is a commitment to the community and new student recruitment (Bitterlin et al., 2003). According to these guidelines, every program should actively advertise their classes to increase public knowledge of the program, which, in theory, should promote high attendance rates. However, a 2000 Vancouver study about immigrant mothers' attitudes towards ESL classes suggests that there may be another reason behind poor attendance rates. These women were enrolled in LINC, or Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, a government-funded ESL program for adult immigrants with permanent legal status (LINC Brochure, 2016). This study unearths an unsettling trend: most ESL class dropouts are women, and the majority of these women are mothers (Kouritzin, 2000), which begs the question, *why is this specific group so marginalized?* A lack of access is a possible explanation: mothers have extremely busy schedules due to juggling household, family, and financial responsibilities. However, there is an inherent shortcoming in this simple explanation: if this were really the overwhelming reason driving maternal dropouts, it seems that many mothers would not have time to enroll in classes in the first place. Yet nearly three-quarters of LINC students are women of childbearing age

(Dempsey et al., 2009), so the problem affecting this group is not low enrollment rates, but rather low retention rates.

Kouritzin calls into question the traditional definition of *accessibility* for ESL classes. This term is conventionally interpreted as referring to any scheduling, geographic, or monetary constraints that affect a student's ability to attend classes. However, Kouritzin argues that the term *access* has been conflated with *availability*. True accessibility is a much more personal obstacle; one that is determined by native culture and family dynamics (Kouritzin, 2000). Keeping this definition in mind, Kouritzin found three access-related barriers to attendance: time constraints, ambivalence, and contradiction with native culture.

Time

Time constraints do not simply refer to restrictive personal schedules. In many cultures there lies an obligation for women to stay at home and take care of the children, even if there is an alternate caregiver, such as an older child or babysitter, available. Even if an ESL class offers childcare with the aim of alleviating the temporal constraints of motherhood, many immigrant mothers would not consider taking advantage of such programs due to cultural beliefs. When women feel a cultural responsibility to stay at home, they do not have time to attend English classes, no matter how convenient they may seem to outsiders (Kouritzin, 2000). Similarly, other cultures may expect the matriarch to contribute financially to the household. This is not limited to working in the traditional sense; many immigrant women must devote time to budgeting and tending to bills when they could be investing in themselves by taking English classes or partaking in

a hobby (Kouritzin, 2000). Lack of time affects language learners of all genders; time

conflict with work is a common complaint of ESL students (Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014;

Kouritzin, 2000; Hayes, 1989; Carter, 2016; Song, 2006). This misunderstanding

between students and program coordinators results in unsuccessful attempts to resolve

these barriers to attendance. More often than not, schedule conflicts are resolved by the

passage of time, and an alleviation of cultural responsibilities, rather than by program

intervention.

Cost of Attendance

Most adult ESL programs in the United States are free or very low-cost to

students (Carter, 2016; Eyring, 2014). This is primarily a result of the U.S. Department

of Education's stance that cost of attendance is a major barrier to attendance, especially

for students enrolled in adult education courses (Eyring, 2014). While cost of attendance

does not seem to be a *present* barrier to attendance due to the high number of programs

offering free classes, cost of attendance is not exclusively pertinent to tuition. Cost of

attendance can also include transportation costs of getting to and from class, and personal

opportunity cost of sacrificing work or family time in order to attend class.

Transportation

Transportation is a commonly misconceived barrier to attendance for ESL

students. In one of the only studies that found lack of transportation to be a significant

deterrent to attendance for adult ESL students, the aggregate variable "transportation"

was actually determined by two identifiers, only one of which exclusively dealt with

transportation to class. The other identifier, which was ranked higher for level of

deterrence from attending classes, measures student inability to pay for childcare *or* transportation (Hayes, 1989). This combination of two barriers to attendance is confusing, as it is impossible to determine which factor (childcare or transportation) primarily drove this identifier's ranking. More studies have conclusively found that transportation is *not* a significant barrier to attendance (Carter, 2016; Kouritzin, 2000).

Both Oxford and Tupelo, Mississippi have public transportation systems, which do cost money to utilize. The Oxford bus transit system costs $1 per ride for non-disabled adults, or $30 per month. While the transit system is free to Ole Miss students and faculty, the majority of adult ESL students in the Oxford area likely do not fall under this distinction (Oxford University Transit, 2019). The city of Tupelo offers on-demand ride share services, costing $2 per trip for all riders (City of Tupelo, 2018). These costs are low and likely insignificant in students' decisions on class enrollment, but further investigation in this study is needed before coming to a conclusion.

Personal Contradiction

A common cause for hesitance to learn English as a second language is cultural or personal contradiction, which applies to interpersonal, financial, and traditional conflicts, among other causes. Wu, Wu & Le (2014) found that the majority of ESL students cited finance, frustrations with slow learning, and embarrassment of making mistakes as factors that discourage them from attending class. While making mistakes is a normal part of any learning process, adults who are already hesitant to learn English for more personal reasons may be discouraged to the point of quitting if they feel embarrassed by their mistakes. Any factor, such as these, that limits learner motivation to attend ESL

classes, should have a significant effect on attendance because adult language learners must be self-motivated, unlike child language learners (Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Meniado, 2019; Song, 2006; Hayes, 1989; Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008). This connects to the importance of self-motivation and the preservation of students' confidence in the classroom to promote student retention. Creating a socially welcoming environment, where students feel a sense of security and community, calms student embarrassment to take classes or fear of judgment for making mistakes.

Specifically relating to female students, some mothers feel a responsibility to preserve their native cultures for their children, a task that is ultimately hindered by replacing the household (native) language with English (Estable, 1986). As matriarchs, some women feel an obligation to support their children academically, emotionally, physically, and financially (Gaskell & McLaren, 1991; Kouritzin, 2000). At home, they act as a primary caregiver and nurture their children in the way that they were taught by their mothers: in their first language. At the same time, they are also responsible for making sure their children are succeeding at school and are physically healthy, which many immigrant mothers perceive to be a near-impossible task without speaking English in an English-speaking country (Kouritzin, 2000). One mother worried that if she spoke to her children in English, they would lose their appreciation for their native culture, one in which she took great pride. At the same time, she felt a responsibility to make sure her children spoke English well so they would be successful in their new country (Kouritzin, 2000). Here lies a second factor inhibiting attendance: contradiction with native culture. Immigrant mothers perceive an internal dilemma of choosing between integrating into

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their new country or fulfilling a cultural obligation to their family (Kouritzin, 2000).

Many immigrant mothers view learning English as yet another cultural responsibility

imposed on them by circumstances. They do indeed want to learn English to prosper in

their new country, but think perhaps it would have been better if they did not immigrate

in the first place (Kouritzin, 2000).

A second mother from Kouritzin's study echoes this opinion. She was upset

because she believed that in assimilating to Canadian culture, her son lost some of the

traditional values that she had taught him. She was disturbed by the notion that her son

thought that he could conveniently adopt the aspects of each culture that suited him. For

instance, if he wanted to have freedom in making his own choices, then he would have to

provide for himself financially, in the Canadian way. Conversely, if he wanted his

parents to support him financially and put him through college, then he would have to

remain respectful of their wishes and promise to return the favor when they were old and

in need of support. Her son did not seem to understand this, and his mother sadly

attributed his loss of cultural understanding to moving to their new country. This woman

felt that if her family had not immigrated to Canada, although they would be worse off

financially, her family would be better off culturally (Kouritzin, 2000).

From a perspective of wanting to preserve cultural traditions, some women are

not unfounded in believing that they would be more successful in a more homogenous

environment. Chao & Mantero (2014) state: "Immigrant parents feel a sense of pride

mingled with a sense of loss seeing children learn English and acculturate into the

mainstream society" (p. 92). This insight indicates that there are more evasive, cultural obstacles to attendance that lie below the surface level.

Ambivalence

The concept of cultural contradiction is closely tied to the last access-related barrier to attendance identified by Kouritzin (2000): ambivalence. This idea seems counterintuitive at first because if immigrants were indifferent to learning English, why would they enroll in an ESL class in the first place? It would certainly be easier to do something else with their time. The concept of ambivalence in this case may be better described as reluctance. Many adult immigrants see learning English as a necessity, not an option (Kouritzin, 2000). They did not want to struggle in moving to a new country with a different culture and language, but they almost certainly had good reasons. Whether they are escaping persecution, violence, or are simply looking for the opportunity of a better life, immigrants are brave enough to put themselves in uncomfortable situations for their greater good. Many immigrant mothers in particular feel ambivalent about the necessity of learning English because of the cultural conflict: in gaining a new language, they may begin to lose their old one (Kouritzin, 2000; Chao & Mantero, 2014).

Debunking Fears

A common fear of parents considering adult ESL classes is that upon learning English, they will lose the ability to pass on their culture through the medium of their native language (Kouritzin, 2000). In addition, many parents worry that as their children's English proficiencies surpass their own, they may lose parental authority while

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finding it harder to connect with their children. However, this sentiment does not

necessarily reflect the actual result of these classes. While these problems do persist in

some cases, the addition of supplemental activities and supports can mitigate any

unwanted "side effects" of learning English. Bilingualism within families can be

extremely beneficial if the family chooses to bond over their shared experiences and learn

from each other, instead of allowing their different proficiencies to create tension (Chao

& Mantero, 2014).

Church-sponsored ESL classes offer community support, which is one way to

avoid this type of household linguistic tension. Chao and Mantero (2014) found that

adult ESL classes facilitated by a church neither devalued nor eliminated the students'

native tongue. In fact, these programs, which were taught adjacently to their children's

ESL classes, actually promoted parents to reclaim their native language and pass on their

native culture to their children. In addition, parents reported strengthened bonds with

their children, since after learning about American culture, they felt they could better

relate to their children. These parents *learned language through culture* and strengthened

family relationships as a result (Chao & Mantero, 2014; Lee, 2015).   One student

explained how her ESL class improved her family's literacy as a whole:

> I used to get mad when the kids talked something in English I could not
>
> understand. I also got mad when I spoke English, but they could not
>
> understand. Now I feel my kids should be able to know Spanish. So I
>
> teach them Spanish. They like it because they can teach their classmates.

They teach me English. They feel they are smart. (Chao & Mantero, 2014,

pp. 105-106)

Church-sponsored ESL programs encouraged parents to be guest speakers at their

children's schools, where they had a chance to share their culture (Chao & Mantero,

2014), thus instilling cultural (C1) pride while learning English (L2, C2) — something

that many students fear is impossible. The support of church communities proved

successful in both improving students' English skills and debunking the fear of household

cultural erosion.

Kouritzin (2000) suggests that secular ESL programs should enact policies to

calm this fear as well. Programs that help maintain minority language and culture in

immigrant communities, such as language schools or community heritage centers, would

be first steps. Many immigrants feel isolated in their new countries, and ESL programs

have the ability to give their students a sense of community with the right programs in

place. Whether that program is "fellowship time," (Chao & Mantero, 2014), group

outings, or "culture days" in which students could share their native heritage, one simple

addition can transform a student's experience. Programs such as these could both

decrease student attrition and increase public awareness of the program, solving two

major barriers to attendance.

Class Size

Class size was found to have a significant, negative effect on student achievement

in the ESL classroom (Oberg, 1993). Oberg's study was not conducted in an adult ESL

classroom, but rather in a public school ESL program for first grade students in Texas. However, the results are still applicable to adult ESL classrooms because class size and teacher-to-student ratio affect student experience regardless of the age group (Smith & Glass, 1980). Just as with class duration, smaller class sizes were found to have a positive, significant effect on oral language improvement, but had no significant effect on reading or writing skills. Oberg concluded that smaller class sizes may yield higher oral proficiency, but do not produce higher standardized test scores as most standardized achievement tests rely heavily on reading and writing skills.

