



2016-06-01

Program and Classroom Factors Affecting Attendance Patterns For Hispanic Participants In Adult ESL Education

Steven J. Carter

Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Carter, Steven J., "Program and Classroom Factors Affecting Attendance Patterns For Hispanic Participants In Adult ESL Education" (2016). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 5941.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5941>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu.

Program and Classroom Factors Affecting Attendance
Patterns for Hispanic Participants
in Adult ESL Education

Steven J. Carter

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Lynn E. Henrichsen, Chair
Norman W. Evans
Cynthia L. Hallen

Department of Linguistics and English Language
Brigham Young University

June 2016

Copyright © 2016 Steven J. Carter

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Program and Classroom Factors Affecting Attendance Patterns for Hispanic Participants in Adult ESL Education

Steven J. Carter
Department of Linguistics and English Language, BYU
Master of Arts

This report explores factors contributing to absenteeism and attrition in government-funded adult ESL programs. Because adult learners enrolled in inexpensive programs typically juggle numerous priorities and responsibilities beyond their schooling, their motivation must be maintained in order for them to continue to attend their language classes. As consumers, they “directly or indirectly assess the cost-benefit ratio of their program participation every time they attend or do not attend classes/tutoring sessions” (Tracy-Mumford & Baker, 1994, p. 8). Tendencies toward absenteeism can ultimately lead to attrition, which poses serious challenges for programs as it inhibits their success rates, their funding, and ultimately their ability to continue to offer services. This research attempted to identify key factors in program procedures, structure and organization, as well as key classroom factors that negatively affect adult Hispanic students’ motivation to continue to attend. Specifically, it focuses on which aspects of overall program structure and which classroom factors have the greatest impact on students’ motivation and attendance patterns. We found that student affective factors (e.g., social sensitivity, lack of congruence), ineffective teaching methods or incomplete methodologies, students’ perceived lack of progress, and assessment issues were the most prominent factors that emerged from the analysis of the data. Additionally, we offer suggestions for influencing these factors so that retention is boosted and attrition minimized.

Keywords: attendance, attrition, absenteeism, motivation, persistence, dropout, adult education, ESL, Hispanic

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to the numerous individuals who have assisted me in the completion of this project. I am indebted to Dr. Lynn E. Henrichsen, chairman of my advisory committee, for his extensive guidance and direction throughout.

I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Norman W. Evans and Dr. Cynthia L. Hallen for their valuable assistance, and to Dr. Dennis L. Eggett for his help in the area of statistical analysis.

I express appreciation to the teachers, staff, and administrators of the Provo Adult ELL Program, specifically Teresa Tavares and Anita Craven, for their support and cooperation as we have conducted this research.

I also wish to acknowledge a number of colleagues and friends for their various contributions. I'm especially grateful to Mayte Company-Lozano, Chirstin Stephens, and Ivette Marcella Cruz Hernandez for their help with translation; to Jenniffer Andrea De la Ossa Delgado, Ivette Marcella Cruz Hernández (once again), Patricia Leonor Moura Vázquez, and Eddie Jorge Franco Morán for their invaluable help in conducting interviews; and to Ben McMurray, Ethan M. Lynn, and Juan Manuel Escalante for their help with the qualitative analysis.

I would also like to thank my parents, Linda A. and Kimball G. Carter, for their constant and unwavering support.

Many successes for which we perhaps could take credit, can be attributed to an accumulation of others' quiet acts, all of which have combined to lay the foundation for our achievements—a foundation upon which we build, but often do not readily see.

PREFACE

This thesis was prepared with the intention of eventual submission as a manuscript (in edited form) to one of the following three publications: *TESOL Quarterly*, *System*, or *Adult Education Quarterly*. All three would be appropriate venues for publication due to the specific topics treated (adult ESL education, attrition, drop out, etc.) in this research report, and the research design utilized (both qualitative and quantitative). We have a specific preference for *TESOL Quarterly* and *System* because, were it to be published in one of these journals, the information contained in this report would likely reach a wider audience of practitioners in the ESL/TESOL field.

Due to the intention of eventual submission as a manuscript, this report does not contain chapters (as does a traditional thesis), but rather follows the format of a typical published research article.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Preface	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Introduction	1
Literature Review	4
Definitions	4
Dropout, Attrition, and Adult Education	6
Summary	17
Methodology	18
Context	18
Attendance Categories	19
Participants	23
Instrument Design and Administration Overview	23
Data Analysis	28
Results and Discussion	29
Quantitative Analysis of Questionnaire Results	29
Qualitative Analysis of Interview Responses	34
Summary of Findings	51

Limitations	58
Conclusion	59
References.....	62
Appendix A.....	68
Appendix B.....	72
Appendix C.....	76
Appendix D.....	78
Appendix E.....	80

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Response data for questionnaire</i>	25
Table 2: <i>Interview participants</i>	28
Table 3: <i>Mean responses for items 3, 5, 6, and 21 (based on attendance category)</i>	31
Table 4: <i>Mean responses for items 26, 29, and 31 (based on attendance category)</i>	32
Table 5: <i>Error count estimates for attendance categories</i>	33
Table 6: <i>Summary of factors affecting students' motivation and/or attendance decisions</i>	51

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Categories defined based on attendance percentages 19

Introduction

Throughout the United States, many cities offer government-funded adult education programs that offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at little or no cost to students. These courses can empower limited-English-speaking adults by helping them improve their language skills and by giving them access to better employment opportunities, more freedom to be self-directing, greater opportunity to participate in government, and the ability to become more engaged in their communities.

The adults who typically enroll in these programs have busy lives; many are working part-time, full-time, or multiple jobs, and/or raising families (Eyring, 2014, p. 569). Attending an ESL class is a commitment they must often juggle in addition to the other important activities and obligations that demand their attention, time, and energy.

Due to the unique characteristics of this adult student population, community adult ESL education programs face distinct challenges. Two of the most serious challenges are (1) attrition, or the gradual loss of participants as they cease to attend their classes, and (2) constantly variable or sporadic attendance patterns among matriculated students. Compounding these challenges, is the fact that many of these programs require little to no financial commitment of their students.

Adult education program administrators are surely familiar with the difficulties associated with adult students' attendance patterns. They regularly confront the problems of absenteeism, dropout, sporadic attendance, and fluid student populations (Schalge & Soga, 2008). Several reports confirm the pervasive nature of these problems. One publication indicated that "a third of all adult ESL learners leave their programs by the end of the second month" (Brod, 1995, p. 3). Tracy-Mumford and Baker (1994) found that "a high percentage of...ESL students remain in programs for less than 100 hours of instruction; however, most students need

[significantly more than this] to increase their skills sufficiently to achieve their goals” (p. 7).

Referring to yet another program, Schalge and Soga (2008) reported that nearly 20% of learners attended fewer than 12 hours per year, and among students who attended more than this, “70-85% of enrollees failed to complete classes in their skill levels within a year” (p. 152). These are disconcerting statistics. Speaking of the challenges facing her program, one ESL teacher appropriately described the situation: “we're just like a big merry-go-round—people hopping on and off all the time” (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 156).

Ultimately, retention of students *does not guarantee* program completion or success in terms of learning, but intermittent attendance and attrition most certainly *do guarantee* non-completion for students. Furthermore, high attrition rates in adult ESL education are problematic, because, for many programs, funding is directly contingent upon retention (Schalge & Soga, 2008; Tinto, 1985), specifically the number of students who continue in the program and reach particular curricular goals imposed by state and/or federal regulations. Among administrators in education there is a tendency to view each departure as “a loss of a potential graduate and much-needed...revenue” (Tinto, 1985, p. 39). Due to the high stakes of funding and program stability that are dependent on student participation, finding ways to resolve retention problems becomes crucial not only to student success, but to the survival of programs.

Various facets of the problem of retention in adult education have been investigated in the past, but only a small percentage of this research has focused specifically on adult ESL education. Many other researchers have explored issues of retention, dropout, and barriers to participation in adult education and literacy programs (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Beder & Carrea, 1988; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Garrison, 1987; Malicky & Norman, 1994; Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990). Yet,

comparatively few empirical studies have focused specifically on *adult ESL* education (Hayes, 1989; Rowsell, 1990; Schalge & Soga, 2008). Arguably, this particular context needs to be considered with specificity because of the distinct cultural and linguistic issues involved. Published reports on the subject generally indicate that their data have been gathered from (a) adult students who have continued to attend their programs, (b) adult students prior to their departure from their programs, or (c) adults who have not enrolled in the first place. There is a general absence of empirical research that attempts to gather data from students who started, but are no longer attending their adult ESL programs.

Our study focused particularly on Hispanic participants in adult ESL education. This ethnic focus was warranted first, because Hispanic participants make up a large percentage of the population of participants matriculated in the program that served as the research context, and second, because of the historically high percentages of Hispanic participants that attend adult ESL programs throughout the country (Kim, Collins, & McArthur, 1997). Furthermore, this study concentrated on Hispanic participants who (a) were sporadic or low attenders, (b) had dropped out, or (c) seemed to be on a trajectory that would ultimately lead to dropout (based on calculated percentages of attendance). The data were analyzed with the intention of identifying factors that negatively influence these students' motivation and attendance patterns. Two research questions were investigated:

In the context of adult ESL education,

1. What key factors in program procedures, structure, and organization negatively affect Hispanic participants' motivation and/or attendance patterns?

2. What key factors in classroom management, teaching practices, teacher-student interactions, etc. negatively affect Hispanic participants' motivation and/or attendance patterns?

Literature Review

This section will first review key terms used in this study. Next it will present information about the unique context of adult education and then adult ESL education. Finally, it will review previous research that has attempted to identify factors influencing motivation and attendance patterns in adult ESL education, including two studies dedicated to that end.

Definitions

Despite the frequent use of certain terminology related to the subject of retention in education, there is often a lack of consensus with regard to the meanings of terms.

Part of the difficulty in defining terms stems from two practical problems: first, there is a need to contextualize and attune terminology such that it adequately serves its purposes (to function with meaning and clarity) within the particular scope of a given study; and second, regarding the institution designated as the chosen context for a study, researchers are faced with the challenge of adapting to the nuanced definitions that have already been adopted by this institution. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that the meanings of terms will be subject to some adjustment, depending on the scope and context of a study. The need for this explanation will become more apparent in the methodology section of this report.

The terms most relevant to the delineated scope and context for the current research are *attrition*, *dropout*, *absenteeism*, *sporadic attender*, *retention*, *persistence*, and *persister*.

Attrition and dropout. Student *attrition* and *dropout* are more or less synonymous and together they function as the clear opposite of persistence and retention (Wesely, 2010, p. 806).

The word *attrition*, however, implies a slightly broader meaning than *dropout* and occurs over a longer period of time. As stated earlier, *attrition* denotes the gradual loss of participants within a program as they cease to attend their classes. *Dropout*, on the other hand, can serve as a label for a single individual or it can refer to the collective behavior of numerous individuals (a *dropout* versus the problem of *dropout*).

Rowsell (1990) described a true dropout as an individual who has had sufficient experience with a program to try it, but then chooses for one or multiple reasons to reject it (pp. 13–14). She clarifies that “dropout among adults seems to describe a more passive act of non-attendance rather than refusal to attend since there is no coercion by any...party” (p. 13). Additionally, for the *dropout* label to be valid, the goals of the individual must be somewhat congruent with those of the program, resulting in shared objectives (Tinto, 1985, p. 39), and the program must have a concern for the long-term educational interests of the student involved (Tinto, 1985, p. 29). Otherwise, it is in the best interest of the student to depart, and that departure cannot be construed as a failure on the part of the student to achieve.

Absenteeism and the sporadic attender. *Absenteeism* simply refers to “frequent absence, but does not suggest complete withdrawal” (Rowsell, 1990, p. 13). In this study, those who demonstrated patterns of consistent absenteeism were assigned the label *sporadic attender*. Although this term does not appear frequently in the literature on the subject of attrition, the concept is readily grasped, and it is useful to the purposes of this research.

Retention, persistence, and persister. A term conceptually related to but opposite of *dropout* is *retention*. Wesely (2010) pointed out that “*retention* focuses more on the action of the educators than do the [related] terms *persistence* and *continuation*” (p. 806). Retention is maximized as programs facilitate student persistence.