Rossiter (2001) details the challenges of conducting SLA research in an adult ESL classroom. Although this study does not explicitly investigate problems plaguing ESL classrooms, many of the challenges that Rossiter encountered draw light to broader shortcomings that affect program quality. She observed that "what are often perceived as *problems* by researchers are in fact the daily *realities* of the contexts in which most teachers practice" (Rossiter, 2001, p. 36). One such *reality* is that although her research was conducted with one of the largest providers of adult ESL classes in the area, there were not enough students or instructors to offer multiple classes for different English proficiency levels (Rossiter, 2001). On the other end of the spectrum, some programs in urban areas are tremendously overcrowded. One such program is LINC (see *Reasons for Low Attendance Rates*, Chapter 2) in British Colombia. As of the year 2000, each student typically waited an average of 18 months after initial assessment before being placed in an ESL class (Kouritzin, 2000). As of 2017, average wait time had decreased to only 12 months, but this problem still persists (Jackson & Martinez, 2017). During this wait time,

many non-English speakers were forced to try to find work without sufficient communicative abilities.

Furthermore, some students may try to learn English on their own in the meantime, creating a discrepancy between their proficiency at the time of assessment and proficiency upon class placement. LINC only allows students to take the preliminary evaluation test once every 12 months, and does not allow students to be on more than two waitlists for programs at once (LINC Brochure, 2016). Many students, therefore, are placed in classes that are not appropriate for their level in both under-crowded and overcrowded programs. Incorrect class placement certainly does not maximize efficiency or efficacy of programs, leaving some students feeling bored by material that is too simple, and some students feeling lost in material that is far too advanced for their level, which may lower student motivation and causing attrition over time. Additionally, lack of motivation can form a barrier to classroom activities that require student interaction, such as the communicative exercises endorsed by Chappell (2014). The student to teacher ratio in ESL classes is usually far too high for one-on-one communicative practice with each student, highlighting the importance of diverse classroom activities and assessments that encourage student motivation. Students may not fully participate nor benefit from an activity if they are struggling or feel it is too easy. Diversifying classroom activities decreases the likelihood of students feeling bored in class and can assist instructors in creating benchmarks for student progress, as well as identifying trends in themes with which students seem to be struggling.

Class Gender Makeup

Adult ESL programs consistently report primarily female student bodies, yet there is not much current research on the implications of gender makeup in ESL or L2 classrooms (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008; Dempsey et al., 2009). While there is a lack of conclusive research, there exists anecdotal evidence that gender perceptions play a role in classroom outcomes. Gender is not necessarily the only determinant of participation between different genders; other cultural customs may affect these outcomes as well. Toohey & Scholefield (1994) found that among ESL students, both genders perceived women as more talkative in social contexts and less talkative in *coed* classroom settings. Furthermore, males have been found to be more assertive, more participative, and receive more instructor interaction than females in general classroom settings (Toohey & Scholefield, 1994; Jones, 1989; Brophy, 1985). Toohey and Scholefield's study was conducted among teenagers, not adults, but is one of the only investigations of this topic in an ESL setting. Their study, unfortunately, did not survey students from all-female or all-male classes, but invokes the implication that primarily- or all-female ESL classes may facilitate more communicative output. Females in their study revealed that at times they wanted to participate more in the classroom, but felt embarrassed or hesitant to do so because of the cross-cultural perception among their peers that women "talk too much" (Toohey & Scholefield, 1994).

Despite a lower level of participation then men, women have been found to be more attentive than their male counterparts in the ESL classroom (Vandrick, 1998). Therefore, decreased female participation in ESL classes (Toohey & Scholefield, 1994;

Jones, 1989; Brophy, 1985) could have been linked to male presence, not a lack of

interest or motivation. It is possible that if there were a diminished male presence in the

ESL classroom, female students would have been more likely to participate. It is unclear

whether this would increase overall classroom participation (via the argument that

women are more talkative than men), or if it would have no significant effect.

Evaluation

Because of the few regulations for adult ESL programs in the United States,

student evaluation methods vary between programs (National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards, 2019; Eyring, 2014). In the program that Rossiter (2001) observed,

the students were preliminarily evaluated for proficiency in grammar, reading

comprehension, and listening skills, but received no evaluation for speaking or writing

skills. This preliminary test was originally intended to be used for program placement,

but ended up serving as a benchmark for comparison of student progress by the end of the

program (because there was only one class, regardless of proficiency). The absence of

evaluation of oral proficiency is concerning because the primary goal for many ESL

students is to improve speaking skills above all else. Speaking practice and assessment

are essential for adult ESL learners because adults typically experience greater difficulty

in learning correct pronunciation in a second language than children. Due to the

developmental timeline in phonological ability, adults usually are unable to achieve

native-like pronunciation in a second language if they learn the language in adulthood

(Cunningham Florez, 1998; Klein, 1996; Huang, 2009). Additionally, the development of

English writing skills is essential for ESL students who have the goal of learning English

to seek employment in mind, yet many adult ESL programs do not provide satisfactory writing or reading resources to students (August, 2006; Rossiter, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2017; Wang, 1999; Crandall & Sheppard, 2004).

For adult ESL programs in the U.S. receiving federal funding, there is a requirement for program coordinators to report standardized test scores of students each year (Eyring, 2014). One of these standardized assessments is the TABE Clas-E Test ("Complete Language Assessment System-English"), which measures student English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and test questions and reading passages focus on educational, workplace, or community contexts. The test is administered online, so Internet access is required for students to take this assessment. Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) also provides program instructors with lesson plans to help students prepare for the exam (TABE Clas-E, 2019). Even if both listening/ speaking and reading/writing skills are taught in adult ESL classes, there is no guarantee of assessment of student progress in these skills (eg. speaking skills were not assessed by instructors, as discussed by Rossiter (2001)).

Funding

Another obstacle to developing an efficient program is that many adult ESL programs are underfunded. Two-thirds of adult ESL programs in the United States are federally funded, and the other third are privately funded. On average, the cost of maintaining an adult ESL program is about $626 per student, per year (Eyring, 2014). For programs that do not receive federal funds, program maintenance can become expensive. Underfunded programs can cause the majority of instructors to make little or

no money from their contributions and programs to not have the resources to develop the most effective curricula (Rossiter, 2001; Eyring, 2014).

Without sufficient funding, it is very difficult to keep qualified employees on staff and provide the program with all the necessary resources. Because of limited funding for ESL instructor salaries, most qualified instructors for Adult ESL programs can earn higher salaries working elsewhere, and many programs are forced to hire under qualified instructors in the face of a shortage (Williams, 1995). While there are organizations that provide standards for Adult ESL education and instruction (for instance, TESOL, or the U.S. Department of Education), most states do not have requirements in place to uphold standards for instructors and curriculum (Eyring, 2014). In addition, instructors generally work year-round and many may be forced to take second jobs to earn enough income to support themselves (Eyring, 2014; Williams, 1995), leaving them with little time to research second language acquisition pedagogy or prepare engaging lessons.

Decreased program funding also decreases the ability of classes to meet student needs, as programs are unable to dedicate separate classes to different levels of proficiency or add additional classes to accommodate larger student bodies (Eyring, 2014; Rossiter, 2001; Kouritzin, 2000; LINC Brochure, 2016). If programs fail to adequately meet student needs, attendance drops and funding may further decrease if it is conditional on student enrollment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while there are extensive resources available to adult ESL instructors regarding second language acquisition and pedagogy, many community ESL

programs lack the resources to thoroughly invest in instructor development. Barriers

such as cost, schedule conflicts, and program overcrowding often deter potential students

from program enrollment, or discourage current students from continuing to attend

classes.

Additional research is still needed to further evaluate the barriers to attendance

perceived by both current and potential adult ESL students, and to evaluate ESL

programs' cognizance of these barriers and/or any disparity between student and program

perception of these factors. Each community must identify its potential student

population, the specific needs of those students, and create a plan of action on how to

meet these students' unique needs. Furthermore, each community is distinctly unique, so

there is a logical necessity for research specifically concerning adult ESL programs that

serve small communities in regions such as northern Mississippi. There is generally no

current research comparing adult ESL programs across municipalities within states

(although there is some comparative research across states; Eyring, 2014). Intrastate

research on adult ESL program quality is necessary for state and federal governments to

identify shortcomings in serving the non-native English speaking population. Statistics

comparing student satisfaction and program characteristics can aid in determining which

adult ESL programs are most successful, identifying models for other programs to

emulate. This study is an attempt to fill these gaps in research and to provide a

foundation for improving access to adult ESL classes in the areas of Oxford and Tupelo,

Mississippi, and similar areas.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY.

Introduction

This chapter introduces the research questions, as well as the methodological design and subject characteristics. It first explains how the research questions were determined and reiterates the goals this study will accomplish. It then details the methodological procedure, which includes data collection methods, survey questions, and ethical considerations. The chapter finishes with an explanation of how data was sorted in preparation for my analysis.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore and compare the characteristics, barriers to attendance, and student satisfaction of adult ESL programs in northern Mississippi. My findings can serve as an aid to improve accessibility and quality of adult ESL programs, and my methodology can be replicated to evaluate similar programs in other areas. I have chosen to investigate three primary characteristics of programs via the research question: What are the attendance rates, availability, and accessibility of adult ESL classes in northern Mississippi? Five supplemental questions investigate the catalysts driving the current statistics of these three characteristics:

1. What are the characteristics of these programs? (ie. cost, curriculum, course availability)

2. What are the specific needs of the students attending these programs?

3. Are the students satisfied with their respective programs?

4. What are the barriers keeping students from attending classes?

5. What improvements can be made to existing programs?

In order to place my findings in a context that can be applied to different parts of the country as well, I compare these three variables across two prominent areas in northern Mississippi: Tupelo and Oxford. I chose these two locations because Tupelo is one of the most populous rural areas in northern Mississippi (Mississippi - Rural Definitions), and Oxford is home to the state's largest university (University of Mississippi: Profile, Rankings and Data, 2019), making it a hub for learning. I developed two surveys, partially based on the results of Chao & Mantero (2014), which include characteristics of two adult ESL programs that were proven to be very successful in both communicative outcomes and cultural (C1) preservation.

Participants

Subjects of this study are six adult ESL program coordinators and seven students of ESL programs in Tupelo and Oxford, Mississippi. At the time of the survey, the participants were all at least 18 years of age, below retirement age, and had no physical or mental handicaps. I did not otherwise collect any identifying demographic information on any individual's age, gender, employment status, medical history, etc. I had no physical contact with any participants and only communicated with them via email. Furthermore, the only subjects with whom I had email contact were program coordinators. I did not have any contact whatsoever with ESL students, nor did I collect student's personal information such as email addresses. Email addresses cannot be linked

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to survey responses and I (the principal investigator) was the only person with access to survey responses.

Procedure

Data was collected between the months of June and September 2019. Many programs were not offering summer classes, or had a limited number of summer students, so the number of student subjects was limited. Subjects received an email explaining the survey (Recruitment Script: Appendix B), with a consent form attached (Appendix A). At the end of the consent form, there was a link to each participant's respective survey (whether program coordinator or student) that they could click if they consented to participate in my study. They then completed the survey, which was estimated to take about five minutes. The subjects had no contact with the investigator and completed the survey anonymously through an Internet browser.

The first survey of 24 questions was for program coordinators, with the first question (Q0) verifying that the participants were at least 18 years of age (see Appendix C: "Please verify that you are at least 18 years of age."). The subsequent questions were either multiple choice, checkbox, or short response. Excluding the first age verification question, there were 15 multiple choice, 4 checkboxes, and 4 short response questions. Nine questions had a short response option for "Other" included in the response options. Three questions were conditional to the previous question and were therefore optional.

The second survey of 12 statements was for students in the programs, with the first statement verifying that the participants were at least 18 years of age (see Appendix D: "Please verify that you are at least 18 years of age."). The subsequent statements were

Likert Scale-style to evaluate student sentiment and satisfaction with their respective

programs. Statements #2-11 included options to select either "Strongly Disagree",

"Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", or "Strongly Agree." For example, Statement 4 reads:

"Classes are conveniently located." Statement #12, "Please rank the difficulty of the

class:" is a Likert Scale statement with options to select either "Too Easy", "Just Right",

or "Too Difficult." A complete list of questions/statements and response options can be

found in Appendices C and D.