The point at which students qualify to be labeled as persisters is somewhat ambiguous in the literature. In some cases the term *persister* is used for any student who does not drop out, while in others it is only assigned to those who have achieved a certain level of successful program completion. In the second case, an attendance rate and performance that are considered successful and merit the title of *persistence* often vary depending on the context. Criteria for completion are institutionally-defined and thus are unique for each institution.

One final term that frequently surfaces in studies focused on retention and dropout is the label *stopout*. It refers to a phenomenon of “one or more cycles of attending, withdrawing, and returning” and is said to be “typical of adults who [sometimes] must place the student role on the back burner temporarily” (Kerka, 1995, p. 2). Though we acknowledge the prevalence of this phenomenon, due to limitations imposed by the context, this behavior was not considered in this study.

Dropout, Attrition, and Adult Education

Turning attention to the research questions of this study, an understanding of the factors that influence adult students’ attendance patterns is necessarily contingent on a solid comprehension of the unique characteristics of the adult education context and of adult learners themselves (specifically how they differ from pre-adult learners).

Unique characteristics of the adult education context and adult learners. Adult education programs often seek to fill gaps that exist in the education students have already acquired or to provide means to very specific ends that learners have already identified. Lindeman observed that adults are not oriented toward studying “‘subjects’ in the hope that some day [the] information will be useful....Facts and information from the differentiated spheres of

knowledge are used, not for the purpose of accumulation, but because of need in solving problems” (Gessner, 1956, p. 160).

Theoretical underpinnings: Knowles’ (1984) model. Lindeman’s insight is corroborated by the work of Knowles (1984) who is credited with most clearly delineating “the ‘technology for adult learning’” (Beder & Carrea, 1988, p. 75). Knowles’ (1984) outlined and described six key characteristics of adult learners that differentiate them from pre-adults. They are summarized as follows:

1. *The need to know.* “Adults need to know why they need to learn something” before they will invest the effort required to learn it (Knowles, 1984, pp. 55-56).
2. *The learner’s self-concept.* “Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions....[they have] a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (Knowles, 1984, p. 56).
3. *The role of experience.* Adults have greater *quantities* of experience and different *qualities* of experience than pre-adults (Knowles, 1984, p. 57).
4. *Readiness to learn.* “Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (Knowles, 1984, p. 58).
5. *Orientation to learning.* “Adults are life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. [They] are motivated to devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations.” They learn best when material is “presented in the context of application to real-life situations” (Knowles, 1984, p. 59).

6. *Motivation.* “The most potent motivators [for adults] are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)” rather than external influences (Knowles, 1984, p. 61).

This model specifies how adults’ approach to learning is characteristically distinct from that of pre-adults. Adults are significantly influenced by their already developed self-concepts. Because they are “self-directing, are responsible for their own learning, and have acquired a reservoir of experience,” they often come to the learning context with greater clarity of purpose, intent on achieving ends that they have already identified. Accordingly, “teachers [of adults] should serve primarily as facilitators of learning rather than as conveyors of knowledge, and learners, rather than teachers, should evaluate learning success” (Beder & Carrea, 1988, pp. 75–76).

Competing demands for adults’ time. Due to the fact that there are often competing demands for their time, adults must perceive a clear connection between the achievement of their long-term goals and their day-to-day classroom instruction. Genuine commitment is fostered by a sense that progress is being made and goals are being met (Tracy-Mumford & Baker, 1994, p. 11). Unlike children for whom school is something of an obligation, “adults elect to join programmes of study and must actively decide, at times in the face of considerable obstacles, to take part in each class session” (Jilg, 2008, p. 2). Their practical concerns such as child-care, transportation, and busy schedules must be attended to. Additionally, numerous sacrifices (i.e., hard work, study time, family sacrifice) are associated with program completion (Tracy-Mumford & Baker, 1994, p. 8).

In order to adequately describe how adults determine the value of potential educational experiences, several scholars have referenced the “cost-benefit theory of private industry” (Noel,

1985, p. 9; Tinto, 1975; Tracy-Mumford & Baker, 1994), which essentially states that individuals direct their energies toward activities that are likely to yield the biggest ‘bang for their buck’ (Tinto, 1975, pp. 97–98). “As consumers of service,” adult learners particularly “directly or indirectly assess the cost-benefit ratio of their program participation every time they attend or do not attend classes...” (Tracy-Mumford & Baker, 1994, p. 8).

Factors contributing to absenteeism and attrition in the adult education context.

After discussing some theoretical perspectives, this section will review key research focused specifically on the adult ESL context.

Theoretical underpinnings. It has already been established that absenteeism and attrition are recurring problems in the adult education context. Evans (2001) rightly observed that, “volumes of studies compiled over the past four decades attempt to explain...the departure puzzle” (p. 46). One frequent fault in investigations has been an oversimplification of the problem of student participation. For instance, in criticism of a departure model for adult education proposed by Boshier (1973), Garrison (1987) stated that it had “in effect eliminated from consideration many factors in the adult’s school and nonschool environment” (p. 214). Speaking of attrition in general, Wesely (2010) observed that in many cases, researchers have neglected “to connect their work to a larger theory of attrition,” and instead have framed their investigations around “understanding the relationship between a small number of factors (usually one) and attrition” (Wesely, 2010, p. 807). Garrison further asserted, “If research is to contribute to the development of our understanding of dropout, then studies will have to be designed that view a population of adult learners in a specific situation with as broad a perspective as possible” (p. 214). In other words, the problem must be considered with the entirety of the context as a backdrop.

Tinto's (1975) model. Tinto (1975) conceived of a theoretical model that attempts to describe how a complex interaction of numerous factors/variables affect students' decisions to drop out or persist in a higher education setting. The model is distinctive in that it places equal emphasis on both psychological and social variables, "and it suggests the inclusion of macro-level variables in retention studies" (Ashar & Skenes, 1993, p. 90). His original model has undergone a number of revisions. However, generally speaking variables such as the degree of academic integration and social integration (their opposites being incongruence and isolation), institutional characteristics, as well individual/personal characteristics all play important roles (Tinto, 1975). Tinto posited that it is a combination of these factors that influences an individual's decisions about persistence or departure (Evans, 2001, p. 3).

There are limitations to this model's applicability to the context of adult education. For instance, in adult education the class must of necessity replace the institution as the unit of analysis. This is because, unlike the traditional collegiate setting in which the students become members of an entire system, in adult education they typically "belong to self-contained classes and interact almost exclusively within these classes" (Ashar & Skenes, 1993, p. 93).

Pertinence to context aside, Tinto's model has come under heavy criticism for other reasons. One salient reason is that it is "less than accurate when applied to students not from the mainstream, traditional mold on which the model is developed" (Evans, 2001, p. 203). Expanding on this point, central to the theory behind the model is the idea that integration requires minorities to break away from their cultures of origin and adopt the norms (traditions, customs, values, language, etc.) of the dominant institutional culture. The model does not consider the possibility of biculturalism (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Also, scholars have argued that it places a disproportionate amount of responsibility on the individual to adapt,

implying “little or no responsibility on the part of the institutions or their stakeholders to accommodate and adapt policies and practices to respond to newcomers” (Kuh & Love, 2000, p. 198). Essentially, the onus in the model is on the individual student (Tierney, 2000, p. 218). This is an important criticism because in order to instigate positive changes, institutions must acknowledge that the actions of teachers and administrators along with policies, procedures, and institutional culture do have an impact and can be changed to assist students in their efforts to persist.

Suffice it to say, Tinto’s model has contributed to an understanding of dropout behavior, but does not represent a holistic explanation of it. The model has served as a foundation for substantial research, but more recent work (some of which is cited above) has yielded important insights that warrant consideration.

With reference to other research, Seidman (2005) developed a promising mediating formula that places responsibility for helping students persist on teachers, staff, and administrators. The formula involves identifying students in need of assistance early on, assessing their needs, prescribing interventions, and then monitoring, assessing, and adjusting interventions as needed (Seidman, 2005, p. 299). However, one problem inherent in the use of this formula is that many community adult ESL programs lack the resources to implement such an involved intervention plan on behalf of individual students. While complex interventions may prove difficult for such programs, evidence from a few specific studies in adult ESL education (two of which are reviewed below) suggests that institutions could do much to better adapt to and accommodate the needs of learners (Rowse, 1990; Schalge & Soga, 2008).

Motivation. Students’ decisions about attendance are inexorably connected to motivation, and motivation is inherently complex. Dörnyei (1998) describes it as a multi-faceted construct

that is often treated superficially in L2 literature (p. 118). Motivation involves learners' beliefs, cognitions (thoughts), affects (emotions), and values, and the influence of these on their interpretations of events. Perceptions based on these thoughts, beliefs, and emotions eventually lead to action or goal-directed activities (Dörnyei, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Expectancy of success, and perceptions of self-efficacy contribute to the shaping and directing of motivation (Dörnyei, 1998). It is helpful to clarify that not all negative forces or factors affect student motivation in the same way. For instance, some negative factors (teacher practices and attitudes, curriculum, classroom activities, affective variables, perceived irrelevance, etc.) can discourage learners by contributing to their feelings of anxiety, frustration, boredom, etc. and ultimately reducing their sense of efficacy. These kinds of factors function as *demotives* (Dörnyei, 2001; Oxford, 1999) that effectively diminish or cancel out motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Whereas other negative factors don't necessarily qualify as demotives. For example, "powerful distractions are not demotives...because they do not carry a negative value: instead of *reducing* the actual motivation towards the original activities, their distracting effect is due to presenting *more attractive* [sic] options" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143).

Research specific to the adult ESL education context. Jilg (2008) gave a meaningful overview of factors that affect adult students' motivation and their decisions to drop out or re-enroll in L2 courses. He categorized factors into four major groups: social forces, organizational forces, external forces and individual-related forces. He gave a helpful summary of his conception of the subfactors falling into each category:

Social forces are those such as meeting others, integrating, and establishing a social network. Organizational forces include support from language course providers, teaching styles, course content and presentation. External forces are those which operate outside

the organization such as work issues, finances, health, family, and relationships.

Individual-related forces are those internal to the student such as their commitment, motivation, goals, and attitudes. (p. 5)

Jilg (2008) further states that “categories are not mutually exclusive and, at times, there can be considerable overlapping with a number of forces working in conjunction with each other to influence the learner’s decision to continue or not” (p. 5).

From this general summary of factors, we turn our attention to two particular applied studies focused on understanding factors influencing attendance patterns in two distinct adult ESL programs. Both studies focused on identifying factors contributing to attendance-related problems within the programs.

Schalge and Soga (2008). Schalge and Soga’s (2008) research is one of very few studies that have focused on absenteeism and attrition in the context of the adult ESL learning environment. Their ethnographic study considered the following questions: “‘What factors prevent learners from attending classes?’ and ‘How can staff minimize student absences?’” (p. 152). They used a cultural broker framework, which encourages instructors and administrators to consider learners’ experiences from the learners’ cultural perspective (their perspective as student participants in a second-language-learner culture). The researchers also considered Knowles’s (1970; 1990) principles for effective adult learning in their approach. This combination of the cultural broker framework and Knowles’s principles, resulted in a research approach that was meant to (a) address and resolve “contrasting viewpoints between students and teachers regarding program efficacy and [attendance]” (p. 153), and (b) discover how to “make the program more relevant to learners’ needs” (p. 152).

Their research involved classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and a student focus group; the data collected were analyzed qualitatively. Observations were conducted for a period of roughly five months inside and outside the classroom. Ten students, four teachers, and two administrators were interviewed. The students included Mexicans, Somalis, and Sudanese (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 154). The focus group consisted of seven students of “African, Asian, and Latin American” ethnicity (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 154).

Schalge and Soga (2008) found that “learners' dissatisfaction [with the program] came primarily from anxiety about unpredictable learning topics and goals” (p. 154). This unpredictability was largely due to the fluid nature of the curriculum, fluid meaning lacking in structure, and in clarity of expectations and purpose. Because of this, students were often confused and “did not understand teachers’ intentions or expectations” (p. 158).

The lack of structure in the curriculum could be traced back to the program’s open-door enrollment policy, which enabled students to continuously enter and leave the program. This policy maximized attendance hours, but contributed to habitually inconsistent student attendance patterns (p. 156). They also found that teachers were “[reluctant] to critically assess their curricula and teaching styles” (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 156), and generally attributed absenteeism and attrition to external factors (p. 155).

Concluding their research report, Schalge and Soga (2008) focused their remarks on two areas that program staff “could address to minimize absenteeism: curriculum structure and learning environment” (p. 159). First, they posited that establishing clear expectations and learning goals would give students a sense of purpose and direction in their studies. Second, they noted that teachers needed to respect students as intelligent and capable individuals, rather than defaulting to “negative assumptions about [their] abilities” (p. 159).

It is important to note that an important deciding factor in choices regarding the school's enrollment policy was the source of funding for the program. This topic cannot be ignored because it is a highly influential factor in many adult ESL programs. Schalge and Soga (2008) clearly stated that, "the cycle of absenteeism" characteristic of students in the program "*started with the government's funding policies* [emphasis added]," which allocated "a budget to each program based on its previous year's total attendance hours" (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 156). By adopting an open-door enrollment policy, this program attempted to maximize attendance hours, thereby maximizing the probability of an increased budget allocation. Funding is necessary to the survival of any program and hence becomes a determining factor for positive or negative in all decisions regarding the program.

Rowsell (1990). Another noteworthy piece of research addressing the dropout problem was conducted by Rowsell (1990). She carried out an in-depth qualitative study in adult ESL classrooms in Calgary (western Canada) with the purpose of comparing the perceptions of students who persisted in courses with those of students who dropped out, and ultimately identifying reasons for students' dropping out. The research relied on a theoretical framework that emphasized individual perception. The premise was that individuals' understanding of the world as they have construed it is essentially their perceived reality (the world as they think it really is) (Rowsell, 1990, pp. 66–69).

Rowsell (1990) surveyed five ESL courses that frequently lost "between 30 and 40% of their students by the end of each session" (p. 94). Each course had between 8 and 15 students, many of whom were refugees from Southeast Asia. Once at the beginning of the course and another time toward the end, participants used a repertory grid instrument to rate classroom activities, allowing them to express their feelings about various aspects of their classroom

experience (RowSELL, 1990, p. 181). They also filled out mini-questionnaires and wrote essays based on the information they'd put into their grids.

RowSELL (1990) hypothesized that (a) dropouts would report “observably higher levels of negative feelings,” and (b) their ratings would “become observably more negative as long as they remain[ed] in class.” In connection with these hypotheses, she sought to identify whether or not any specific classroom factor would correlate more readily with negative feelings, and whether or not trends in students' feelings would be general among the sample population or exclusive to particular attendance groups (p. 216).

When the grids were administered for the second time 20 of the students had dropped out. The author had 50 grids from the initial grid activity and 29 follow-up grids (one student was not in attendance, but had not dropped out) from the second instance of administering the grids (RowSELL, 1990, p. 192).

RowSELL's (1990) results corroborated the hypothesis in that dropouts perceived most course activities and elements “more negatively than stayins, and [tended] to increase in negative perceptions as the term progressed” (p. 235). In fact, she found that all students seemed to adopt progressively more negative perceptions toward classroom activities as the semester played out. With reference to this finding, RowSELL postulated that students vary in their ability to persist in the presence of “negative factors, . . . if the whole class were for example bored, some students would drop out and others would remain” (p. 238).

When students were asked to speculate about the possible causes of dropout, 74% of the reasons offered were internal, pertaining to the classroom; the vast majority of these referred to some aspect of the class as being ‘unsuitable’ or dissatisfactory (RowSELL, 1990, pp. 197-198). Difficulty, perceived irrelevance, boredom, and frustration were all salient in the students’

responses. “External factors mentioned were *work, family problems, money, transportation, health, weather, or just being too busy*” (Rowse, 1990, p. 199).

One criticism of this study could be that students supplied their opinions and perceptions of their classes the first time at a point fairly early on in the course, but, if they later dropped out, they did not supply feedback a second time. It could be argued that a second instance would have given a much better indication as to why they ultimately chose to drop out.

Although this study gathered substantial data about students’ perceptions of classroom activities (namely whether those perceptions were positive or negative), the study did not draw any strong conclusions about which of all of those perceptions may have more readily contributed to students dropping out. Also, the point that dropouts’ initial perceptions were generally more negative than stayins could be viewed as problematic; this information alone could indicate that dropout behavior is a byproduct of individual personality characteristics, which would absolve programs, administrators, and teachers of any responsibility.

Summary

Though some studies do exist, very little empirical research has attempted to identify factors that negatively influence attendance patterns and motivation for participants in the context of adult ESL education. The few published studies that exist did not solicit opinions from low attenders and dropout students. Furthermore, we are unaware of any empirical study that focuses specifically on identifying these factors for Hispanic participants, arguably one of the most historically well-represented demographics in adult ESL education (Kim, Collins, & McArthur, 1997). This study provides an investigation of factors that negatively influenced motivation and attendance patterns for Hispanic participants. The research includes not only perspectives of students who have persisted, but also the perspectives of low attenders and

dropouts. The methodology, which follows, combines both quantitative and qualitative methods in the research design.

Methodology

Context

A large community adult English ESL program in Utah functioned as the research context for this study. In the year period during which the research was conducted, the number of students serviced by the program fluctuated between 249 and 469. The vast majority of those students were Spanish speakers from South, Central, and North America. The program offered six levels of integrated-skills courses focused primarily on the development of basic English listening and speaking proficiency. The curriculum was designed such that learners reached roughly an intermediate level of proficiency upon program completion. The program utilized the BEST Plus™ Oral English Proficiency Test and the BEST Literacy™ Reading and Writing Proficiency Test for both placement and summative assessment.

Learners attended courses nine hours per week and each term lasted for a period of 10 weeks. Hence, a term constituted 90 hours of course study. However a course lasted for a period of two terms. Class size fluctuated considerably during the course of each term, ranging anywhere from 30+ students down to fewer than 10. Usually attendance diminished considerably throughout each course.

At the time of the study, the program employed several office staff members, one in-service teacher-trainer, and 11 ESL teachers, some of whom taught multiple classes. Teachers' prior experience varied considerably. Most had the ability to speak a second language. Some of them had received some education in linguistics or ESL teaching (limited study without necessarily having a degree), some had a background in K-12 education, and others simply had a

bachelor's degree in an unrelated field. The majority of the teachers worked multiple jobs. The teachers received in-service training for 30 to 45 minutes once every two weeks. The training curriculum was not set nor was it well established.

Attendance Categories

Prior to the use of any of the primary data collection instruments, once IRB approval had been obtained, consenting research participants were grouped into categories based on their attendance patterns. We did not have direct access to students' individual attendance records; rather, with the permission of the program, staff gave select information to us: each consenting student's total cumulative attendance hours (as far back as the beginning of the calendar year in July), and program start date. These data were used in order to calculate attendance percentages that, in turn, represented emerging patterns that appeared to indicate future behavioral trajectories. Based on these data, each student was assigned to one of three predetermined categories. They were as follows: (a) Dropout, (b) Sporadic Attender, and (c) Persister (see *Figure 1*).

Grouping students into attendance categories prior to any data collection enabled us to interpret participants' responses (to questionnaires and/or interviews) in light of their attendance patterns. Later in this analysis, this perspective enabled us to determine whether or not certain response patterns were related to specific attendance categories.

0% of Hrs	20% of Hrs	70% of Hrs	100% of Hrs
Dropout Attendance < 20%	Sporadic Attender $20\% \leq \text{Attendance} < 70\%$		Persister $70\% \leq \text{Attendance}$

Figure 1. Categories defined based on attendance percentages. Percentages were calculated from participants' actual total cumulative attendance hours, potentially spanning multiple terms (relative to possible total hours).

A description of each of the three attendance categories and a discussion of the rationale behind their design is warranted.

Dropout. As discussed previously, the term *dropout* has numerous connotations. There is consensus in the sense that a dropout is almost universally considered to be a student who “ceases coming to class and does not return before the end of the course” (Rowse, 1990, p. 14). With reference to the current study, those assigned to the Dropout category were more clearly defined as those who *appeared to be on a trajectory likely to lead to dropout*. Accordingly, (a) those who *appeared* to have ceased all course activity (as judged by their having completed less than 20% of the total possible course hours by the eighth week of the current term) *and* (b) those whose attendance rate consistently measured at less than 20% for the entire duration of their involvement with the program were assigned under the label *dropout*.

It could be argued that this definition of dropout behavior is problematic because, to the knowledge of the authors, those who met the described criteria had not *definitively* ceased all activity, nor had they *definitively* left the program. Some of them might have been more appropriately classified as *stopouts* rather than *dropouts*. However, one might counter that whether a student continues to attend intermittently a very low percentage of the time or eventually drops out, the short-term result of these differing behaviors is more or less the same for both the program and student. When no significant progress is made, students are effectively consuming resources with little to no effect. Ultimately, student absenteeism, especially consistent and excessive absenteeism, hinders learners’ progress if not halting it altogether “and can jeopardize programs’ funding” (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 152). Hence, for the purposes of this study—because the short-term consequences of consistently low attendance rates are

essentially the same as the consequences of dropout behavior—students who fit the criteria delineated above were categorized under the label *dropout*.

A 20% attendance rate was chosen as the discriminating point. If a student's attendance percentage fell below this point, the individual received the label of *dropout*. This decision was made for two primary reasons. First, 18 hours or two full weeks of course study constituted 20% of a full 90-hour term. Thus 20% functioned as a clean discriminating point. The second reason was that it gave students an adequate sample of classroom experience from which to judge. Attendance percentages for participants in this study were calculated at the end of the eighth week of course study (eight weeks constituting 72 possible hours of course study for students who were enrolled in their first term). By this study's definition, a student on a trajectory toward dropout would have completed just less than two full weeks of study (14.4 hours or almost 5 full three-hour class periods) by the eighth week of the course. Arguably, the student would have had sufficient time to legitimately 'try' the course. This is important, because as defined by Rowsell (1990), dropouts could be described as those who have had an opportunity to try the system, but have subsequently rejected it (p. 13).

Persister. The second category, Persister, referred to those students whose longitudinal total accumulated hours of course attendance (calculated at the end of the eighth week of the current term) was greater than or equal to 70% of total possible hours.

There seems to be very little consensus in the literature regarding when it is that a student has reached the lower limits of optimal levels of attendance or involvement in a program. Whatever attendance rate results in their achieving level gains seems to be the ideal. One might argue that anyone who does not drop out ought to be considered a persister. However, it is helpful to draw a distinction between those students who are truly likely to advance and those

who statistically do not contribute to the growth and progress of a program. Those who attend sporadically are less likely to improve and advance; therefore, they expend resources without benefiting the program much by their attendance. On the other hand, those who have higher percentages of attendance are more likely to advance and thereby, in the eyes of administrators, add value to the program and justify its continued existence.

Because category boundaries had to be determined based on attendance percentages, it was necessary to select an upper limit for the Sporadic Attender category that would also function as the lower limit for the Persister category. To award the title of persister to a student who only attended 70% of the time may seem overly generous. However, the context of adult ESL education necessitated considering attendance rates with an adjusted set of paradigms. Likewise, the authors' own experience dictated that the context of adult ESL education would require a redefining of successful involvement and persistence. To illustrate, of the 240 students who were successfully contacted about participation in the current research, 44 students averaged at or above 70% attendance, but only 15 students averaged at or above 80%. Hence, if 80% had been chosen as the discriminating boundary, only 15 students (6.3% of the 240 contacted) would have qualified as persisters. Therefore, a realistic discriminating point had to be selected to allow for a reasonable number of students to be given the title of persisters. Hence, an attendance rate of 70% was chosen as the discriminating boundary.

Sporadic Attender. The last category, Sporadic Attender, refers to those students whose total cumulative hours of course attendance (calculated at the end of the eighth week of the current term) was greater than or equal to 20%, but less than 70% of total possible hours. The vast majority of students, 67.9% of those who responded to the questionnaire, fell into this middle category.

Participants

The large majority of the students who attended the adult ESL program were Spanish-speaking and of Latin American ethnicity, representing Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and every Spanish-speaking country in Central and South America except Bolivia. Although significantly outnumbered by Spanish-speakers, there were a substantial number of students from Brazil who attended the program as well, making Portuguese the second most prominent L1 represented. A small percentage of students who attended came from Asian, European, and African countries.

In order to partially control for distinct cultural characteristics, participants in this study were limited to Spanish-speaking students enrolled in the program, and two ESL teachers who had been or were at the time employed with the program. Some practical considerations also factored into this decision: interviews were conducted only in Spanish or English (with the two teachers) and the questionnaire was only translated into Spanish.