Both surveys were available online via Google Forms and were accessible

through an email link to the consent form. At the bottom of the form, participants

consented to participate by clicking the link to the survey. An online survey was the best

instrument for data collection because it ensures anonymity and does not require a large

time commitment. I collected a list of 21 program coordinator contacts for 12 different

programs through research via online search, word of mouth from students on campus,

and phone calls. In total, I found 10 programs in the Oxford and Tupelo areas that, to the

best of my knowledge, are currently offering classes. I reached out to the contacts for the

programs I found and sent them an email with a link to a consent form to participate as a

program instructor (see Appendix A). I also included a separate message that I asked the

program coordinators to email to their students with a link to their respective consent

form and link to the online survey (see Appendix B). Note that there is no difference in

the two consent forms, except for the link marked "CLICK HERE IF YOU AGREE TO

PARTICIPATE" which goes to each group's respective survey.

Ethical Considerations

I had no direct contact with any students and did not collect any personal information such as email addresses or names. The only involvement of human subjects in my study were via online surveys and email contact with program coordinators to send consent forms and inquire about program availability. Information recorded by the investigator cannot readily identify the subject (either directly or indirectly) and disclosure of subjects' responses outside the research could not place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, educational advancement, employability, or reputation.

Both surveys were completely anonymous in compliance with University IRB procedures. I received data through survey responses on Google Forms, then exported the data into an Excel document. Data was stored on my computer hard drive, with a backup copy on Google Docs to ensure that there was no data lost. All data was stored in password-protected accounts to which only I had access. Individual survey responses were assigned a number within the category of either Student or Program Coordinator (PC). Some participants elaborated in the Short-Response "Other" options for survey questions. These elaborations are included in my analysis, with the respondent's anonymity ensured through their identifier number. In this way, responses cannot be linked with individuals or programs. One program coordinator was not currently offering classes, but he/she shared some of the program characteristics with me via email. This program coordinator was assigned a number within his/her category as well (see Table 1).

Table 1. Program Coordinators & Current Status of Programs

Identifier	Agreed to Participate?	Currently Offering Classes?
PC 1	Yes	Yes
PC 2	Yes	Yes
PC 3	Yes	Yes
PC 4	Yes	Yes
PC 5	Yes	Yes
PC 6*	Yes	No
PC 7**	No	No
PC 8	No	Unknown
PC 9	No	Unknown
PC 10	No	Unknown
PC 11	No	Unknown
PC 12	No	Unknown

*PC 6 indicates the program coordinator whose program no longer offers classes but answered some questions via email instead of my survey.
**PC 7 indicates a program coordinator who notified me via email that her program no longer offers classes but declined to participate in the data collection process.

No funding was needed for this study. I was the only principal investigator, with the assistance of Dr. Felice Coles as my advisor. All survey questions were in English. I did consider the possibility that some students would not have an adequate proficiency in English to answer my survey, but ultimately decided that I could not risk trying to translate my survey questions into different languages to avoid nuances in interpretation.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data by grouping subject responses by participant category, either 'Student' or 'PC.' The first portion of my analysis investigated programs' demographic information, including total number of programs, classroom gender ratio, average of students, etc. The bulk, and more meaningful, portion of my analysis included the student survey containing eleven Likert-scale statements. The first ten of these statements all had the same five options from which to choose to indicate how little or much they agreed with each statement. The possible responses were "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree." In order to evaluate the results of the student survey, I have developed a point system to rank the statements in order of student concordance with each statement. The system assigns points as follows: 1 point for "Strongly Disagree," 2 points for "Disagree," 3 points for "Neutral," 4 points for "Agree," and 5 points for "Strongly Agree." For Statements 2-11 on the student survey, the maximum possible cumulative score per statement is 35, and the minimum possible cumulative score per statement is 7. The results of Statement 12 were analyzed separately from this point system.

Out of the 10 program coordinators, five responded to my survey. I cannot accurately estimate the total number of adult ESL students in the Oxford and Tupelo areas; however, I can estimate the total number of students in the programs that agreed to participate in my study. I created an estimate by summing the PC respondents' answers to Question 3, "How many students are enrolled in the program?" (see Appendix C). I created the lower bound of my estimate by summing the lowest values in the range for

each response (in the case of PC 1, I estimated the total number of students to be 30 for a

year-round average: see Table 2) . I created the upper bound of my estimate in the same

way, by summing the greatest values in the range of each recorded response. Given the

five programs with coordinator responses on my survey, I have estimated the total

number of adult ESL students in these programs to be between 143-170 students. Out of

the estimated 143-170 students, only seven responded to my survey. This number is

disappointing, but I must keep in mind that many of these students may face barriers to

completing the survey, such as limited English proficiency (LEP) or limited Internet

access, which would also explain the gap in the percentage of responses for each subject

category (50% for program coordinators and only 4.47% for students), as program

coordinators are extremely unlikely to experience these issues. My analysis of Program

Coordinator responses was limited to PC 1-6; however, I was able to evaluate responses

from all Student participants (Students 1-7).

  Results will be presented in the next chapter. The results focus on barriers to

attendance and student satisfaction, and many of the survey questions serve the purpose

of providing supplemental information to support these principal findings. I have simply

found mode or average results of certain questions to reveal demographic statistics of

these programs. Other questions prompt a qualitative discussion of what program

characteristics drive certain outcomes, such as Question 5 in the Program Coordinator

Survey, "What do you think are some barriers to attendance?," which I consider to be the

most important question of that questionnaire. Student responses are compiled and

compared across the average program characteristics in an attempt to link student

satisfaction with program traits.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS.

Introduction

This chapter presents the results obtained from this study. It begins with a description of the results of the Program Coordinator Survey. The chapter then describes the results of the Student Survey. A complete list of survey questions can be found in Appendices C and D. Using the methodology described in Chapter 3, data was derived from both surveys; analysis will focus primarily on qualitative results. These results are demographic information of program characteristics that I have compiled for the region. A more in-depth analysis of these results will appear in the Discussion of Results chapter.

Data Analysis: Program Coordinator Survey

I will begin the analysis with the results of the Program Coordinator Survey. The respondents of this survey are representatives of adult ESL programs in either Tupelo or Oxford, Mississippi, who hold administrative positions in their programs. I have included the responses of six program coordinators, five of whom answered my survey via Google Forms, and one of whom (Identifier: PC 6) notified me that his/her program was no longer offering classes, but answered some of my questions via email. Note that in the tables, some cells in PC 6's row are labeled "No Data." However, I have included excerpts of my communication with this participant in my description and explanation of specific results.

Demographics

Table 2 contains the aforementioned demographic information of program characteristics in the Oxford and Tupelo communities. This list of programs is not exhaustive, as it only includes data from program coordinators who have consented to participate in this study. My analysis will not focus heavily on the results of the questions included in Table 2, with the exception of Question 4, "What percentage of enrolled students, on average, attend classes regularly?", which will be referenced later as part of my analysis of the conditional follow-up question (Q5) that investigates barriers to attendance. Nevertheless, I have included the results of these questions because I believe they provide meaningful information of Adult ESL class availability in the region.

Respondents were distributed evenly between Oxford and Tupelo, with three respondents from each city. Out of the six programs, the majority were church-affiliated, and of the two remaining programs, one offered classes in a University-affiliated venue and the other offered classes in a school building. The number of students enrolled in each program varied, with an average of 29.8 students given the response ranges.[1] All programs offered classes at least once per week, with PC 1 (a University-affiliated venue) offering classes daily. Attendance rates varied considerably, with some programs reporting average attendance rates as high as 100% every week, to as low as only 25% of students attending class. The most commonly reported attendance rate was 50-75%,

[1] This was found by finding individual averages within each range, eg. for the range '21-30,' the average is 25.5. I then averaged these values for an all-encompassing average for all represented programs. For PC 1, I averaged the Summer range average (15) with the Fall enrollment (30) to get 22.5.

Table 2. General Program Characteristics (from PC Survey)

Identifier	Q1 Town	Q2 Venue	Q3 Number of Students	Q4 Attendance Rate	Q7 Class Frequency	Q11 Years in Session	Q13 Avg. Student Age	Q14 Gender Ratio	Q15 Childcare Services
PC 1	Oxford	University-affiliated	10-20 in Summer, 30 in Fall	100%	Daily	> 10	18-22	Even Mix	No
PC 2	Tupelo	School Building	21-30	50-75%	Twice a week	> 10	22-30	Mostly Female	Sometimes
PC 3	Tupelo	Church	31-40	25-50%	Once a week	> 10	30-40	Mostly Female	Yes
PC 4	Tupelo	Church	50	50-75%	Twice a week	> 10	22-30	Mostly Female	Yes
PC 5	Oxford	Church	11-20	50-75%	Once a week	> 10	30-40	Mostly Female	Yes
PC 6	Oxford	Church	No Data	No Data	No Data	20, but now closed	No Data	No Data	No Data

which was selected by three out of the five responding program coordinators (Q4, PC Survey). PC 1 reported perfect attendance in their program, and PC 3 reported the lowest attendance rates, which ranged from only 25-50% (Q4, PC Survey). All programs were well-established in their respective communities, offering classes for at least ten years, and four out of five responding programs reported more female students than male students. Average ages of students in the programs varied, with two out of five responding programs serving students primarily in their 30's, another two serving students in their mid-to-late 20's, and one primarily serving college-aged students. Out of the five currently running programs, none reported a high number of students aged 40 or older. Lastly, three out of the five responding programs always provided childcare during classes, whereas one program sometimes offered childcare services, and one never offered them.

Public Transportation

Table 3 presents the results from Question 16, "How close is the nearest public transportation stop (i.e. bus stop) to your building?" on the Program Coordinator survey, which investigated the proximity of public transportation to each program's location where classes are taught. This question measures if transportation is, in fact, a barrier to attendance for students who wish to attend these classes. PC 4 informed me that Tupelo no longer offers a city-wide public bus transportation system ("Tupelo doesn't have a transit system anymore," PC 4). Two of the three programs in Oxford were located less than a five-minute walk from the nearest public transportation stop, which was the shortest response option for this multiple-choice question. One program (PC 5) in

Oxford was 5-10 minutes away from the closest public transportation stop. PC 3

responded that "there is not a bus line, but students could use an on-demand service.

However, I do not know of any who do." PC 2's response was interesting because they

indicated a 5-10 minute proximity of public transportation to the class location, but did

not elaborate as to what type of public transportation option he/she was referencing.

According to the City of Tupelo Public Transportation website, Tupelo no longer offers a

traditional public transit system via bus, effective July 1, 2019. However, beginning on

the same date, Tupelo began offering an "On-Demand" system, which offers guaranteed

seating for rides around town, Monday through Friday, if given 48 hours notice before the

scheduled trip. Fares cost $2 for one-way and $4 for round trip within the city (City of

Tupelo, 2018). To summarize, all programs in Oxford were relatively conveniently

located in relation to proximity of public transportation stops; however, the programs in

Tupelo presented a challenge unique to this location because there is no public

transportation system offered in the city.

Table 3. Public Transportation Proximity (PC Survey, Q16)

Identifier	Location	Public Transportation in City	Public Transportation Proximity
PC 1	Oxford	Yes	< 5 min. walk
PC 2	Tupelo	No	5-10 min. walk
PC 3	Tupelo	No	N/A
PC 4	Tupelo	No	N/A
PC 5	Oxford	Yes	5-10 min. walk
PC 6	Oxford	Yes	< 5 min. walk

Administrative Costs

Table 4 presents the annual cost of program maintenance, which was collected via

Question 10 in the Program Coordinator survey ("What is the annual cost of maintaining

the program?"). Program costs varied extremely considerably, with costs as high as

$75,000 per year for PC 2, and costs as low as $1,000 per year according to PC 4. PC 1

was unsure of the cost of maintaining their program.