Instrument Design and Administration Overview

The design used for conducting this study was both quantitative and qualitative. The initial instrument used for the collection of data was a questionnaire designed to identify factors that influenced participants' decisions when they did not attend their courses. In addition to this, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted, serving as the qualitative element of data collection. Seven of the interviews were conducted with students in the program and two were conducted with ESL teachers who had been or were employed with the program. These interviews were conducted with a phenomenological perspective, focusing on what people experienced and how they interpreted their experiences (Patton, 1990, p. 70). Both data collection methods were included in order to strengthen the validity of the findings. As Shvidko,

Evans, and Hartshorn (2015) clearly articulated, “Numbers and statistical analysis [alone] cannot reveal what is on learners' minds; neither can they allow learners' voices to be heard (Evans, 2001)” (p. 15). By employing these two distinct approaches, we sought to “build on the strengths of [multiple data collection methods] while minimizing the weakness of [a] single approach” (Patton, 1990, p. 245).

Questionnaire. The structure and design of the questionnaire was influenced by survey instruments utilized by Darkenwald and Valentine (1985), Moussu (2010), and Shvidko, Evans, and Hartshorn (2015). As stated above, the questionnaire’s primary intention was to identify factors that influenced participants’ decisions when they did not attend their courses, so that eventual improvements could be implemented in the program in order to more effectively retain students who enrolled. It also served to identify individuals who would be appropriate candidates for interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 41 questions (See Appendices A and B). The first 31 questions elicited students’ reasons for not attending their classes and their opinions about different aspects of the program. The final 10 questions were aimed at gathering demographic data and giving participants’ the opportunity to choose to participate in an interview.

The questionnaire was composed in English and then translated into Spanish by the author. The translation was checked and edited by a native Spanish-speaking ESL instructor who held a masters in TESOL and was pursuing a further graduate degree in Spanish. It was subsequently back-translated into English to confirm the accuracy of the Spanish translation. This was done by an individual who held a bachelor’s degree in Spanish Translation.

Three separate versions of the same questionnaire were administered (they were exactly the same with the exception of one very minor difference in wording in one sentence at the very beginning of the instrument: preterit tense was used on the dropout questionnaire, whereas

present perfect was used on the sporadic attender and persister questionnaire). Each version of the questionnaire was discretely coded by a different symbol in the footer. One version was coded for and administered to persisters, one was coded for and administered to sporadic attenders, and the third was coded for and administered to dropouts.

The questionnaire was administered in class, through email via a Qualtrics® survey, and through regular post. It was administered in two waves, one beginning in December and the other beginning in March of the following year. Seventy-five students responded during the first wave, and 62 responded during the second wave. Overall, 137 students completed the questionnaire. Table 1 shows specific data with regards to questionnaire responses in relation to attendance categories.

Table 1

Response data for questionnaire

Time of Distribution	Responses According to Categories			Total Responses	Total Contacted	Response Rate
	Dropout	Sporadic Attender	Persister			
Wave 1: December	11	52	12	75	131	57.3%
Wave 2: March	0	41	21	62	109	56.9%
Total Responses	11	93	33	137	240	57.1%
Total Contacted	33	163	44	240	--	--
Response Rate	33.3%	57.1%	75.0%	57.1%	--	--

Interviews and interview participants. After questionnaires were administered and collected, they were reviewed and scrutinized. Bearing in mind that the intention of this study was to identify factors that seem to impact students' attendance rates, those questionnaires that seemed to indicate a discernible opinion about some aspect of the program (procedures, structure, and organization, or classroom management, teaching practices, teacher-student interactions, etc.) were separated out for interviewing purposes. To lend further explanation to

this decision, one must consider that nearly every individual who completed the questionnaire had an attendance rate *below* 80%. Only 9 individuals of 137 exceeded 80%, the highest attendance rate being 91.7%. Therefore, a questionnaire response that failed to specify any reason for not having attended classes naturally raised concerns. In these cases, the students' honest evaluation of their own habits and motivations was somewhat suspect. It was also uncertain whether or not they gave appropriate thoughtful attention to completion of the questionnaire. Additionally it appeared as if there was nothing about their experience in relation to their periodic non-attendance that they felt compelled to discuss. Hence, students whose questionnaires fit this description were not considered as possible interview candidates.

In seeking interview candidates, efforts were made to contact a number of students from all three attendance categories. However, only those students who had consented to receive interviews were contacted. Of those students contacted, 10 agreed to receive interviews. Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Two of the ten did not initially commit to specific times and were unresponsive to further attempts to contact them. The remaining eight were interviewed; however, one particular participant appeared to have misunderstood the questionnaire completely. Her comments were unrevealing; as a result, her interview was not transcribed nor was it included in the analysis (hereafter her interview will be excluded from the numeric data and discussion). The primary purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to inquire further regarding students' reasons for non-attendance and their respective questionnaire responses about the same. All of the interviews combined "an interview guide approach with a standardized open-ended approach" allowing for greater flexibility in exploring those areas of inquiry that seemed important to the participants (Patton, 1990, p. 287). This ensured that respondents were able to frame and structure their responses in their own way

(Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 80), and “express *their own* understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 1990, p. 290). The interviews gave us access to “small, but very densely textured facts” (Geertz, 1973, p. 28) from students’ and teachers’ own mouths, which could then be interpreted based on the research questions and used to draw conclusions.

The interviews were generally 30 minutes to one hour in length and were conducted in Spanish (and in English with the two teachers). A native Spanish-speaking research assistant accompanied the primary researcher for each interview conducted. This was done to ensure the comfort of all interview participants and to ensure the safety of female participants. Also, the research assistant was able to help clarify any language-related confusion (this only occurred on one occasion due to incomplete understanding of a vocabulary word). All interviews were conducted at a local library in a reserved study room.

With the permission of participants, the interviews were digitally recorded to guarantee accurate quotation and representation of student perspectives, and later, the majority of each interview was transcribed verbatim (some sections that proved redundant or highly tangential were summarized). Interview scripts for both student and teacher interviews are available in the appendix (See Appendices C, D, and E)

Five of the students interviewed were women and the remaining two were men. This corresponded with a high degree of accuracy to the ratio of women to men that responded to the questionnaire (99 women versus 36 men, a ratio of 2.75 to 1). Student interview respondents came from Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. One male teacher and one female teacher were interviewed. The male teacher customarily taught a higher level course, and the female customarily taught a lower level course. Table 2 shows demographic information regarding interview participants (pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity).

Table 2

Interview participants

Pseudonym	Attendance Rate and Category			Native Country	Class	Gender	Age
	Dropout	Sporadic Attender	Persister				
Gloria	7.4%			Mexico	Level 5	F	35-39
Angela		24.8%		Peru	Level 5	F	45-49
Laura		48.0%		Mexico	Level 5	F	45-49
Juliana		50.0%		Colombia	Level 2	F	50-54
Juan		58.3%		Mexico	Level 3*	M	40-44
Carlos		60.6%		Colombia	Level 1	M	35-39
Silvia			79.5%	Mexico	Level 3	F	30-34
Lisa (teacher)				Not U.S.A	Lower Level	F	
Adam (teacher)				U.S.A	Higher Level	M	

Note. *Although Juan marked that he had been in Level 2 when he filled out his questionnaire, he spoke repeatedly about having been in Level 3 throughout his interview. We opted to trust his interview comments rather than what he had put on his questionnaire.

Data Analysis

With the data from the 137 completed questionnaires, the researchers conducted a stepwise discriminant analysis of the first 31 questionnaire items (questions 32–41 were focused on demographic information). Eight questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to their being incomplete. Consequently, 129 of the 137 completed questionnaires were factored into the analysis. The discriminant analysis resulted in seven items emerging as somewhat predictive of students' attendance categories. These items will be further discussed in the Results and Discussion section of this report.

Three individuals assisted the primary researcher in the qualitative analysis of the interviews. Following a procedure described by Patton (1990), the researchers approached the task inductively, searching for patterns, categories, and themes (p. 398) related to the research

questions. They then attempted to create descriptive typologies or categories of factors for the shared features of participants' experiences with the program (p. 400). After, working with the assistants to refine and adjust categories, four primary categories along with their subfactors were identified as influencing students' motivation and/or attendance patterns. These categories seemed to best describe and "capture the complexities of [participants'] individual perceptions and experiences" (p. 290).

Results and Discussion

This section begins with a discussion and interpretation of the results from the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire. That discussion will be followed by a discussion and interpretation of the results from the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Quantitative Analysis of Questionnaire Results

As stated in the "Data Analysis" section, the discriminant analysis resulted in seven questionnaire items emerging as somewhat predictive of students' attendance categories. Four of the discriminating items came from the first major section of the questionnaire and the remaining three came from the second major section (see Appendices A and B).

In the first major section of the questionnaire, students used a 5-point Likert scale to rate *how much of an effect* different variables had on their attendance. A rating of 1 was equivalent to 'It Didn't Affect Me' (*No Me Afectó*), whereas a 5 was equivalent to 'It Affected Me A Lot' (*Me Afectó Bastante*). The four items from this section that best discriminated among participants by attendance category (i.e., Dropout, Sporadic Attender, Persister) were the following:

(Note: each item represented a reason for non-attendance and was worded as such; each is followed by the original corresponding Spanish rendering)

3. Because my class was at an inconvenient time

Por el horario de las clases

5. Because of transportation problems

Por cuestiones de transporte

6. Because my family did not encourage me to attend

Por falta de apoyo familiar

21. Because I did not feel comfortable with my teacher

Porque no me sentía a gusto con mi maestro(a)

There was generally an inverse relationship between students' self-reported Likert scores on these items and their attendance rates. In other words, the greater the degree to which students identified these items as having affected their attendance, the lower their attendance rates were (i.e., they were more likely to fall into the Sporadic Attender or Dropout attendance categories).

Table 3 shows the mean responses for the three discriminating items from the first section of the questionnaire in accordance with the three attendance categories. In simple terms, difficulties with class schedules and teacher-student relationships strongly affected students' decisions to stop attending. Likewise, problems with transportation and lack of family affected students' decisions to a lesser degree.

Table 3

Mean responses for items 3, 5, 6, and 21 (according to attendance category)

Questionnaire Item	Mean Likert Scores		
	Dropout	Sporadic Attender	Persister
3. Because my class was at an inconvenient time <i>Por el horario de las clases</i>	2.40	1.38	1.26
5. Because of transportation problems <i>Por cuestiones de transporte</i>	1.00	1.62	1.32
6. Because my family did not encourage me to attend <i>Por falta de apoyo familiar</i>	1.00	1.07	1.09
21. Because I did not feel comfortable with my teacher <i>Porque no me sentía a gusto con mi maestro(a)</i>	1.60	1.08	1.18

Note. These four items came from the first section of the questionnaire. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The prompt to which students responded was, “Please, indicate to what degree *each* of these reasons affected your decision to *not* attend your classes.” The Likert scale points ranged from “It Didn’t Affect Me” (1) to “It Affected Me A Lot” (5). See Appendix B for Spanish renderings of the prompt and Likert scale points.

In the second major section of the questionnaire, students also used a 5-point Likert scale to rate items. However, in this section, they were asked to indicate *how much they agreed* with various statements about the program. A rating of 1 was equivalent to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (*Muy En Contra*) and a 5 was equivalent to ‘Strongly Agree’ (*Muy De Acuerdo*). The three items that best differentiated among dropouts, sporadic attenders, and persisters were the following:

26. My teacher cared about me and was aware of my needs

Mi maestro(a) se preocupaba por mí y estaba pendiente de mis necesidades

29. I felt comfortable with my classmates and enjoyed working with them

Me sentía a gusto con mis compañeros de clase y me gustaba trabajar con ellos

31. The book(s) helped me

El libro de texto me ayudó

With regard to these statements, the more that students *disagreed* with them, the lower their attendance rates were (i.e., they were more likely to fall into the Sporadic Attender or Dropout categories).

Table 4 shows the mean responses for these three discriminating items in accordance with the three attendance categories.

Table 4

Mean responses for items 26, 29, and 31 (according to attendance category)

Questionnaire Item	Mean Likert Scores		
	Dropout	Sporadic Attender	Persister
26. My teacher cared about me and was aware of my needs <i>Mi maestro(a) se preocupaba por mí y estaba pendiente de mis necesidades</i>	3.27	4.36	4.63
29. I felt comfortable with my classmates and enjoyed working with them <i>Me sentía a gusto con mis compañeros de clase y me gustaba trabajar con ellos</i>	4.09	4.52	4.54
31. The book(s) helped me <i>El libro de texto me ayudó</i>	3.45	4.33	4.40

Note. These three items came from the second section of the questionnaire. Each item was also rated on a five-point Likert scale. The question to which learners responded was, “How much do you agree with each of the statements on the left?” The Likert scale points ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). See Appendix B for Spanish renderings of question and Likert scale points.

To put it simply, the students who felt comfortable with their classmates, felt that their teachers cared about them, and felt that the book(s) helped them were more likely to persist, whereas those who did not have these feelings were more likely to have diminished attendance or to drop out.

It should be noted that although the seven items discriminated to a certain degree, their predictive strength was limited, and they failed to discriminate incredibly well. Table 5 shows the percentage of error that occurred overall and for each attendance category when relying on

these seven items to predict attendance category assignment (for example, 30.3% of those who belonged to the Persister category were erroneously assigned to one of the other two categories).

Table 5

Error count estimates for attendance categories

	Error Count Estimates for Attendance Categories			
	Dropout	Sporadic Attender	Persister	Total
Error Rate	40.00%	60.47%	30.30%	43.59%

This high error rate is unsurprising due the highly complex nature of individual attendance decisions and patterns. To suppose that any select group of program or classroom factors would discriminate to a high degree would be wishful thinking at best. A low level of error in discrimination would likely occur only in the event that certain aspects of a program were exceptionally poor, and in contrast, other aspects of the same program were surprisingly effective.

One might question the significance of these seven items which were salient (or predictive) because they are somewhat expected. They are the kinds of factors that often contribute to students' nonattendance. However, these were only seven among many other items (health problems, work-related issues, etc.) that *did not* appear to discriminate among attendance categories/patterns. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to these particular items.

The fact that they discriminate as much as they do is meaningful for two reasons: (1) there is some commonality between some of the items, and (2) the salient items agreed to some degree with the results of the qualitative analysis.

Questionnaire items 3, 5, and 6 addressed factors external to the program. Therefore, although the information pertaining to these items was informative, it was peripheral to the central focus of our research. However, items 21, 26, 29, and 31 were much more pertinent to

our research questions because they referenced program and classroom factors. It is noteworthy that items 21, 26, and 29 all related to students' level of comfort and affect, a point that will be discussed further in the next section of this report.

Qualitative Analysis of Interview Responses

Our qualitative analysis of the nine semi-structured interviews generated four categories of salient factors, with several subfactors in each category. The four primary categories were Student Affective Factors, Teacher Practices, Student Perceptions, and Program Procedures and Structure. Further discussion of each category follows.

Student Affective Factors. This category comprises factors that are characterized by emotional dimensions. Brown (2014) stated, "The development of affective states or feelings involves a variety of personality factors, feelings both about ourselves and about others with whom we come into contact," and (p. 100). We might add 'feelings about the particular contexts in which we live our experiences.' Factors including Lack of Confidence, Feelings of Vulnerability, Fear, Social Sensitivity, and Lack of Congruence all fill this category. Six of the nine interview participants spoke of affective factors. The following paragraphs will treat these in greater detail, beginning with a focus on the first three factors mentioned (since they naturally overlap and it is difficult to isolate them from one another). This will be followed by a discussion of the last two factors (grouped together as well).

Lack of confidence, feelings of vulnerability, and fear. Affective feelings often resulted from students comparing themselves to others, doubting their own competence, and/or having their self-concept challenged or undermined. Obviously, bad experiences have an adverse effect on students' motivation and/or confidence levels, but even somewhat benign experiences can have an impact. For example, Angela, a middle-aged Peruvian woman, talked about the feelings

she had when she returned to study after taking a semester off. She said, “Coming back, it’s like you forget everything—you have to start all over.”¹ Her previous classmates had advanced to higher levels in her absence. This affected her confidence; she said, “They knew a lot more at that point....they could speak. So, basically,...I felt kind of small.”²

Juan, a Mexican student who had dropped out of the program, had a more clearly negative experience partially due to a teacher’s comment. At one point early on during his class, his teacher openly gave her opinion about who she thought would likely repeat the course. He related, “[The teacher] said, ‘Alright, who is going to repeat this level?’ and then she started pointing, ‘You, you, you...,’ and she pointed to me as well.”³ This experience had a lasting effect on Juan who was already feeling unsure of himself; he felt discouraged and demotivated. He reflected,

It’s never okay to tell a student that he’s going to repeat the class without testing him, or without finishing the class first, and you should especially never say it in front of other people....now everyone knew: Juan Vasquez is going to repeat the class only three weeks after it started! How!?! How is that possible?⁴

This occurrence and the challenge of learning English in general seemed to undermine Juan’s self-concept and sense of competence. This may have been due to his high level of previous accomplishment; he held various advanced degrees and was a practicing professor and

¹ “Al retomarlo, como que se te va todo—a empezar de nuevo”

² “Ellos ya sabían más....Hablaban ya. Entonces que,...yo me sentía un poco chiquita.”

³ “[La maestra] dijo ‘Bueno, quienes se van a quedar nuevamente en el nivel?’ y empezó a decir, ‘Tú, tú, tú...,’ y me señaló a mi también.”

⁴ En ningún momento puede ser propio que le digas a un estudiante que va a repetir el curso sin haberlo evaluado, o sin haber concluido el curso, y mucho menos decirlo frente a otras personas....ahora todos sabían: Juan Vasquez va a repetir el curso a tres semanas de haberlo comenzado! Cómo!?! Cómo puede ser eso?

cognitive neuroscientist in his native country of Mexico. With reference to learning English, at one point during the interview he confided, “I don’t like feeling like I don’t understand...”⁵

Laura, another individual from Mexico who held a graduate degree, spoke generally about fear being a deterrent to motivation and the importance of teachers inspiring confidence in their students. She stated, “The first thing is you need to overcome that fear! And the teacher has the primary responsibility for that!”⁶ Obviously, lack of confidence, feelings of vulnerability, and fear in general factor into students’ feelings of motivation.

Social sensitivity and lack of congruence. These factors primarily have to do with students’ relationships with those around them. They involve students’ fears of being embarrassed or looking foolish in front of peers, and their desires for acceptance and belonging. Jilg (2008), paraphrasing the words of Dörnyei, commented that language learning “is a ‘deeply social event’” and the “social context of language learning and its impact on learner persistence must be taken into consideration” (p. 20). This influence of the group and social interactions on students’ motivation was evident in the comments of interview participants.

Laura expressed the following: “It is psychological; I think that learning is psychological!....Everyone has a need to feel accepted, loved, to be part of a group.”⁷

One of the teachers, Lisa, shared an informative experience that demonstrates the influence of this factor. A student brought her some food she didn’t like, but wanting to be gracious, she accepted the food and thanked the student for it. Lisa related,

⁵ “No me gusta sentir que no le entiendo...”

⁶ “La primera cosa es que tiene que vencer ese miedo! Y allí el, el principal actor es el maestro!”

⁷ “Es que eso es psicológico; yo creo que el aprender es psicológico!....Es una necesidad el que te sientas estás aceptado, amado, ser parte de un grupo.”

[The student] came back and she [kept] coming. And then she started working, and then she says to me, um, “Teacher, I had the opportunity to work at nighttime, but I chose not to. And then I’m gonna work right after class until two in the morning so that I can come to class,”....So, that was very, that was very touching to me,...I guess she appreciates that I know her name, that I take her gifts or whatever.

Certain cultural characteristics may serve to heighten social sensitivity for Hispanic ESL learners. Lisa stated, “I think that, for the Latino culture,...They feel like they need to be noticed or you know, um, just being aware that they’re there.”

Juliana, an older woman from Colombia, also referenced culture, sharing her belief that Latin people tend to be somewhat judgmental and critical of one another. “We are very ready to judge, but not to help each other and respect each other,”⁸ she said. She spoke of a social division in her class that demotivated students’ and hindered their involvement. “It’s pressure they create for themselves,” she said, “Because of the fear of being judged, they don’t speak, they don’t ask questions...it’s not fear of learning English, it’s the fear of, of [pause] of ridicule...of embarrassment...”⁹

According to Juliana, some students in her class felt that they knew more and were better than others and a feeling of dissonance and incongruence grew. She described this as being hurtful. Speaking about the classmates who felt they were superior, she said she would go to class wondering, “What attitude are they going to have [today]?”¹⁰

⁸ “Somos muy ‘readys’ para estar juzgando, pero no para ayudarnos o para respetarnos.”

⁹ “Es presión que ellos dan a ellos mismos. Porque por el miedo a juzgar, no hablan, no preguntan...no es el miedo a aprender inglés, es el miedo a, a [pause] al ridículo...a la vergüenza...”

¹⁰ “Qué actitud van a tener [hoy]?”

Juan's experience of being singled out as someone who would likely repeat the course (discussed above) relates to these factors as well. Aside from feeling individually discouraged, he also seemed very sensitive to the fact that his teacher's negative comment occurred in front of his classmates. He confided, "We are all social people, so, other people's opinions are very important to us. And so, when you come and you feel that, you feel like you know less than everyone else,... I think that has an influence as well."¹¹

With reference to our research questions, although student affect is not directly controlled by program or classroom factors, it appears to be significantly influenced by them (whether for positive or negative). Adult students are often "desperately trying to avoid humiliation, embarrassment, and criticism, and to preserve their self-esteem" (Tsui, 1996, p. 159). Teachers can mediate by taking steps to ensure students' comfort and feeling of confidence in the classroom. Without appropriate intervention and classroom management by the teacher, students "face an uphill battle" (Carter & Henrichsen, 2015, p. 17).

Specific quantitative items that were salient in the discriminant analysis relate to the discussion of this qualitative data. Items 21, 26, and 29 (see above) from the questionnaire all involve teacher-to-student or student-to-student interactions. As is evident, student affect is directly impacted by these interactions, specifically by (a) the consequent level of comfort students feel with their teacher and classmates, and (b) the degree to which they perceive their teacher as being attentive to them and caring about them. This is meaningful because the results from the quantitative data and the qualitative data seemed to validate each other.

¹¹ "Todos somos personas sociales, entonces, lo que opinan los demás nos importa mucho. Y entonces, cuando llegas y sientes que, te sientes él que menos sabe,... eso creo que influye también."

Factors belonging to the next category, Teacher Practices, also directly impact students' perception of and relationship to their teacher. As such, the importance of teacher practices is also corroborated by the results of the quantitative analysis.

Teacher Practices. Since teacher practices are clearly a subcomponent of the broader label of classroom factors, this factor category has a clear connection to the original research questions identifying in part what classroom factors affect students' motivation. As was the case with Juan, teachers' actions and comments are likely to influence student affect and numerous other aspects of their classroom experience. Indeed, "the role of the teacher is pivotal in any learning environment" (Carter & Henrichsen, 2015, p. 18).

Eight of the nine interview participants spoke of teachers' practices. Many of the factors that fall into this category could be grouped under Ineffective Methods or Incomplete Methodologies. Ineffective Classroom Management and Poor Teacher Attitude are also part of this category.

Ineffective methods or incomplete methodologies. This factor refers to ineffective aspects of teachers' methods, such as no grammar instruction, no pronunciation instruction, no feedback or error correction, failure to answer questions, lack of flexibility, lack of preparation, no assigned homework, and lack of attention to individual learners. All of these were mentioned by students.

Gloria, Silvia and Angela all mentioned lack of feedback (error correction) numerous times during their interviews. All three were clearly frustrated by this. Silvia stated, "It's like, she doesn't review our work....She doesn't correct us, and I wonder, 'How do I know if I'm right?'"¹²

¹² "O sea, no nos revisa.... No corrige, y yo digo, 'Cómo sé que estoy bien?'"

Angela noticed that some teachers would avoid answering students' questions and were inflexible in the presentation of daily lessons. She said, "It's always like they don't really answer your questions."¹³ She continued, "I don't know if they don't have the answer,...but, um, they just have their plan and they don't address anything else that isn't in it, that doesn't fit."¹⁴

Participants' comments were sometimes ambiguous. Lisa, commenting on one class, said, "They just go off the book, like, there's nothing else to do. You know and there's—it was boring." Silvia, speaking of her teacher, stated simply, "It's just, I don't like the method she has for learning, for teaching."¹⁵ Vague statements like these make it difficult to pinpoint what exactly it is about teachers' approaches that students find troublesome. Without conducting further research it would be very difficult to determine the pervasiveness of any *specific* failing in method.