Table 4. Estimated Program Maintenance Costs vs. Reported Cost (PC Survey, Q10)

Identifier	Average Number of Students	Estimated Cost	Reported Cost
PC 1	22.5	$14,085	Unknown
PC 2	25.5	$15,963	$75,000
PC 3	35.5	$22,223	$2,000
PC 4	50	$31,300	$1,000*
PC 5	15.5	$9,703	$5,500
PC 6	No Data	No Data	No Data

*PC 4 responded, "Approximately $50 a week = $500." I took this response to mean an estimate of the per-semester cost. If classes are offered in both the Fall and Spring semesters, but not during the Summer, then the annual cost should amount to $1,000.

The average cost of providing an adult ESL program in the United States is $626

per student, per year (Eyring, 2014). According to this statistic, and using average

student enrollment numbers, as calculated in Footnote 1, Chapter 4, I have calculated

each program's expected annual expenditures. The values in the 'Estimated Cost' column

of Table 4 are calculated by multiplying the average number of enrolled students by $626.

All dollar amounts in Table 4 are annual costs. This figure only includes the base cost of

program maintenance, and does not include the cost of additional resources offered to students.

According to this data, PC 2 is likely spending a larger portion of its budget on expenditures than other programs, which may include higher instructor salaries, additional resources for students, or facility improvement costs. PC 2 hires only paid instructors with required educational background, so this could explain the higher budget (Table 5). Conversely, PC 3 and 4 are providing programs at an extremely low cost relative to the estimated expense. This is most likely explained by the exclusive use of adult volunteers as program instructors (Table 5) and the use of no set curriculum (PC 3) and books from Barnes and Noble (PC 4) (see Table 6). PC 5 is the only program whose estimated cost of facilitation is close to the estimated cost from Eyring (2014). This program utilizes both paid instructors with no required educational background and adult volunteers, and does not use a set curriculum (Table 5; Table 6). To summarize, PC 3, 4, and 5 all appear to be underfunded programs.

Class Instructors

Table 5 shows the types of program instructors that teach classes for each program. Adult volunteers were the most commonly utilized instructor type, while none of the programs used student volunteers. Additionally, of the programs that hired paid instructors to teach classes, slightly more programs required some sort of educational background for instructors than programs that did not. PC 1 and 2 required educational background for their instructors, while PC 5 utilized both adult volunteers and paid

instructors with no required educational background. PC 3 and 4 only utilized adult

volunteers, and PC 6 did not provide data about instructor background.

Table 5. Program Instructors (PC Survey, Q12)

Identifier	Adult Volunteers	Student Volunteers	Paid Instructors (no education experience)	Paid Instructors (required education experience)
PC 1				✓
PC 2				✓
PC 3	✓			
PC 4	✓			
PC 5	✓		✓	
PC 6	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data

Curriculum

Table 6 presents the results of Question 8 and 9 on the Program Coordinator

survey, which measure curriculum standards for programs. Four out of the six programs

used some sort of set curriculum, with PC 3's and PC 5's programs being the two

exceptions. Curricula sources varied considerably, with some programs providing

detailed lesson plans and assessment tools, while others simply used books or unspecified

online sources as lesson guides.

Table 6. Program Curricula (PC Survey, Q8-9)

	Q8	Q9
Identifier	**Set curriculum?**	**Curriculum Source**
PC 1	Yes	Online
PC 2	Yes	"The Adult Education Program through the Mississippi Community College Board provides both our program assessment policies and curricuulum [sic] opportunities. The curriculum is not mandatory, but it is most definitely provided as a guide to assure educational level gains are achieved on post assessments given at regular intervals after classroom instruction has been delivered."
PC 3	No	N/A
PC 4	Yes	"Barnes & Nobel [sic]. Wednesday classes don't have a set curriculum."
PC 5	No	N/A
PC 6	Yes	"I had served as the first ESL teacher for the Oxford City Schools in the 80's and therefore had a lot of materials to use. I also taught Spanish at Ole Miss and had visual materials to use that I used in my Spanish classes."

Assessment

Student assessment methods used by each program are presented in Table 7.

Exams consisting of both written and oral components, and no exam were the two most

commonly used assessment methods. PC 2 used a standardized assessment method for

the students, explaining that the program is federally funded. PC 1 and PC 2 were the

only two programs that used a required assessment method for all students. PC 3 and PC

5 did not use any method of student assessment, and PC 4 only offered an optional quiz to some students. PC 6 did not respond with data for this question.

Table 7. Student Proficiency Assessment Method (PC Survey, Q18)

Assessment Type	PC 1	PC 2	PC 3	PC 4	PC 5	PC 6
Written Exam	✓					No Data
Oral Exam	✓					No Data
Written & Oral Exam	✓	✓				No Data
No Exam			✓		✓	No Data
Homework	✓					No Data
Written Classwork	✓					No Data
Oral Classwork	✓					No Data
Other*		✓		✓		No Data

*PC 4 responded that an optional quiz is given for certain classes, without specifying the format of this quiz (oral, written, etc.). PC 2 responded that in addition to a written and oral class exam, "the TABE Clas-E assessment is the required assessment for our federally funded ESL program."

Cost of Attendance

The data for each student's cost of attendance from the Program Coordinator survey (Q6: "What is the cost for students to attend classes? (Please indicate if cost is per-class or a one-time fee)") was fairly simple. Five out of the six programs, including PC 6's program, were free to students. However PC 1's program costs $4,750 plus fees

for students to attend. The question asked respondents to indicate whether this was a

one-time or per-class fee; however, PC 1 did not specify how many classes this fee

covers. Since PC 1 classified their program as university-sponsored, it is possible that the

fee is for one semester.

Class Duration

Question 17 in the Program Coordinator survey investigates the duration of a

typical class ("How long is a typical class?"). All classes were at least one hour long,

with PC 1, 3, and 4's classes running between one and two hours long, and PC 2 and 5's

classes running more than two hours long.

Barriers to Attendance

Table 8 presents one of the central questions for this study, an investigation into

barriers to attendance for adult ESL classes. A key consideration to this question is that

this was a question for *Program Coordinators,* not Students. Question 5 measures

program coordinator's perceptions of the barriers that keep students from attending class

("What do you think are some barriers to attendance?", Q5). Student's own perceived

barriers to attendance were measured through the Student survey. The two most common

barriers to attendance, according to Program Coordinators, are schedule conflicts and

transportation conflicts. Two out of the three programs located in Tupelo cited

transportation as a primary conflict for students. Interestingly, none of the program

coordinators thought that cost was a barrier to students. PC 1's program was the only

program that charged a fee to attend class; however, PC 1 felt that their attendance policy

was enough motivation for students to attend every class, and therefore responded that

there were no barriers to attendance in their opinion. To quote directly, PC 1 responded

"None because we have an attendance policy." PC 1 was the only respondent to cite no

barriers to attendance.

Table 8. Barriers to Attendance (PC Survey, Q5)

Perceived Barrier	PC 1	PC 2	PC 3	PC 4	PC 5	PC 6
Schedule Conflict			✓	✓	✓	
Cost						
Lack of Childcare		✓				
Transportation		✓	✓		✓	
Student Discomfort			✓			
Other*	✓					✓

PC 6, whose program is no longer offering classes due to a lack of interested

students, responded not in reference to barriers that keep students that would otherwise

want to attend class but feel that they cannot, but rather in reference to the reason behind

the downward-sloping trend of student enrollment in recent years. He/she felt that

students improved their English skills to the point that classes were no longer necessary

and found employment, so were no longer in need of the career support resources offered

by the program. (PC 6 responded: "In recent years, the numbers have varied considerably. As folks have found employment and have been immersed for several years, they have not felt the need for classes").

Additional Resources

Additional resources offered to students by programs are presented in Table 9. Question 20 is conditional to Question 19, which asks program coordinators to elaborate if they responded "yes" to Question 19, "Do you offer any additional resources to students, such as career support?" (Question 20 reads: "If yes, what additional resources do you offer?") All responses to Question 20 are free response, and responses have been grouped into five categories for comparison: Events, Transportation, General Support, Education, and Donations. Out of the respondents to these questions (PC 1-5), PC 1's was the only program not offering additional resources to students. The most common resource category was General Support, which was offered by all programs that present additional resources. This label is quite broad, so I have included some specific examples from individual Program Coordinator responses to this question. Some examples include "transitional support into college and work" (PC 2), "ten-week citizenship classes" (PC 3), "TPS [Temporary Protected Status] rep to talk about school policies" (PC 4), and "work readiness" programs (PC 2). The second most common type of support offered is Transportation Assistance. Examples include "gas card assistance" (PC 2) and "rides to classes,…advice on how to get a drivers license, gas up at the pump etc." (PC 4).

Examples of Education support include GED preparation. PC 4 provided various examples of social events made available to students, such as "field trips to the library,…

baby showers for new moms and parties for new US Citizens, and…Celebration of Cultures in Tupelo every September." PC 5 mentioned that his/her program accepts donations for baby gear for new and expectant mothers.

Table 9. Additional Resources Offered to Students (PC Survey, Q19-20)

Identifier	Additional Resources Offered?	Events	Transportation	General Support (advice, legal, etc)	Education	Donations
PC 1	No					
PC 2	Yes		✓	✓	✓	
PC 3	Yes			✓		
PC 4	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	
PC 5	Yes	✓	✓	✓		✓
PC 6	No Data					

Program Marketing and Expansion

Table 10 represents the marketing strategies used by Program Coordinators to increase public knowledge of the programs. Data was collected from Question 21 on the Program Coordinator survey, "How do you market your program/recruit new students?" The most commonly utilized strategy was word of mouth, followed by flyers and social media. The "Guest Speaker" category refers to invited speakers at events, for example, at the end of a church service. All responding programs used some sort of marketing strategy for their programs.

Table 10. Program Marketing Strategies (PC Survey, Q21)

Identifier	Flyers	Online Ads	Social Media	Word of Mouth	Guest Speaker	None
PC 1		✓	✓	✓		
PC 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
PC 3	✓		✓	✓		
PC 4	✓		✓	✓		
PC 5	✓			✓		
PC 6	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data

Question 22 asks Program Coordinators if they have any current or future plans for program expansion. Question 23 ("If yes, please explain") is conditional to the previous question, asking respondents to elaborate if they answered "yes." PC's 2 and 5 responded that they have plans for program expansion; however, only PC 2 elaborated, writing: "We recently closed an evening class that was failing…we hope to reopen that class at the same location as a day offering to see if it will fare better as a day offering for mothers while their children are attending school once school opens again in August." PC 6 also wrote that although his/her program is formally closed, "we continue to have the class open in case someone wants to participate. Last year I worked with one student one-on-one until his contractor moved him to another town."

Data Analysis: Student Survey

The student survey contained eleven Likert-scale statements to measure student sentiment and satisfaction with their respective programs. Table 11 presents these results, ranked from most representative of student sentiment, to least representative of student sentiment. The highest possible cumulative score for statements in Table 11 is 35, and the lowest possible cumulative score is 7. Since Statement 12, "Please rank the difficulty of the class," used a Likert scale that is different from Statements 2-11, the results of Statement 12 are presented separately from this table, and the same point system is not used to evaluate the results of Statement 12.

The three statements that tied for the most points, or were most agreed upon by students, are Statement 4, "classes are conveniently located;" Statement 8, "I would recommend this program to a friend;" and Statement 9, "this program has improved my English speaking and listening skills." Students were quite satisfied with class location, overall experience, and improvement of their English speaking and listening skills. The statements with the lowest aggregate scores were Statement 6, "I feel emotion during my class;" Statement 10, "this program has improved my English reading and writing skills;" and Statement 11, "the difficulty of the class is appropriate for my level;" with Statement 11 scoring the lowest, with just 23 points. Students were less satisfied with the program's ability to improve their English reading and writing skills and the level of difficulty in their classes. Students also did not report strong emotions, whether positive or negative, while in class. Contrary to the results of Statement 11, Statement 12, which asks students

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Table 11. Student Sentiment and Satisfaction (Student Survey, Q2-11)

Statement Number	Statement	Points
4	Classes are conveniently located.	28
8	I would recommend this program to a friend.	28
9	This program has improved my English speaking and listening skills.	28
5	It is easy to get to class.	27
2	I feel that my ESL Program gives me a voice in my community.	26
3	Class times are convenient to my schedule.	26
7	I feel comfortable and accepted in my ESL classes.	26
6	I feel emotion during my class.	25
10	This program has improved my English reading and writing skills.	25
11	The difficulty of the class is appropriate for my level.	23

to rank the difficulty of the class, indicates that the majority of students are satisfied with the level of difficulty. Six out of seven students said the difficulty of their class was "just right," with only one student responding that their class was "too easy." This student, identified as Student 3, consistently responded negatively or indifferently to the statements in this survey. Student 3 is an outlier, as the responses of other student participants were overwhelmingly positive. Student 3 did not respond to any statement

with a score higher than "Neutral," strongly disagreeing with Statements 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8, which measured students' perception of class convenience and comfort. In addition, Student 3 was the only respondent to rank the difficulty of the class as "too easy." Given the measures taken to ensure participants' anonymity, there is no way to link Student 3's responses with one specific program. I have included individual responses to Statement 7, which measures student comfort in the social environment of their classroom, because it is one of the most important statements in the student survey for this study. Five out of seven students agreed with this statement, one strongly agreed, and one strongly disagreed. Statements 4 and 8 received the greatest number of responses indicating strong agreement (3 out of 7 respondents). Statements 6 and 11 received the greatest number of neutral responses (3 out of 7 respondents). No statements were strongly disagreed with by more than one respondent, and that respondent was Student 3 in every such case.

Conclusion

Overall, students were quite satisfied with their program atmosphere and convenience, but were divided on their satisfaction with the improvement of their English skills as a result of the programs. Program coordinators felt that the largest barriers to student attendance were transportation issues and schedule conflicts, but students responded that classes are located conveniently for them. Only two out of the five programs with available data had a required assessment for students. Costs of program facilitation varied considerably, as did curricula sources and standards. A more detailed discussion of results will follow in the upcoming section.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter contains a detailed analysis of the results obtained from this study, with reference to the research questions and goals of this study. The discussion of results follows in the same order that the results were presented in Chapter 4, with reference to key published research in relation to each finding. The chapter concludes with justification for future research.

As explained in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to explore and compare the characteristics, limitations, and barriers to attendance of adult ESL programs in two Mississippi areas. The primary research question is: What are the attendance rates, availability, and accessibility of adult ESL classes in northern Mississippi? The secondary research questions are as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of these programs? (ie. cost, curriculum, course availability)

2. What are the specific needs of the students attending these programs?

3. Are the students satisfied with their respective programs?

4. What are the barriers keeping students from attending classes?

5. What improvements can be made to existing programs?

The goal of this study is to reveal information that can be used to improve accessibility and quality of adult ESL programs, regardless of geographic area. Overall,

programs were relatively similar between the cities of Oxford and Tupelo, but PC 1 was a consistent outlier. Analogously, students had similar levels of satisfaction with their respective programs, but Student 3 was an outlier, consistently reporting negative opinions of his/her program. Generalizations of students or programs in the areas are exclusive of these two outliers, and an explanation of the exception is always included.

Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of these programs?

The majority of adult ESL programs in the Oxford and Tupelo areas are church-affiliated, underfunded, and average about 30 students per class. Additionally, the programs in these areas offer long, relatively infrequent classes. Adult volunteers are the most commonly-employed classroom instructors. Curricula sources are not regulated among programs in these areas and vary greatly, indicating the potential for dramatic disparities in the quality and content of education. Free-of-charge adult ESL programs in these two areas do not measure student assessment via classwork (written or oral). PC 1 was the only program that satisfied this requirement, but it is not free to students. Overall, programs in these areas are generally under-regulated, underfunded, and under-specialized.

Demographics - *Venue*

The majority of responding programs were church-affiliated, which is not surprising, as the areas of Tupelo and Mississippi have high levels of religious affiliation. According to the 2010 US Religion Census, 59.92% of Tupelo residents and 40.40% of Oxford residents are members of a religious congregation (Grammich et al., 2010). Motivation has been found to be a key factor in ESL student retention (Meniado, 2019;

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Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Gardner, 1985; Birdsong, 2006; Wang, 1999), and a sense of

community support is extremely important for maintaining student motivation (Chao &

Mantero, 2014). Church-sponsored ESL programs create a sense of community for not

only the congregation, but for ESL students as well by offering social events, family and

career support, and transportation assistance to students. This development of a

community within the ESL classroom facilitates improved learner uptake through social

interaction—something that is quite difficult if students are not comfortable with each

other (see *Debunking Fears*, Chapter 2). Church-sponsored ESL programs have been

found to promote reclamation of students' native culture rather than diminish it, which is

something that many potential English learners worry about (Chao & Mantero, 2014;

Kouritzin, 2000). These factors make church-sponsored ESL programs generally very

effective at creating a socially appropriate classroom environment.

Demographics - *Class Size*

The average class size of responding programs was 29.8 students. PC 5 had the

smallest class size, with classes ranging from 11-20 students. PC 4 had the largest class

size, with 50 students per class. Smaller class size has a significant positive effect on

student oral improvement (Oberg, 1993; Smith & Glass, 1980), so it would be interesting

to assess whether students in PC 5's program have higher oral proficiency achievement

than students in PC 4's program. However, this study cannot link individual student

satisfaction or achievement with specific programs.

Class size can sometimes be indicative of over- or under-enrollment in ESL

programs. Either case presents a problem: overcrowding of ESL programs results in long

wait times for classroom placement and under-crowding inhibits the ability to specialize

classes by student ability level (Rossiter, 2001; Kouritzin, 2000; LINC Brochure, 2016;

Jackson & Martinez, 2017). Either situation results in the potential for students to end up

in classes that are either too easy or too difficult for their English proficiency levels.

While I did not collect data from program coordinators about their perception of student

enrollment (i.e. whether it was too high, too low, or just right), or on student-to-teacher

ratio, student responses from Statement 11 on the student survey may shed some light on

this situation. Statement 11 reads, "The difficulty of this class is appropriate for my

level." This statement was ranked the lowest for level of agreement out of all the

statements on the student survey. While the few responses to this statement cannot be

directly linked to over- or under-enrollment, it provokes a discussion as to why the

curricula difficulty across all programs is not satisfying student needs. I speculate that

lack of appropriate student placement in classes, or a lack of the ability to diversify class

offerings, due to over- or under-enrollment could be possible explanations for this

(Rossiter, 2001; Jackson & Martinez, 2017).

Class Duration & Frequency

According to the results of Question 17 on the Program Coordinator survey

("How long is a typical class?"), all classes were at least one hour long. PC 2 and PC 5

offered the lengthiest classes, which lasted more than two hours. PC 1, 3, and 4 offered

classes between one and two hours long. No programs offered classes for less than one

hour.

It is possible that programs offered such long classes because the majority of programs did not offer classes extremely frequently. With the exception of PC 1, who offers classes daily, all other responding programs only offer classes either once or twice a week (Q7, PC Survey). This type of "intensive course," as defined by Serrano (2011), has been shown to improve the language proficiency of intermediate language learners more than shorter, more frequent classes (Serrano, 2011). There is no way to tell if this was a purposeful pedagogical decision made by each program, or if this decision was made for the purposes of convenience.

According to the theory described by Carroll (1967), which states that proficiency achievement is affected by total hours devoted to study, regardless of class time distribution, PC 1's program could be the most successful in improving student proficiency, because it has the highest total number of hours of instruction per week (5-10 hours per week). According to the same theory, I could hypothesize that PC 3 may be the least successful in improving student proficiency, with just 1-2 hours of class time per week.

Curriculum

Two-thirds of the programs used a set curriculum in their classes (Table 6). This curricula was obtained from online, government-provided, and print sources. Government-provided sources include lesson plans and materials from public schools and universities. Some of these sources, especially if they are older, may be problematic. Many ESL texts have been found to underrepresent women, containing gender stereotypes or indicating preference towards men (Vandrick, 1998), which would be of

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particular consequence to programs in this study, as the majority of programs reported primarily female student bodies. This study did not collect detailed information on program curriculum, so it is unknown whether the present programs in this study utilize said problematic sources. Online sources of instruction are less likely to facilitate social interaction in the classroom (Baralt, 2013; Doise & Mugny, 1984; Chappell, 2014; Gardner, 1985).

The two programs that do not use a set curriculum for their classes are difficult to analyze. Generally, it seems that requiring a set curriculum be taught ensures consistency across classes and years, while a lack thereof has the potential for inconsistent student experiences. More information can be gained about what these classes are like through their methods of assessing student progress.

Assessment

The most commonly utilized methods of student assessment were both written and oral exams, or no exam (Figure 2). PC 3 and PC 5 reported that their programs do not administer an exam to students, nor do they administer any other measure of student progress. These two programs did not select any of the options for Q18, PC Survey, "How do you assess student progress?" The response options were "written exam," "oral exam," "written and oral exam," "no exam," "homework," "written classwork," "oral classwork," and "other" (Figure 2; Appendix C). It is surprising that these two programs did not administer any homework or classwork to substitute for formal student evaluation via exam, because without some form of instructor-facilitated assignment or assessment, there is not much distinction between a class and a social gathering.

PC 1 was the only program that utilized homework, written classwork, oral classwork, written exams, and oral exams. The separate options for "written exam," "oral exam," and "written and oral exam" were intended to refer to examinations that were either exclusively written or oral, and exams that included both written and oral components. Only one program assigns classwork to its students. Extensive research has been conducted on the importance of classwork assignments, both written and communicative (Chappell, 2014; Meniado, 2019; Harklau, 2002; Fernandez et al., 2017; Hinkel, 2004). Furthermore, researchers have argued that the study of a language as a subject, not a medium of communication, is ineffective at improving student language proficiency (Stern, Swain, & Maclean, 1976). If there are no classwork activities to engage students, classes have a heightened potential risk of falling into this category.

PC 2, whose program is federally funded, requires all students to take the TABE Clas-E assessment (see footnote, Figure 2). All federally-funded adult ESL programs are required to regularly report "core outcome measures" that measure student educational gain in order to continue to receive federal funds (Eyring, 2014, p. 137). The TABE Clas-E assessment is one of these approved measures. This assessment program provides preparatory instructional materials to participating programs, and measures student English proficiency in four areas: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (TABE Clas-E, 2019). However, programs whose federal funds are dependent on standardized test scores may devote the majority of classroom instruction to test preparation, rather than more individually-relevant curriculum.

Funding/Administrative Costs

Program coordinators reported very diverse program maintenance costs, ranging from $1,000 per year to as high as $75,000 per year (see Table 4). Program maintenance costs may include classroom materials, staff salaries, rental space, and utilities costs. PC 2's program, that reported an annual maintenance cost of $75,000 per year, was still able to offer classes to students free of charge. This program is federally funded (see footnotes, Figure 2), so that may offer an explanation as to why program maintenance costs are so high yet the cost of attendance is free. Other program maintenance costs ranged from $1,000 to $5,500 per year, confirming relatively similar administrative costs by other programs in the areas. The coordinators of these programs (PC 3, 4, and 5) did not mention federal funding, so I will assume they are funded through private, rather than public, sources. Private financing would put these programs in the minority, as two-thirds of adult ESL classes are federally funded (Eyring, 2014). For the purposes of this study, I am equating the reported program maintenance costs with the actual amount of funding each program receives, as administrative costs should not exceed the program's budget (although it is technically possible that programs are accumulating debt). According to the results presented in Table 4, PC 3, 4, and 5's programs appear to be underfunded.

Some investigations have pointed out that underfunded programs have the potential to fall short by failing to provide adequate pedagogical materials to instructors. If instructors are not properly trained in SLA or even general classroom instruction, lessons will be less successful and student language uptake will suffer. Furthermore,

decreased funding leads to overcrowded classes, lessons that do not match student proficiency level, and less qualified instructors (Rossiter, 2001; Eyring, 2014). Students ranked Statement 11 (student survey), "The difficulty of this class is appropriate for my level," lowest for level of agreement out of 11 statements (see Table 11), which suggests that students are not very satisfied with the program curriculum. The programs of PC 3, 4, and 5 (the programs with the lowest amount of funding) had 31-50, 50, and 11-20 students, respectively (Table 2). All of these programs, especially those of PC 3 and 4, certainly have enough students to split the groups into classes for multiple skill levels. However, it may be the case that these programs do not have enough instructors for diversified class offerings. I did not ask program coordinators if they offered different courses based on skill level, so it is unknown whether these programs already offer similar options. For those programs that do not offer multiple classes, it may be possible to do so if the programs were to receive more funding.