Suffice it to say, dissatisfaction, whatever its cause, can lead to frustration and boredom. These negative factors have been given as reasons for absenteeism in other studies (Rowse, 1990; Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 154), which was confirmed by our research as well.

Ineffective classroom management and poor teacher attitude. Three interview participants mentioned problems with classroom management, and three mentioned teachers' attitudes. Juliana was particularly forthright about the need for a teacher that is "in control." She felt her teacher was a passive individual who lacked the ability to direct. She said, "Character is necessary—it's character! You know you should—directions! 'We're going to do this, you with

¹³ "Siempre están como que no te resuelven las dudas."

¹⁴ "No sé si no tienen la respuesta,...pero, este, solamente ellos tienen su programa y no tocan otro tema que no va allí, no, que no encaja."

¹⁵ "Es que no, no me gusta el sistema que tiene ella para aprender, para enseñar."

you,...Let's switch! Let's go!'"¹⁶ These comments reflect what Lee and Ng (2009) stated: "[The] teacher is the director of the lesson determining learners' participation opportunities in classrooms" (p. 303).

In support of this idea, Laura shared a situation in which a lack of classroom management deterred her participation. She felt like the same (more advanced students) would always answer questions in her class before other students had time to process. "And when the teacher says, 'Let's see so, this question...,' [interjecting as if one of the advanced students], 'This, this answer!' There! And you are just barely thinking of the answer and they're already saying it,"¹⁷ she said. Clearly, a lack of teacher direction was problematic. "[They] are taking away...my ability to participate!"¹⁸ she lamented. The teacher eventually addressed the problem, but only after Laura approached her and talked with her about it.

Juan, Laura, and Angela also mentioned teacher attitude as having an affect on motivation. Juan made the following observation about his teacher: "How she taught the class depended on how good she was feeling."¹⁹ He described the class as being tedious and demotivating when she was in a bad mood.

Angela, commenting on the same topic, confided, "If the teacher comes in a bad mood, what can we hope for, coming with all of our things to learn a language?...we don't come from napping at home."²⁰

¹⁶ "El carácter se necesita....Es el *carácter*! Tu sabes que hay que—las direcciones! 'Vamos a hacer esto, tú con tú,... Vamos a cambiar! Vamos!'"

¹⁷ "Y cuando la maestra dice, 'A ver entonces, esta pregunta...,' [interjecting as if one of the advanced students], 'Tal, tal respuesta!' Entonces! Y tu te quedas apenas estás pensando la respuesta y ellas ya la están diciendo."

¹⁸ "Me [están] quitando...que yo pueda participar!"

¹⁹ "Depende cómo estaba en su estado de ánimo era cómo daba la clase."

²⁰ "Si el profesor viene con desánimo, que esperamos nosotros que venimos con todas nuestras cosas a aprender un idioma?...no venimos de casa de dormir."

In summary, teacher practices in the form of grammar instruction, pronunciation instruction, feedback, responding to students' questions, preparation, flexibility, attention to individual learners, classroom management, and attitude all play a key role in students' motivation and attendance patterns.

Student Perceptions. Two key factors fit into the category of Student Perceptions. They are Perceived Lack of Progress and Cost-benefit Mentality.

Perceived lack of progress. With regard to this first factor, Rowsell (1990) stated, "In an educational context, [frustration] is often caused by lack of positive feedback or lack of observable progress" (p. 30). Much like affective factors, students' perception of their progress is not within the direct control of programs or teachers. However, program and classroom factors can considerably impact these perceptions. The mechanisms responsible for making learners' progress more readily discernible to them are reliant on classroom and program assessment procedures (These mechanisms will be further addressed in relation to the last category, Program Procedures and Structure).

Six of those interviewed, five students and one teacher, talked about the effects of lack of progress. Whether this lack of progress was real or simply perceived, it affected motivation and in some cases, attendance.

Carlos simply stated, "I felt like...there wasn't much progress."²¹ Juan and Angela made similar observations, although Angela's comments were less overt.

Silvia and Gloria were particularly vocal about feeling stagnant. Silvia, who had persisted up to that point, said: "I feel like I'm the same, it's like I feel like I haven't progressed. Also, some of my classmates that we started together in January, they've changed classes....And I am

²¹ "Sentía que...no había tanto progreso."

like, well, like, ‘Do I change or do I not change?’ and between deciding whether or not to change, I haven’t ever changed.”²² Her comments are very insightful because she was vocalizing the thinking of a student who may be on the verge of withdrawing. In other words, among other potential factors her lack of progress led her to the point of considering abandoning her ESL class.

Cost-benefit mentality. This factor relates more or less to all other factors and is an integral part of students’ decisions about persistence. Tinto (1975) explained that “individuals will direct their energies toward that activity that is perceived to maximize the ratio of benefits to costs over a given time perspective” (pp. 97–98).

This cost-benefit mentality, which was described at length in the literature review, seemed prevalent in students’ thinking. The idea of the perceived cost outweighing benefits was directly mentioned by four participants, but was alluded to at different times by all nine.

Silvia and Gloria often felt that attending class was a waste of time. Silvia said, “I try to attend, but sometimes it’s like I say, ‘Ugh! It’s almost three hours wasted!’”²³ Gloria specified that other activities seemed like a better use of her time: “It’s just that she didn’t motivate me...I thought, ‘I’m wasting my time, I’ll go exercise, because I’m better off doing something else,’....[laughing] Truthfully, that’s what I really thought!”²⁴

²² “Yo creo que estoy igual, o sea como que siento que no he avanzado. Incluso, varios de mis compañeros que entramos desde enero se han cambiado a otro grupo....Y yo así como que, pues, estoy, ‘¿Me cambio o no me cambio?’ y entre me cambio o no me cambio, ya no me he cambiado.”

²³ “Trato de asistir, pero a veces como que digo, ‘Ay! Son casi tres horas perdidas!’”

²⁴ “[Es] que no me motivó...dije, ‘Estoy perdiendo mi tiempo, me voy a hacer ejercicio, porque mejor otra cosa,’....[laughing] Sí, así pensé la verdad!”

Carlos, who was more reserved in his expression, said, “There were times that I got home late and I was tired and so whatever, ‘Forget it, I’ll go tomorrow.’”²⁵

Adam was aware that something was tipping the scale for his students, but was unsure of what it was. He worried about his students’ perception of him:

People vote with their feet, and so that’s the fear...It’s like, “Well, I’ve got two people here tonight, is it because I suck? Or is it because they worked late, or they don’t feel well today, or the car wouldn’t start?”

Noel (1985) explains that “although they may not talk about it in these terms, students are making decisions on a daily basis that involve some interpretation of the weight on both sides of the cost-benefit scale” (pp. 9–10).

Program Procedures and Structure. The last salient category of factors that emerged from the data is Program Procedures and Structure. Several sub-factors fell into this category; they were Assessment Issues, Lack of Monetary Investment, Lack of Teacher Training, and Insufficient Teacher Prep Time. The most prominent of these was Assessment Issues.

Assessment Issues. This factor accounts for unaligned (with content), invalid, and unreliable placement and summative assessments; assessments’ lack of face-validity; and lack of formative assessment. This factor is important for two reasons. First, seven out of the nine interview participants spoke about issues with assessment. All seemed to be in agreement (both teachers and students) that placement, formative, and summative assessments were ineffective to varying degrees and lacked face validity. The second reason that this category stands out is that one could argue that assessments are a much more concrete, less nebulous factor than teaching

²⁵ “Hay veces que llegaba tarde y cansado entonces ya pues, ‘Dejémoslo así, y mañana asisto.’”

practices for instance. Many assessments are actually a tangible item. To clarify, even though the factor itself is relatively distinct, definite, and unambiguous, we are not suggesting that optimizing assessments and assessment procedures is a simple matter. As discussion of this issue ensues, it is important to keep in mind that the program used the same assessment for both placement and summative purposes.

Laura, Juan, and Gloria all commented at length about assessment. Their attitudes ranged from seeing the assessment as simply invalid to feeling profound dissatisfaction.

Laura offered the following comment concerning the placement exam: “It seemed very simple to me, I mean really, really easy,....it’s like sometimes, even though you didn’t know, it’s like you could use logic to figure it out, right?”²⁶ She seemed to feel the exam was lacking in validity. She contrasted it with another exam she had taken in Mexico. She spoke of this exam in considerable detail saying it “increased in difficulty until the final level.”²⁷ She seemed to believe the exam she had taken in Mexico was far more accurate in placing students.

Gloria was fairly open about her exasperation with the assessment. She kept asking the interviewers, “Have you seen it?!”²⁸ Later she stated, “They’re not really testing you, you know what I mean?”²⁹

Juan overtly questioned the validity, reliability, and alignment of the summative assessments. He said, “So, there wasn’t congruence between my feeling like I wasn’t progressing

²⁶ “Se me hizo un poco sencillo o sea muy, muy fácil,....como que a veces, aunque no supieras, como que por lógica ya lo conquistabas, no?”

²⁷ “abarcaba la dificultad hasta el último nivel.”

²⁸ “Tú lo has visto?!”

²⁹ “No te están evaluando realmente, sí me entiendes?”

and the kind of evaluation they gave me, which was very simple. And so, I thought, ‘Perhaps—I don’t know if these evaluations are aligned with what we’re learning.’³⁰

Lisa and Silvia also commented on the unreliable nature of the exam with regard to placement. Silvia felt she had been assigned to the wrong level, because the written portion of the exam was easy. Lisa added that some of her students had left her Level 2 class because it was too easy for them. She recounted that later, when “they did the post-test, . . . they were scoring level 6, level 5.”

From his perspective as a teacher, Adam didn’t feel the assessment was appropriate for higher level students, because it did not adequately reflect progress at a higher level. He observed,

I’m like, ‘How am I supposed to gauge . . .?’—when my students are already testing at 73 out of 78 points and then they increase by two, it doesn’t look like much, but they’re already topped out on what they’re accomplishing. . . .so, it just needs to be one that’s more scaled more appropriately for the different levels it seems like.

Students seemed equally frustrated with the lack of formative assessment in the program. Both Juan and Laura felt that evaluation should be continuous. Juan and Gloria mentioned that one should not have to wait until the end of the term to be tested. Juan thought that there should be a means “of evaluating students, [to ensure that] the objective of the class, not the program,

³⁰ “Entonces no había congruencia del como yo me sentía que no estaba avanzando con el tipo de evaluación que me ponían, que era muy sencilla. Y entonces decía, ‘tal vez—no sé si estas evaluaciones tengan la congruencia de lo que se está aprendiendo.’”

but the objective of the class itself, is really being met with the students and to find out who is struggling.”³¹

Speaking of regular evaluation, Carlos said, “Yes, in fact that would help people not, not to miss so much, right?”³² He seemed to feel that lack of formative assessment was a possible cause of absenteeism.

When discussing assessment, some obstacles are immediately apparent. High assessment literacy or assessment expertise is sometimes perceived as being beyond the reach of most small, low-cost, community programs. Indeed, “the field of assessment is often viewed by teachers [and administrators] as an arcane ‘Ivory Tower’[,]. . .not accessible to the average [practitioner],” (Coombe, Troudi, & Al-Hamly, 2012, p. 23). Additionally, teachers often perceive evaluation as an unpleasant part of their job that they would just as well avoid (Coombe, Troudi, & Al-Hamly, 2012). Furthermore, sound assessment practices can require a heavy investment of resources; finding or creating the correct assessment for a given purpose is no small task.

Despite these obstacles to high quality assessment, it cannot be ignored. Assessment practices have a considerable impact on students’ feelings about their learning. Adam (teacher), speculating about students’ evaluation of their own progress, made the following perceptive comment: “Every once in a while they may get a comment [on their progress], but people may just notice it and just not say anything either. So, does that mean that they’re going to perceive that they haven’t been making any progress? So, it’s hard to know on your own. . .”

³¹ “de evaluar los estudiantes, [para verificar que] el objetivo de la clase, no del programa sino el objetivo de la clase, realmente se cumplió con los estudiantes y darse cuenta quien está teniendo dificultades.”

³² “Sí, de pronto eso ayudaría a que las personas no, no fallen tanto, cierto?”

Whether or not students are able to discern their progress is largely dependent on their being made aware of it through the mechanisms of assessment and feedback. Thus, the factors related to assessment have a direct influence on students' perceptions of themselves (their achievement and ability to achieve), which in turn have an influence on student affective factors. Harmer (2007) affirms that, "part of a teacher's job is to make sure that students recognize their achievements, however small those achievements actually are" (p. 154). Brod (1995) adds, "Programs need to provide regular feedback on progress so that the learner continues to perceive goal attainment as possible" (p. 4). The fundamental question becomes: If programs and teachers do not help students recognize their progress through feedback and assessment, then who will?

Lack of Monetary Investment. Four of the nine interview participants spoke of lack of investment as being problematic. Adam, speaking from his perspective as a teacher, summarized the concept well with this comment: "There's really—there's no skin in the game." He continued, "they haven't put anything out, like they haven't paid a tuition or something. Even just a nominal fee,...I think that would, that would be a help."

The other teacher, Lisa, stated, "I think the fact that it's free, it also reduces....their [perception]³³ of the value of the program."

Carlos and Gloria corroborated these statements. Carlos compared the Provo program to a paid program that his brother attended; he mentioned that his brother's program did not have the same kind of problems with attendance: "I think, because it costs them more, right?...he also says that over there, there isn't all this non-attendance, but the classes are practically very similar, you know."³⁴

³³ Here, Lisa said "perceptive," but meant "perception."

³⁴ "Yo creo, porque les cuesta más, entonces cierto?...dice pues que allá también no hay, como esa inasistencia, pero prácticamente las clases eran muy similares, sí."

Gloria, specifically speculated that some kind of monetary investment in the program might help students to be more motivated. She cited an experience with a business class that she had attended. An external entity had helped her pay for the class, but the funding was contingent upon her regular attendance. If she had not attended, she would have had to pay for the class herself. She indicated that this motivated her to attend.³⁵

Lack of Teacher Training. The efficacy of teacher practices and formative assessment procedures are somewhat contingent upon teacher training or the lack thereof. Likewise, these factors in turn influence student affective factors and student perception. Therefore, teacher training is significant in that it has the potential to impact most other factors; its importance is perhaps unquestionable. In our research, an underlying question was whether or not teachers' prior training was truly adequate. The data indicated that in many cases it was not. This could likely be addressed via more in-depth in-service trainings, focused on some of the factors that proved problematic.

With respect to this topic, Adam's perspective was particularly meaningful. He made numerous comments that suggested his own uncertainty about the quality of his teaching. He suggested that it might be helpful if, as a group, teachers clarified program goals and curriculum choices at the beginning of each semester. When discussing his own choices of topics and teaching content, he confided, "I don't know; is it the most relevant or is it the best, you know, use of our curriculum? I mean is it the best...use of our time to be using that? I don't know really."

³⁵ No digital recording or transcription was made of Gloria's comments on this topic because they occurred right after the digital recorder had been turned off. However, the researcher made note of them.

Adam also confessed that he felt he had erred in not clarifying course objectives for his students. In his opinion, if he had done so, they would have been more aware of their progress and might have had “more incentive to come.” When he was asked how he would have known the importance of clarifying objectives, he responded, “Yeah,...I just didn’t know. Through training, I think.”

Overall, three of the interview participants specifically alluded to their feelings that teachers needed more training. However, nearly any comment that indicated dissatisfaction with teacher practices would arguably imply the participant’s feeling that teachers would benefit from more training.

Lack of Teacher Prep Time. The last factor to be discussed is lack of teacher prep time. At the time that this research was conducted, the program was paying teachers for one half hour of prep time per three-hour class period. Classes were scheduled for nine hours per week and the teachers were allotted a total of only one and a half hours of prep time per week. Both of the teachers that were interviewed considered the amount of prep time inadequate and indicated they were using more than the allotted amount.

One of the two, said, “I probably put about two hours, two and a half per class,” (equivalent to seven and a half hours per week). Upon further inquiry by the researcher, the teacher mentioned, “But it also depends on whether you’re teaching the same level multiple times.” In the latter case, the teacher believed three hours of preparation per week would be sufficient. The other teacher did not put in nearly as much time as the first, but still exceeded the allotted time and felt a little more prep time would be helpful.

The students were likely largely unaware of how much preparation time the teachers were paid for. However, Laura (who had been a teacher herself in Mexico) commented on the

topic, suggesting that teachers lack motivation if they are not paid for enough prep time.

In general, regardless of the amount of time for which teachers are paid, the quality of teaching is certainly affected by the amount of preparation time invested. Lower quantities of prep time likely result in lower quality lessons.

Summary of Findings

Table 6 gives a summary of the four primary factor categories, the individual factors in each category, and the number of interview participants that discussed each factor. These categories are by no means mutually exclusive. It is likely that some of the students' experiences could easily pertain to more than one factor and/or more than one category. Social sensitivity, lack of congruence, ineffective methods or incomplete methodologies, perceived lack of progress, and assessment issues were the most prominent factors that emerged from the analysis. The data suggested that these were areas of concern for this program that ought to be addressed.

Table 6

Summary of factors affecting students' motivation and/or attendance decisions

Primary Factor Categories	# of Participants Referring to Factor	Factors
A. Student Affective Factors	5	Lack of Confidence, Vulnerability, Fear
	6	Social Sensitivity, Lack of Congruence
B. Teacher Practices	8	Ineffective Methods or Incomplete Methodologies
	3	Ineffective Classroom Management
	3	Poor Teacher Attitude
C. Student Perceptions	6	Perceived Lack of Progress
	4	Cost-benefit Mentality
D. Program Procedures and Structure	7	Assessment Issues
	4	Lack of Investment
	4	Lack of Teacher Training
	3	Lack of Teacher Prep Time

It is interesting to note that these students' attendance percentages ranged from 7.4% to 79.5%, yet their frustrations regarding different aspects of the program (from the perception of the researchers) did not seem to increase or decrease relative to their attendance. This information could be interpreted in different ways. One might assume that attendance patterns are not affected by these factors. However, the other possibility is that a number of students may continue to persist in the presence of negative factors while others simply leave.

Returning to Silvia's experience as an illustration, she persisted despite expressing a very real dissatisfaction with her class. At one point she confessed, "I don't know, I feel like...now, in fact, now I don't even like going! Anyway, I don't really want to go, but then I say, 'No, well yes...'"³⁶ It seems that for whatever reason, Silvia by nature was inclined to 'stick with it' in spite of having no remaining desire to attend. Her comments validate the idea that students "vary in their **tolerance levels** [*sic*] for negative factors." All the students in a given class may be experiencing some negative factor, but some may persist regardless (Rowse, 1990, p. 238).

Speaking specifically of students who drop out, Rowse (1990) made the following insightful observation:

[One might ask whether or not it would be] worthwhile [to change] the system to meet the needs of the dissident minority....[It could be, however, that] this minority of students are not the only ones who are dissatisfied with the system, but they are the ones who are so dissatisfied that they will commit an illegal act to withdraw from it. Therefore, a change in the system is to be recommended since it will probably help more than the few who drop out. (p. 282)

³⁶ "No sé, siento que...ya, de hecho, ya ni me gusta ir! Bueno, yo ni quisiera ir, pero luego digo, 'No, pues sí...'"

Silvia's experience (mentioned above) certainly corroborates this statement, as does the experience of Juan who continued for quite some time after feeling humiliated before eventually leaving the program.

Rowsell's (1990) statement cited above also serves as a response to the potential criticism that so few perspectives do not have sufficient credibility to warrant attention. Indeed, the statement merits careful consideration: "[It could be that] this minority of students who drop out are not the only ones who are dissatisfied with the system" (p. 282).

Another element of these findings perhaps deserves further mention. As was already discussed, five of the seven students interviewed and one of the two teachers made some reference to affective factors. Other factors received as much commentary, however, this particular category stood out because students spoke about their experiences with a distinct intensity and depth of feeling. As Lisa suggested, it seems that a feeling of belonging and social rapport is particularly important to Hispanic students. Instances that represented the opposite of comfort and belonging seemed particularly traumatic for students. One dropout student (who was not interviewed) wrote on her survey,

One day I went 20 min. late,...and [the teacher] didn't tell me to work with my classmates, and gave me two tests to take and told me to leave the class and to go to the first floor and when the classes finished, [he/she]³⁷ came down to ask me to come up and go over the tests and [he/she] said that I had done fine and that I could go and after that I didn't come back anymore, I felt humiliated.³⁸

³⁷ It is unclear whether she is referring to a male or female teacher in her writing.

³⁸ "Un día fui 20 mtos tarde,...y [el/la maestro/a] no me dijo que trabajara con mis compañeros, y me dio 2 exámenes para desarrollarlos y me pidió que abandonara la clase y fuera al primer piso y cuando terminé las clases, recién bajo para pedirme que subiera y revisar los exámenes y me dijo q' estaba bien y q' me fuera y ya no volví más, me sentí humillada [*sic*]."

Whatever the intentions of the teacher may have been, the students' written comments seemed to indicate that she felt traumatized by this experience, so much so that she never returned to that class.

All of this seems to add up to students feeling an intense sensitivity and vulnerability, both of which must be mitigated. This is further confirmed by Laura's extensive commentary about her friend who was so fearful about attending. At one point Laura said, "From the moment that someone goes to [the school], and, and says, um, 'I want to enroll,' wow! I mean, right there they've overcome a huge hurdle! You should give them a prize the moment they arrive!"³⁹ If fear is such a tremendous hurdle for students to overcome, it may be that very slight instances of criticism or offense have a catastrophic effect. Furthermore, the quantitative data seems to validate the significant impact that feelings of comfort or lack thereof have on students' attendance choices. It may be that affective factors have a particularly powerful influence for Hispanic students.

Implications. A number of implications seem evident from this research. There are pedagogical and procedural implications, as well as implications for future research. First we will review both pedagogical and procedural implications.

Pedagogical and procedural. Due to the delicate nature of student affect, it would behoove teachers to direct attention to building rapport and a sense of community in the classroom. Dörnyei and Malderez (1997) commented on the "element of tension" that is often present during students' first experiences in the language classroom:

³⁹ "Desde el momento en que alguien va a [la escuela], y, y dice, este, 'Quiero inscribirme,' *no hombre!* o sea allí ya se aventó una muralla gigante! Ya deberían de darlo un premio desde que llega allí!"

People typically experience unpleasant feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and a lack of confidence (McCollom, 1990b)....They are uncertain about what membership in the group will involve, and whether they will be able to cope with the tasks. They observe each other and the leader suspiciously, trying to find their place in the new hierarchy. They are typically on guard, carefully monitoring their behaviour to avoid any embarrassing lapses of social poise. (p. 68)

They suggested the importance of class participants (including the teacher) “*learning about each other* as much as possible,” indicating that, “acceptance simply does not occur without knowing [other people] well enough,” (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997, p. 69). They also suggested the importance of establishing group norms.

Beder and Medina (2001) shared several ways that teachers could create and maintain a nurturing and trusting atmosphere: teachers can (1) be “liberal in their use of praise;” (2) “[level] the social distance between [themselves] and learners” by sharing information and having students do the same; and (3) attempt “to reduce the perception that they [are] authority figures, to be perceived as being with the class rather than over the class” (pp. 82–83). These actions, especially the latter two, seem to align readily with Knowles’ (1984) theories about adult learning.

Another important pedagogical implication of this research involves the importance of (1) clarifying teaching objectives, (2) making progress transparent for students, and (3) giving them regular feedback.

On the topic of teaching objectives, Adam spoke of the need to “[take] the objectives and [make] the curriculum match it rather than trying to match the objectives to the curriculum.” This is sound pedagogical practice. Clearly articulated objectives and “practical learning goals ensure

that students have a sense of purpose and success, encouraging them to complete [their programs]” (Schalge & Soga, 2008, p. 159).

Making progress transparent for students is particularly important because otherwise they may simply be unaware of their gains. Indeed, attempting to detect progress in language learning simply by monitoring one’s own language could be compared to staring at a plant in the hopes of detecting growth. Formative assessment is an excellent tool for helping both teachers and students be aware of progress.

Closely tied to the idea of making progress transparent, is feedback. Feedback can be categorized under both classroom pedagogy and program procedures, as it plays a role in both. Its importance cannot be emphasized enough.