Class Instructors

The type of classroom instructor chosen by adult ESL programs is directly related to program funding (Williams, 1995; Rossiter, 2001; Eyring, 2014). PC 2's program, which received, by far, the most funding, utilized paid instructors with required educational background (see Table 5 for class instructor statistics). I was not surprised by this; in fact, I would have been very disappointed if this program did not hire highly qualified instructors because of the high amount of funding this program receives. PC 1's program also required its paid instructors to have some educational background. Again,

this was not surprising, as this program charged a tuition fee of $4,750 per semester to students.

Out of the three programs with lower amounts of funding (PC 3, 4, & 5), two of these programs utilized only adult volunteers, and one (PC 5) hired both adult volunteers and paid instructors, but did not require instructors to have any educational background. Out of these three programs, PC 5's program had the highest annual maintenance cost, so it makes sense that this program utilized a combination of adult volunteers and paid instructors. Unfortunately, there is a gap in current research on the effect of instructor salary on adult ESL student outcomes. It is likely that instructors with educational experience are more knowledgeable about and employ better pedagogical strategies (Crawford, 2002; Akbari & Dadvand, 2011), but it is unclear in this case whether instructor salary affects instructor performance.

Research Question 2: What are the specific needs of the students attending these programs?

Students attending adult ESL classes in this region are primarily female students in their mid-to-late 20's and 30's. This group is particularly predisposed to need multiple options for flexibility, including childcare, and have the potential to feel intimidated or uncomfortable in classrooms with a large proportion of male students or instructors (Toohey & Scholefield, 1994).

Demographics - *Student Age*

Student needs are dependent on student characteristics, and students of different ages have different classroom needs. Student age varied considerably between programs,

but 80% of programs catered to students aged from their mid-to-late 20's or students in their 30's. The outlier was PC 1, who served mostly college-aged students. Since all of these programs only offer ESL classes for adults, the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967) is not relevant to this data. Among adult L2 learners, the age of acquisition has no effect on the degree of attainable proficiency. Rather, other factors, such as total amount of time devoted to language study, motivation, social interaction, and immersion time have significant effects on L2 attainment (Birdsong, 2006; Carroll, 1967; Wang, 1999; Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Meniado, 2019; Gardner, 1985; Stern, Swain, & Maclean 1976; Serrano, 2011; Netten & Germain, 2004; Stern, 1985). The results of this question (Q13, PC Survey, "What is the average age of your students?") are therefore, not significantly relevant to the findings of this study.

Demographics - *Class Gender Makeup*

Eighty-percent of ESL programs reported mostly female class gender makeups (see PC Survey, Q14, "What is the average gender of students?"; Appendix C). Again, PC 1 was the outlier, reporting an even mix of males and females. A large proportion of present classroom adult ESL research has reported primarily female students (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008; Dempsey et al., 2009). There may be any number of underlying causes for this gender disparity in ESL classes, such as single motherhood (Song, 2006) or fewer women than men with full-time jobs.[1]

[1] As of 2007, 76.6% of men and 65.4% of women in Mississippi worked full-time jobs, defined as at least 35 hours per week, for no less than 50 weeks per year (Part-Time and Full-Time Workers, 2013)

Regardless of the underlying cause, women have been found to participate less, and are called on less, than their male counterparts in classroom settings (Toohey & Scholefield, 1994; Jones, 1989; Brophy, 1985). Despite this, females have been found to be more attentive than male students in the ESL classroom (Vandrick, 1998). In the youth ESL context, females feel overpowered and intimidated by male classmates and are discouraged from speaking up in class (Toohey & Scholefield, 1994), which could imply that in a mostly female ESL classroom setting, women may be more likely to participate than in more evenly split coed classes.

Demographics - *Childcare*

Because the majority of programs (80%) reported mostly female class makeup (Q14, PC Survey), and the average age of students ranged from 22-30 or 30-40 depending on the program (Q13, PC Survey), the potential necessity of childcare during ESL classes is high for this subject group. While some immigrant mothers have reported hesitance or unwillingness to utilize childcare offerings due to personal reasons (Kouritzin, 2000), the availability of childcare services during ESL classes can make the difference between attending and not attending classes for those students who are willing to utilize such services. Time conflict, especially with work or familial obligations, is consistently cited as a top barrier to attendance for ESL students (Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Kouritzin, 2000; Hayes, 1989). Meniado (2019) points out that many immigrants move to a country to seek employment, so while learning the local language certainly will be beneficial in the workplace, it is work that takes first priority for these individuals. People with full-time jobs only have a small window of free time each week that they

would be available to attend ESL classes, but this time frame is often devoted to child care and familial obligations for individuals with families. Offering childcare services during classes solve this time conflict for many different situations. For example, for members of a dual-income household, a spouse who must stay home with the kids while their spouse works, and vice-versa, would be able to bring his or her children to the ESL class venue and not worry about leaving the children unattended. For single parents, the same solution applies. The results of Q15 on the PC survey, "Do you offer childcare services during classes?" indicate that 60% of programs always offer childcare, and an additional 20% sometimes offer this service. Interestingly, the only program that reported an even mix of male and female students (PC 1) was also the only program that did not offer childcare services to students and their families. Despite the varying gender makeups of program student bodies, it is surprising that not all programs offer childcare services, because a lack thereof is an obvious and easily mitigable barrier to attendance— one that disproportionately affects females. However, it is possible that more programs do not provide childcare services due to budgetary constraints and a lack of funding.

Research Question 3: Are the students satisfied with their respective programs?

Students seem quite satisfied with their respective programs in terms of location, overall experience, and improvement of their English speaking and listening skills (Student Survey, Statements 4, 8, 9, respectively). Conversely, students were not satisfied with their improvement of their English reading and writing skills, along with the level of difficulty of their class (Student Survey, Statements 10, 11, respectively).

This study only evaluates student satisfaction in relation to program curriculum; furthermore, it evaluates curriculum sources, *not* specific materials.

There is a trend in contemporary research of adult ESL programs that do not provide satisfactory reading and writing resources to students (August, 2006; Rossiter, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2017; Wang, 1999; Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). The results of this study echo this trend. A curriculum that is less focused on writing can put students at a disadvantage when seeking employment, and disproportionately disservices L2 learners with a lower level of formal education, because this group experiences a heightened difficulty in developing advanced English reading and writing skills as compared to their peers with a higher degree of formal education (August, 2006; Hinkel, 2004; Bialystock, 2002; Harrison & Krol, 2007). Because learner acquisition of English reading and writing skills is not significantly linked to total class duration or class size (Oberg, 1993), the only way to increase learner uptake of these skills is through increasing the proportion of class time dedicated to literacy skills.

Research has suggested that student satisfaction increases with more diversified course offerings based on English proficiency level, and an elevated focus on the development of reading and writing skills in the ESL classroom (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008; Greenfield, 2003).

Additional Resources

All programs, except PC 1's program, offer additional resources to students. Out of the programs that offered additional resources, 100% offered services categorized as "General Support," including advice, legal support, and employment assistance. Other

services offered to students, ranked in descending order of frequency, are transportation

assistance, education support, events, and donations (Table 9). One example of events

for ESL students is the Celebration of Cultures Festival in Tupelo (PC 4). According to

the event's Facebook page, "The Celebration of Cultures Festival celebrates diversity

through unifying cultures. The purpose of this event is to share and learn about the

cultures of all the ethnic groups we have in Tupelo and the surrounding areas," (Tupelo

Parks and Recreation [Facebook], 2019). This event is supported by the theory that

language is best learned through culture, as this method increases student motivation and

comfort in the ESL classroom (Lee, 2015). Moreover, class events and field trips allow

students and instructors to get to know each other, creating a sense of community among

adult ESL learners. This can make the difference between whether a student chooses to

continue taking classes or leave a program. When students feel comfortable and accepted

in their classes, they feel more self-motivated to continue to pursue their acquisition of

English (Chao & Mantero, 2014; Kouritzin, 2000; Meniado, 2019; Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014;

Gardner, 1985; Birdsong, 2006).

Employment assistance was an additional resource (classified under "General

Support") offered by PC 2. Many English language learners are motivated to learn

English to improve their careers. In the United States, there is a strong incentive for

workers to learn English, as English-proficient employees earn up to 17% higher salaries

than their non-English speaking or LEP counterparts (Chiswick & Miller, 2002). Non-

native English speakers have the opportunity to distinguish themselves from the rest of

the work force if they learn English, because the demand for bilingual employees is

growing at an exponential rate in the U.S. (Subtirelu, 2017). Nevertheless, non-English speaking immigrants need to learn English quickly in order to get well-paying jobs. Some ESL programs have become aware of this time-sensitive need and have developed specialized programs specifically for this group. One such example is vocational ESL programs, which specialize in efficient acquisition of basic English and provide students with career-specific lessons so they can enter the workforce more quickly (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008). Researchers have pointed out the importance of career preparation in the adult ESL classroom, especially because many immigrants come to the U.S. on a temporary work visa with the intention of learning basic English quickly before beginning employment (Fernandez et al., 2017; Meniado, 2019).

Research Question 4: What are the barriers keeping students from attending classes?

Given the results of this study, there are no immediately obvious barriers to attendance for currently enrolled students, but it is possible that schedule conflict or student discomfort in the classroom may be barriers. Additional research is needed to determine if these factors are, in fact, significant barriers to attendance. While program coordinators perceived transportation to be a top reason that students do not attend classes, this study did not find transportation conflict to be a significant barrier to attendance. Cost of attendance is not a significant barrier to student retention, but may be a significant factor affecting new student enrollment and choosing which adult ESL class to attend. Finally, a lack of childcare is not a strong deterrent to attendance for the subject group, due to many programs offering this service, but may present a significant

barrier to attendance in areas where there is a widespread lack of childcare offerings in adult ESL programs.

Public Transportation

Table 3 presents the results of Q16 on the PC survey, "How close is the nearest public transportation stop (i.e. bus stop) to your building?" Results indicated that the programs in Oxford were all located within a 5-10 minute or less walk from the nearest public transportation stop. Conversely, Tupelo has stopped offering a traditional public transportation system, now using only on-demand ride share services (City of Tupelo, 2018), so students in Tupelo may experience more difficulty getting to class than students in Oxford. However, Statement 4 on the Student Survey, "Classes are conveniently located," scored the highest (tied with two other statements) for most student agreement, and Statement 5, "It is easy to class," scored the second highest number of points for student agreement. It is important to note that students for whom transportation is a significant barrier likely would not have continued to attend class, and therefore may not have had the opportunity to participate in this research study.

Relevant literature supports student sentiment, confirming that lack of transportation is not a significant barrier to attendance for ESL students (Kouritzin, 2000; Carter, 2016). Getting to class is among the most essential requirements for succeeding in any course, particularly language courses. Program coordinators shared the same intuition, citing transportation, along with schedule conflicts, as the mode barrier to attendance for ESL students (see *Barriers to Attendance,* Chapter 4; Figure 3). Oxford public transportation, for non-Ole Miss students or faculty, costs $1 per ride for non-

disabled adults, or $30 per month (Oxford University Transit, 2019). Public

transportation in Tupelo, starting in July 2019, is now limited to municipal-offered ride

share "On Demand" services, which costs $2 per ride, each way (City of Tupelo, 2018).

If a student were attending classes twice per week, it would cost $4 per week for Oxford

residents to attend, and $8 per week for Tupelo residents to attend. Given the findings of

this study, these costs are either not significantly deterring students from attending class,

or students are utilizing some other form of transportation to class, such as their own cars,

walking, or getting rides from friends.

Cost of Attendance

All classes, with the exception of PC 1's program, were free for students to attend.

PC 1's program, as stated in Chapter 4, costs $4,750 "plus fees" (PC Survey, Q6, PC 1)

per student. This program seems to be an outlier among adult ESL programs in the U.S.,

as multiple studies have confirmed that the vast majority of such programs are of free or

very low cost to students (Carter, 2016; Eyring, 2014). PC 1 had the second-lowest

enrollment, averaging 22.5 students. Only PC 5 had a lower number of students,

averaging 15.5 students (see Footnote 1, Chapter 4).

While I have discussed literal tuition cost, I feel it is necessary to also discuss any

other 'costs' of attendance, which include transportation costs and opportunity cost.

Transportation costs were not found to be a significant barrier to attendance for students

(see *Public Transportation*, Chapter 5), despite the fact that program coordinators ranked

transportation as one of the two highest barriers to attendance for students, from their

perspectives. This result indicates a disparity of information between students and

program coordinators about student needs. Three out of five programs offered

transportation assistance to students (Table 9). It is possible that the coordinators of these

programs are spending a portion of their budget on transportation for students, when in

reality this issue is not preventing students from coming to class.

Opportunity costs, on the other hand, are more difficult to measure. An

opportunity cost is an aggregation of all the other possible choices a person gives up by

choosing to do something (Buchanan, 1991). This cost is usually not empirically

measurable, but can include missing family time, social events, the opportunity to work

overtime, or even extra down time for relaxation. While opportunity cost cannot be

measured directly, certain variables, such as student satisfaction, can be used to try to

identify opportunity cost by proxy. Program tuition increases both the literal and

opportunity costs to students, because they are paying more per class, and therefore are

losing more by failing to attend every class. On the student survey, Statements 2 and 3

best measure student satisfaction with the amount of opportunity cost to attend classes.

Statement 2, "I feel that my ESL Program gives me a voice in my community," scored 26

out of a possible 35 points. This statement measures the opportunity cost of missed

potential to make social connections in other settings during class time. Statement 3,

"Class times are convenient to my schedule," also scored 26 out of a possible 35 points.

This statement measures the opportunity cost of missing other scheduled events, such as

family time, work, or other prior arrangements. Schedule conflicts with work and family

have been consistently found to be a major barrier to attendance for adult ESL students

(Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Kouritzin, 2000; Hayes, 1989; Carter, 2016). Fortunately, it does

not seem that the programs in this region are conflicting with work or family to the point

that current students are deciding to discontinue attending class. It is important to stress

that the results of student satisfaction and program attrition are only indicative of the

attitudes of currently enrolled students, and this study does not investigate the number of

students who considered, but ultimately decided not to enroll in classes.

Barriers to Attendance: a Coordinator's Perspective

Question 5 (PC Survey) asked program coordinators what they thought the

barriers to attendance are for students in their programs. The most commonly cited

perceived barriers to attendance were transportation and schedule conflict. Pertinent

investigations reveal that while schedule conflict has been proven to be a very real

deterrent for student attendance, transportation has not been found to be a significant

barrier to attendance among the participants (Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Kouritzin, 2000;

Hayes, 1989; Carter, 2016). The instructors who selected transportation as an attendance

barrier are not aware of the opinion their students, because students in these programs

confirmed that they are not limited in their ability to get to class (see Chapter 5: *Public

Transportation*; Table 11).

PC 1's program differed from the other five program coordinators because their

program catered more to younger, university-aged students, and reported perfect

attendance rates, offering classes daily. This program was the only one that charged a fee

for classes ($4,750 per semester plus fees), and PC 1 responded that he/she felt there

were no barriers to attendance because the program has implemented an attendance

policy. There is a clear lack of research on the effects of cost of ESL classes on

attendance, because most CESL classes for adults are free to all or conditionally free (Carter, 2016; Eyring, 2014). However, it seems that the *cost* of attendance is driving the program's perfect attendance just as much, if not more, than the attendance policy. The cost of this program may be a deterrent against initial enrollment, but once students are enrolled, it does make sense that students have a higher incentive to attend every class than students enrolled in a free class. This tuition cost dramatically increases the opportunity cost of missing class, because students pay more money per-class at PC 1's program than at any other program in the two areas.

Other barriers to attendance cited by program coordinators include a lack of childcare by PC 2, whose program only offers childcare sometimes, and student discomfort in class by PC 3. While a lack of childcare during classes has been found to be a significant barrier to attendance in previous research, this barrier is not always alleviated by the implementation of childcare services by program coordinators (Kouritzin, 2000). Sometimes, a lack of *culturally acceptable* childcare options prevents students (particularly mothers) from attending class, not a complete lack thereof. Yet it is unlikely that the program coordinators who participated in this study were thinking of this more elusive barrier when answering the survey. Every program coordinator whose program always offers childcare did not cite lack of childcare as a barrier to attendance. Unfortunately, there is no statement on the student survey measuring whether a lack of childcare is a real barrier for students, but since 60% of surveyed programs offer childcare, an absence of childcare is not likely to be a major barrier to attendance.

Student discomfort in class can be caused by social anxiety, fear of making mistakes in front of other people, and for females, intimidation by male classmates (Hayes, 1989; Wu, Wu, & Le, 2014; Toohey & Scholefield, 1994; Jones, 1989; Brophy, 1985; Vandrick, 1998). Only one program coordinator cited student discomfort to be a barrier to attendance, as there is extensive research on the effects of classroom anxiety in both the adult ESL classroom and educational settings in general (Hayes, 1989; Wu, Wu & Le, 2014). It is important to note that PC 3's program had the lowest attendance rate out of all PC participants, which indicates a need for further investigation. Statement 7 on the student survey, "I feel comfortable and accepted in my ESL classes," attempts to measure student discomfort or anxiety in the classroom. This statement scored 26 out of a possible 35 points, indicating that most student respondents agreed with this statement. One student, Student 3, strongly disagreed with this statement, but as I have stated in Chapter 4 ('Data Analysis: Student Survey'), this student is an outlier among the group who consistently responded negatively to the survey statements.

A final barrier to attendance is satisfactory student English acquisition. This was only mentioned by PC 6, but has been echoed by present research concerning student enrollment (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008). While ESL programs should view this reason for students leaving as a success, an overall decline in enrollment over time is cause for concern. If programs are successfully facilitating English acquisition in current students, but failing to recruit enough new students to maintain a constant student body, then eventually most programs are forced to shut down due to a decline in enrollment. Unfortunately, it is not always possible for adult ESL programs to conduct a student exit

survey if a student decides to stop attending classes, because this may occur mid-semester or without notice, so it can be difficult to identify additional barriers to attendance. Because PC 6's program, which no longer offers classes due to lack of enrollment, was located in Oxford, and there are still at least two other programs in the city still offering programs, further investigation of other barriers to attendance (other than students' English acquisition) that may have caused a decline in enrollment is needed.

In short, both a decline in student retention rates *and* a decline in new student enrollment is necessary for overall student bodies to decrease over time. Students' satisfactory English acquisition is not enough to explain a lack of interested students in PC 6's program; if this were the case, students currently attending other programs in Oxford would likely have enrolled in this program in the past couple years. It, therefore, is likely that PC 6's program suffered the same barriers to attendance that other surveyed programs experience, but may have had stronger deterrents to new student enrollment than other programs.

In conclusion, there are no apparent strong deterrents to attendance for students currently enrolled in these programs, but schedule conflict or student discomfort in class may cause some students to miss class. Further research is needed on this subject, particularly of a research design that allows student satisfaction measures to be linked to specific programs. Furthermore, additional research should separately investigate barriers to student retention versus barriers to new student enrollment. Transportation is not a strong barrier to attendance for students in Tupelo and Oxford, Mississippi.

Research Question 5: What improvements can be made to existing programs?

Based on the results of the Student and PC Surveys, and current literature that has been reviewed, overall student satisfaction would improve if each program diversified class offerings and increased the amount of written and oral classwork exercises.

Program Marketing & Expansion

The most common marketing strategies employed by program coordinators was word of mouth, followed by flyers and social media (Figure 4). A lack of program awareness will both prevent the program from reaching its full potential to aid the local population that wants to learn English, and will also disadvantage currently enrolled students because of under-enrollment, which causes a lack of diversified class offerings based on proficiency level. One of the Standards for Adult Education ESL Programs is that each program must have a comprehensive plan for raising public awareness of the program. This process must be developed by all administrators, and include identification of target audience, allocation of a budget for program marketing, and the development of an evaluation measure of marketing efficacy (Bitterlin et al., 2003).

All programs used some method of marketing, in accordance with these Standards. PC 2 employed the most expansive marketing strategies, utilizing flyers, online ads, social media, word of mouth, and guest speakers to advertise their classes and raise awareness of the program. All programs utilized satisfactory levels of marketing strategies.

Two out of five responding programs currently have plans for program expansion. However, only PC 2 elaborated, explaining that his/her program identified a night class

with declining enrollment, and decided to reschedule it as a day class offering in the future, indicating an awareness of student needs and evaluation of student satisfaction. Encouraging programs to utilize similar strategies in order to make their programs more accessible to interested students calls into discussion the concept of accessibility vs. availability (Kouritzin, 2000). While programs may have *available* classes that technically fit into potential students' schedules, students may be incurring a very high opportunity cost to attend these classes. True *accessibility* of classes only comes from an open line of communication between students and program coordinators, so that coordinators can adjust class characteristics to better suit student needs. That is, after all, the goal of adult ESL classes: to help students improve themselves and their lives.

Conclusion

As this study has shown, there is a disparity of information between students and program coordinators of adult ESL classes that is preventing programs from best suiting the needs of their communities. Adult ESL programs in Oxford and Tupelo, Mississippi are meeting the needs of their primarily young, female students by offering childcare options during classes, offering classes in convenient locations, and improving students' English speaking and listening skills. Conversely, these classes are seen as needing to improve their specialization of classes (in both skill level and time), to obtain more funding, and to add more emphasis on the development of students' English reading and writing skills. Student satisfaction would greatly improve if both instructors and students made a conscious effort to understand the barriers each party faces in offering and attending ESL classes.

Programs could improve by requiring instructors to train more heavily in SLA and pedagogy and providing students with anonymous surveys on how to improve their programs. Additionally, offering multiple English classes by student proficiency level would both better suit student needs and increase student motivation to attend class. Finally, a greater degree of emphasis needs to be placed on classwork exercises, with particular regard to reading and writing activities.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION.

Aims and Methods

The purpose of this study was to sample the characteristics of adult ESL programs

in northern Mississippi, identify the needs of students attending these programs, and

evaluate whether these programs are meeting student needs. A central measure of

satisfactory program facilitation was taken by investigating the barriers to attendance that

students face when attending class. Data was collected from six adult ESL programs in

the cities of Tupelo and Oxford, Mississippi, using anonymous online surveys

administered separately to program coordinators and students. Due to the nature of the

research design, the number of subject responses was limited and therefore only

qualitative observations could be made from the surveys. A larger sample size,

accomplished through expanding the geographic region of surveyed programs, would

achieve more statistically significant results.

Key Findings

The student body of the programs in this geographic region was primarily female,

most commonly ranging in age from mid 20's to 30's. This demographic is consistent

with many other adult ESL programs across the United States and Canada (Spurling,

Seymour & Chisman, 2008; Dempsey et al., 2009). The sampled adult ESL programs in

northern Mississippi are meeting student needs by conveniently locating classes,

providing childcare options during classes, and improving students' English speaking and

listening skills. However, these programs must improve their development of students'

English reading and writing skills, offer more diverse class offerings, and obtain more

funding.

This study has identified an information gap between students and program

coordinators. Program coordinators perceived transportation and schedule conflict to be

the strongest barriers preventing student attendance, but transportation was not found to

be a significant barrier to attendance for these students. Transportation is not a

significant barrier to attendance for adult ESL classes in Tupelo or Oxford, Mississippi,

due to the current public transportation infrastructure in both cities. This research study

has suggested that schedule conflict and student discomfort in class may be two

significant barriers to student attendance.

Free-of-charge adult ESL programs in these two areas are not offering a

satisfactory level of student assessment via classwork (written or oral). PC 1 was the

only program that satisfied this requirement, but is not free to students. Students are

dissatisfied with their programs' improvement of their English reading and writing skills,

which is likely due to a deficit in classwork exercises. Written classwork exercises have

been shown to improve students' English reading and writing skills, and studies have

shown that adult ESL programs generally are not facilitating enough classwork exercises

to adequately develop these skills (Harklau, 2002; Hinkel, 2004; August, 2006; Rossiter,

2001; Fernandez et al., 2017; Wang, 1999).

About half of the programs in this geographic region are comparatively

underfunded, which may explain the deficit in satisfactory classwork exercises and

student dissatisfaction with English literacy improvement. Underfunded programs prevent the diversification of class offerings and may decrease the quality of instructor education from a lack of professional development (Rossiter, 2001; Eyring, 2014; Kouritzin, 2000; LINC Brochure, 2016).

This research study has suggested that student satisfaction would improve if programs received more funding, and used those additional funds for professional development and community events for students and their families. Furthermore, programs should focus more heavily on the development of student English literacy skills.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study are important to discuss. There were two consistent outliers among the data: PC 1 and Student 3. Because of the very low number of subjects, these outliers cannot be assumed to be statistically insignificant. This study could be improved with an increased number of subjects, accomplished through broadening the surveyed geographic region. If the number of subjects increased, true outliers could be identified. Furthermore, the very low number of student participants, relative to the total number of reported students in each program, indicates the possibility that some program's students were not represented in Student responses, or that the students that did answer the survey are outliers among the entire student population.

Of the two outliers, the characteristics of PC 1's program consistently differed from other programs. Student 3 was quite dissatisfied with his program, but was the only student participant who felt this way. Unfortunately, it is possible that PC 1 was

answering questions for an English program that does not fall under the category of community ESL. When I reached out to the coordinator of the intended program, I found that there are two programs that are managed by the same coordinator. One program is a community ESL class, and the other is a University-sponsored ESL class. I suspect that the program coordinator (PC 1) may have misunderstood and answered the survey with both the University-sponsored class and the community ESL class for which I had intended to collect data in mind. PC 1's program required a very high attendance fee ($4,750 plus fees), which was charged per-semester. As I have noted in Chapter 5, there is a substantial lack of research on the effects of cost of attendance on adult ESL class attendance rates, because the vast majority of community ESL classes are either free or very low in cost (Carter, 2016).

Furthermore, one program coordinator (PC 6) did not complete my survey, because his/her program is no longer offering classes. However, he/she was still willing to provide me with some basic information about his/her former program. Because PC 6 did not complete my survey, I was limited to the information given to me in prose via email.

Certain additional questions could have also been included in Table 2, "General Program Characteristics," but due to size constraints, I have limited the table to those nine questions. Finally, there is a need to improve both surveys, which I have discussed in the following section: Implications for Further Research.

Implications for Further Research

   This study has confirmed that transportation is not a significant barrier to attendance for adult ESL students. Furthermore, the trend of primarily young-to middle-aged female students is echoed by the results of this study. Lack of childcare options is not a significant barrier to attendance for this subject pool, but may be a significant barrier in a different geographic region. Further research is needed among a larger subject pool, with a combination of programs that do and do not offer childcare, in order to confirm the significance of this result. Finally, this research study confirms that adult ESL programs are not perceived by participants as satisfactorily improving students' English literacy.

   If this study were to be replicated, I would like to suggest a few changes and additions to be made. Firstly, this study would yield more widely applicable results if conducted within a larger geographic area, which would both increase the number of participants and eliminate any statistically insignificant variables affecting results, such as effects from the limited geographic area of this study. Furthermore, there must be a distinction among "barriers to attendance," between barriers to student retention and barriers to new student enrollment.

   Secondly, it would be helpful to add a few additional statements to the student questionnaire. I believe that a higher quantity of useful data could be collected if a second section to the student survey was developed, either in the form of interview questions or survey questions of a similar design as the PC survey. Data should be collected on how students get to class, what assignments and assessments they complete

as part of their program, and their self-described barriers to attendance. It may also be useful to collect more demographic information about student participants, such as race/ethnicity, if they have dependent children, and marital status.

Some additional questions should be included in the program coordinator survey. There should be a question included about whether the program offers multiple courses for different English levels. Another question should be added about program funding sources. Typical classroom activities should also be investigated. This would be best accomplished through classroom observation, but could also be investigated via a survey question. Lastly, specific curricular materials from each program should be investigated, as opposed to simply identifying the sources of material.

The most important improvement that could be made on this study would be to add a question on the student survey that could link individual student responses with specific programs. Program names would still remain confidential and replaced with a unique identifier, but program identifiers would be uniform across responses from both surveys. This addition would more directly link program characteristics with student satisfaction, providing a very specific model of an ideal adult ESL program based on analysis of negative and positive program characteristics.

There is a need for further study on the following topics: effect of instructor salary on student success in the adult ESL classroom, the effect of tuition cost on student attendance rates among non-free adult ESL classes, and discrete results comparing barriers to student retention versus new student enrollment for community adult ESL classes.

In conclusion, this research study supported other current research and added important information about northern Mississippi, an area of growing Hispanic populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2017).

Appendix A: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Accessibility and Quality of Adult ESL Programs in Northern Mississippi

Investigator	**Faculty Sponsor**
Jessica Flynn, Undergraduate Researcher	Felice Coles, Ph.D.
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Key Information for You to Consider
● **Voluntary Consent**. You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
● **Purpose**. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the accessibility and quality of Adult ESL programs, comparing their characteristics across a rural and urban area.
● **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last about 5 minutes.
● **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to complete a short online survey.
● **Risks.** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation.
● **Benefits**. There is no direct benefit to your participation, however the researchers hope to gain knowledge that will improve the quality of Adult ESL programs.
● **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

What you will do for this study
You will be sent a link to an online survey via Google Forms to evaluate characteristics of your ESL Program. The program coordinator survey evaluates program characteristics and accessibility and should take around 5 minutes to complete. The student survey evaluates program satisfaction and should take less than 5 minutes to complete. You must verify that you are at least 18 years old in the first question of the survey.

Time required for this study
Participation in this study should take about 5 minutes to complete the survey.

Possible risks from your participation
There are no anticipated risks to you from participating in this study.

Benefits from your participation
You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, your contributions may help improve the quality and accessibility of similar programs in your area or other areas.

Confidentiality
All information in the study will be collected from you anonymously: it will not be possible for anyone, even the researchers, to associate you with your responses.

Right to Withdraw
You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, just close your web browser. Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with your ESL Program.

IRB Approval
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, then decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. I have been given an unsigned copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

signed (Electronically)

CLICK HERE IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE

Appendix B: Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script - *Accessibility and Quality of Adult ESL Programs in Northern Mississippi*
Jessica Flynn, Principal Investigator

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT:

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jessica Flynn, and I am an undergraduate researcher at the University of Mississippi. I am conducting research on the accessibility and quality of ESL programs for adults in northern Mississippi for my honors thesis. I would greatly appreciate you and your students' participation in my research. This survey will analyze certain metrics of ESL classes, such as cost, attendance, and availability. Your responses will be anonymous in order to evaluate the programs that are available in and around the Oxford and Tupelo communities. I've attached the link to the consent form and program coordinator survey below:

link to Google Forms survey here

I have a second survey for ESL students, and I would appreciate it if you could pass the following message along via email to the students in your program if they are willing to participate:

> My name is Jessica Flynn, and I am an undergraduate student in the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College at the University of Mississippi. I am conducting research on Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in Tupelo and Oxford, Mississippi. I am sending you a link to a survey to analyze student satisfaction with the programs. Your responses will be completely anonymous and are for my research purposes only.
>
> Attached is the link to my survey, I sincerely appreciate your feedback and responses.
>
> *link to google forms survey and consent form will appear below*
>
> Jessica Flynn
> Undergraduate researcher, Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

_____

Thank you,
Jessica Flynn

Appendix C: Program Coordinator Survey

(MC) denotes Multiple Choice, **(CB)** denotes Checkboxes, **(SR)** denotes Short Response,

(O) denotes a Short Response option for "Other", **(*)** denotes Optional Question

Totals: 24 Questions, 16 MC, 4 CB, 4 SR, 9 O, 3*

0. **Please verify that you are at least 18 years of age. (MC)**

    - (Yes, I am at least 18 years of age.; No, I am not at least 18 years of age.)

1. **Is your program located in Tupelo or Oxford, Mississippi? (MC)**

    - (Tupelo, Oxford)

2. **Where are your classes offered? (MC, O)**

    - (Church, Community Center, University-affiliated venue, School Building,

      Other)

3. **How many students are enrolled in the program? (MC, O)**

    - (Less than 10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, More than 50, Other)

4. **What percentage of enrolled students, on average, attend classes regularly?**

    (MC)

    - (Less than 25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, 75-99%, 100%)

5. **What do you think are some barriers to attendance? (CB, O)**

    - (Schedule Conflict, Cost, Lack of childcare during classes, Transportation,

      Students feel uncomfortable during class, Other)

6. **What is the cost for students to attend classes? (Please indicate if cost is per-class**

    or a one-time fee) (MC, O)

    - ($0, Other)

7. **How often are classes offered? (MC, O)**

   - (Once a week, Twice a week, More than twice a week, Once every two weeks, Less than once every two weeks)

8. **Do you use a set curriculum? (MC)**

   - (Yes, No)

9. **If so, where or how is the curriculum accessible? (SR*)**

10. **What is the annual cost of maintaining the program? (SR)**

11. **How many years has this program been offered? (MC)**

    - (Less than one year, 1-5 years, 5-10 years, More than 10 years)

12. **Who teaches classes? (CB, O)**

    - (Student volunteers, Adult volunteers, Paid instructors (no required educational background), Paid instructors (required educational background), Other)

13. **What is the average age of your students? (MC)**

    - (18-22, 22-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50+)

14. **What is the average gender of students? (MC)**

    - (Mostly male, Mostly female, Even mix)

15. **Do you offer childcare services during classes? (MC)**

    - (Yes, No, Sometimes)

16. **How close is the nearest public transportation stop (i.e. bus stop) to your building? (MC, O)**

    - (Less than a 5 minute walk, 5-10 minute walk, 10-20 minute walk, More than a 20 minute walk, Other)

17. How long is a typical class? (MC)

- (30 minutes or less, 30 minutes to 1 hour, Between 1 and 2 hours, More than 2 hours)

18. How do you assess student progress? (CB, O)

- (Written Exam, Oral Exam, Written and Oral Exam, No exam, Homework, Written classwork, Oral classwork, Other)

19. Do you offer any additional resources to students, such as career support? (MC)

- (Yes, No)

20. If yes, what additional resources do you offer? (SR*)

21. How do you market your program/recruit new students? (CB, O)

- (Flyers, Online ads, Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), Word of Mouth, Guest speaker at events (eg. speaker at church service), No advertising, Other)

22. Do you have any current or future plans for program expansion? (MC)

- (Yes, No)

23. If yes, please explain. (SR*)

Appendix D: Student Survey

Statements #2-10 are Likert Scale statements with options to select either "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", or "Strongly Agree." Statement #11 is a Likert Scale statement with options to select either "Too Easy", "Just Right", or "Too Difficult."

Total: 12 Questions

1. **Please verify that you are at least 18 years of age. (MC)**

   - (Yes, I am at least 18 years of age.; No, I am not at least 18 years of age.)

2. **I feel that my ESL Program gives me a voice in my community.**

3. **Class times are convenient to my schedule.**

4. **Classes are conveniently located.**

5. **It is easy to get to class.**

6. **I feel emotion during my class.**

7. **I feel comfortable and accepted in my ESL classes.**

8. **I would recommend this program to a friend.**

9. **This program has improved my English speaking and listening skills.**

10. **This program has improved my English reading and writing skills.**

11. **The difficulty of the class is appropriate for my level.**

12. **Please rank the difficulty of the class:**

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