Hartshorn et al. (2010) suggested that the benefits of formative feedback have been consistently demonstrated by meta-analyses in a variety of disciplines (p. 85). With specific reference to writing instruction, they argued the need for feedback that is “*meaningful, timely, constant, and manageable*” (p. 87). These characteristics readily describe highly effective feedback in speaking and pronunciation as well. Incorporating this kind of feedback into classroom pedagogy and program procedures would surely have a positive impact on students’ learning experiences.

Students seem to desperately want feedback. Angela’s words are indicative. Speaking specifically of pronunciation, she said, “If we don’t correct it, if we don’t talk about in a class, if they don’t tell us, ‘You pronounce this like this,’ I don’t think we’ll ever be able to speak to American people with confidence, you know?”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ “Si no lo corregimos, si no lo hablamos en una clase, si no nos dicen, ‘Este se pronuncia de tal manera,’ yo creo que nunca vamos a poder hablar con seguridad con otras personas americanas, no?”

Part of the need to make progress transparent falls under the umbrella of program procedures as well. Attention to both placement and summative assessment play a key role in helping students both start in the right place and have a sense of their growth and achievement as they continue their studies.

As discussed in the Literature Review section of this report, it may be unrealistic to expect that adult ESL education programs would have the available resources to implement complex interventions tailored to specific individuals. However, these pedagogical and procedural implications resonate with Seidman's (2005) formula in that they ask teachers, staff, and administrators to take action and make changes to help students persist. Of course, in most cases they suggest interventions that would occur at the macro-level.

Future research. To further evaluate the validity and reliability of the findings of this study, more research focused on the Hispanic population in the adult ESL context is needed. It is clear that the findings of this study are tied to the particular context in which it took place and therefore may not readily apply in all settings. However, it is likely that some of the same factors that proved significant for these students would exist in other contexts as well. Specifically, there is a need for more research into the general impact of affective factors for Hispanic learners in adult ESL education. It may be that this particular factor is of critical importance given the cultural characteristics of Hispanic learners as a group.

Additionally, there is the need for the development, testing, and further refinement of Spanish language survey instruments intended to identify factors negatively influencing students' motivation and attendance patterns in adult ESL education. The questionnaire mentioned in this report was created and used for the first time for this study.

Limitations

One obvious limitation for this study was the size and characteristics of the sample population that received interviews. The research design specifically sought to include the perspectives of students who had lower attendance or had dropped out. The interview recipients varied considerably in their attendance percentages and one could argue that only one of them belonged to the Dropout category. However, this is somewhat relative considering Juan had also dropped out, despite having a relatively high percentage of attendance. There is an inherent challenge in identifying dropout students, making contact with them, and obtaining a commitment from them to participate in research. This is likely a difficulty common to any study that seeks to include the perspectives of dropout populations. We must concede that there would be value in having more input from dropout students. Nonetheless, this fact does not diminish the value of the perspectives of those students who were interviewed, many of whom had relatively low attendance percentages.

Another limitation is that this research was context-specific and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to other populations of learners in other programs indiscriminately. This program, however is typical of many adult ESL education programs. Therefore, many of the findings of this study would be of value in different settings. There are varied implications for Hispanic participants in adult ESL education, which have already been addressed.

Various other limitations are associated with the quantitative element of the research: its design, the instrument itself, its distribution, and problems inherent in self-reported data. The utility of the three attendance categories along with the current definition of their parameters is also subject to debate. This design was clearly heuristic and exploratory. Whether or not the use of these categories is truly beneficial is somewhat dependent on the validity and reliability of the

questionnaire, along with its distribution to an appropriate population. Ideally, the instrument would have been subjected to a rigorous refinement and testing prior to its use. Due to time constraints, this was not possible. One very evident flaw in its design is that it did not solicit students' opinions and or feelings about the assessments or assessment procedures of the program. This surfaced as a particularly salient factor in the qualitative analysis and therefore ought to be accounted for in the questionnaire. Additionally, although numerous efforts were made to distribute the questionnaire to students who had left the program, only 11 students fitting the dropout criteria filled out the questionnaire. Ideally, more students falling into this category would have completed the questionnaire, thereby contributing their voices to the research.

Conclusion

Much of the challenge in identifying salient factors that influence motivation and attendance behaviors is due to the complex, multi-faceted nature of student persistence. Referencing cost-benefit theory, Noel (1985) stated, "When it comes to getting beyond the current myths and identifying just...what tips the cost-benefit scale, we find that it is almost impossible to pinpoint the single, specific reason why a student leaves," (p. 10). Although he was speaking of a different educational context, Tinto's (1975) description of students' attendance choices in higher education readily applies. He described them "as the outcome of a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the institution (peers, faculty, administration, etc.)" (Tinto, 1975, p. 103).

In any real-life context, it is unlikely that research would identify one single factor as exclusively significant in predicting diminished attendance. Rather, it is typically a confluence of various factors that causes lack of motivation and dropout (Jilg, 2008; Malicky & Norman, 1994; Noel, 1985; Rowsell, 1990; Wesley, 2010). Furthermore, Garrison (1987) concluded that any

reasonable approach to understanding the problem of persistence and dropout “must begin with a holistic perspective but focus on the dynamics of a situation-specific population of adult learners” (p. 214). Hence, the intention of our research has been to identify what factors discourage motivation and negatively influence attendance patterns for a very specific group of learners in a very specific context. The degree to which our findings apply to other adult ESL programs must be determined by the people who work in those programs.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) wrote, “In the study of human experience, it is essential to know how people define their situations” (p. 40). They go on to cite Thomas (1949) who said, “If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (p. 301). In our case, it was important to attempt to identify factors influencing students by gaining access to their perspectives, to understand the “structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon” as felt by those directly involved and described in their own words (Patton, 1990, p. 69).

At this point we must acknowledge that numerous external factors that are beyond the control of teachers and program administrators influence students’ choices. Jilg (2008) states matter-of-factly, “In spite of any interventions pursued, a number of students will drop out regardless” (p. 9). Kerka (1995) elaborates: “In any program, adults are largely voluntary participants, but the student role is just one of many roles and responsibilities competing for their time and attention,” (p. 2).

Suffice it to say, external factors will exert their influence. Furthermore, Tinto (1985) indicates that, “Not all entering students possess [the required] commitment. Their leaving, whether forced or voluntary, indicates their unwillingness to expend the effort required to attain the goal of [completion]” (p. 34). Additionally, some forms of departure do not deserve negative labels, “nor do they all require institutional action” (Tinto, 1985, p. 28). In some cases adult

students have appropriate, valid, and positive reasons for leaving a program (e.g., They may have achieved a desired end, received better employment, relocated to a different city, etc.).

Debatably, it is not worth the time or resources of program administrators to attempt to reach the group of students that is likely to drop out no matter what. On the other end of the spectrum, there is a group of students (like Silvia) who will likely *stay* no matter what, despite the opposition that presents itself. The challenge then becomes creating a better experience for this group, the devoted persisters, and focusing efforts on retaining the in-between group. Those belonging to the latter group are of critical importance because their attendance or non-attendance is more likely to be contingent upon achieving a critical mass of positive factors that will tip the scale in favor of attendance.

Our research has gathered evidence in favor of addressing factors pertinent to the specific population of Hispanic adult ESL learners attending the adult ESL program that served as the context of our study. These factors, if appropriately addressed, would likely affect students' motivation and improve retention rates.

One of the interview participants summarized the challenge well in the following statement: "If there's no motivation, no matter the quality of the program, or the funding available...it won't be successful."⁴¹

⁴¹ "Si no hay motivación, por muy bueno que sea el programa, por fondos que haya...no va a tener éxito."

References

- Ashar, H. & Skenes, R. (1993). Can Tinto's student departure model be applied to nontraditional students? *Adult Education Quarterly*, 43, 90–100. doi:10.1177/0741713693043002003
- Beder, H., & Carrea, N. (1988) The effects of andragogical teacher training on adult students' attendance and evaluation of their teachers. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 38, 75–87. doi:10.1177/0001848188038002002
- Beder, H., & Medina, P. (2001). *Classroom dynamics in adult literacy education* (NCSALL Reports). Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (NCSALL Report No. 18) Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED465026.pdf>
- Boshier, R. (1973). Educational participation and dropout: A theoretical model. *Adult Education*, 23, 255–282. doi:10.1177/074171367302300401
- Brod, S. (1995). *Outreach and retention in adult ESL literacy programs* (ERIC Digest). Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED383241) Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED383241>
- Brown, H. D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Coombe, C., Troudi, S., & Al-Hamly, M. (2012). Foreign and second-language teacher assessment literacy: Issues, challenges, and recommendations. In Coombe, C., Davidson, P., O'Sullivan, B., & Stoyhoff, S. (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language assessment* (pp. 20–29). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, S. J. & Henrichsen, L. E. (2015). Addressing reticence: The challenge of engaging reluctant adult ESL students. *Journal of Adult Education*, 44(2), 15–20.

- Darckenwald, G. G., & Gavin, W. J. (1987). Dropout as a function of discrepancies between expectations and actual experiences of the classroom social environment. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 37, 152–163. doi:10.1177/0001848187037003003
- Darckenwald, G. G., & Merriam, S. B. (1982). *Adult education: Foundations of practice*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Darckenwald, G. G., & Valentine, T. (1985). Factor structure of deterrents to public participation in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 35, 177–193. doi:10.1177/0001848185035004001
- Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31, 117–135. doi: 10.1017/S026144480001315X
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Malderez, A. (1997). Group dynamics and foreign language teaching. *System*, 25, 65–81.
- Evans, N. (2001). *In their own words: Polynesian students' perspectives on persistence in an American university* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.
- Eyring, J. (2014). Adult learners in English as a second/foreign language settings. In Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Snow, M. A. (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 550–567). Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.
- Garrison, D. R. (1987). Dropout prediction within a broad psychosocial context: An analysis of Boshier's congruence model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 37, 212–222. doi: 10.1177/0001848187037004003

- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In Geertz, C. (Ed.), *The interpretation of culture: Selected essays* (pp. 3–30). New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Gessner, R. (Ed.). (1956). *The democratic man: Selected writings of Eduard C. Lindeman*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of english language teaching* (4th ed.). Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hartshorn, J. K., Evans, N. W., Merrill, P. F., Sudweeks, R. R., Strong-Krause, D., & Anderson, N. J. (2010). Effects of dynamic corrective feedback on ESL writing accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44, pp. 84–89.
- Hayes, E. (1989). Hispanic adults and ESL programs: Barriers to participation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23, 47–63. doi: 10.2307/3587507
- Jilg, T. (2008) Staying the course: Factors influencing L2 learner dropout and suggested remedial actions. Retrieved from <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/welsh/resources/Stayingthecoursefinalcopy.pdf>
- Kerka, S. (1995). *Adult learner retention revisited* (ERIC Digest no. 166). Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED389880) Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED389880.pdf>
- Kim, K., Collins, M., & McArthur, E. (1997). *Participation of adults in English as a second language classes: 1994-95. Statistics in brief* (ERIC Digest). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED409749) Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED409749.pdf>

- Knowles, M. S. (1984). *The adult learner: A neglected species* (3rd ed.). Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Kuh, D. G., & Love, P. G. (2000). A cultural perspective on student departure. In Braxton, J. M. (Ed.), *Reworking the departure puzzle* (pp. 196–212). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Lee, W. & Ng, S. (2009). Reducing student reticence through teacher interaction strategy. *ELT Journal*, 64, 302-313.
- Malicky, G. V., & Norman, C. A. (1994). Participation patterns in adult literacy programs. *Adult Basic Education*, 4, 144–156.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moussu, L. (2010). Influence of teacher-contact time and other variables on ESL students' attitudes towards native- and nonnative-English-speaking teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44, pp. 746–768.
- Noel, L. (1985). Increasing student retention: New challenges and potential. In Lee, N., Levitz, R., Saluri, D., & Associates (Eds.), *Increasing student retention* (pp. 1–27). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Oxford, R. L. (1999). Anxiety and the language learner: New insights. In Arnold, J. (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 58–67). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Pintrich, P. L., & Schunk, D. H. (1996). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

- Rendón, L. I., Jalomo, R. E., & Nora, A. (2000). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In Braxton, J. M. (Ed.), *Reworking the departure puzzle* (pp. 127–156). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Rowse, L. V. (1990). *Classroom factors pertaining to dropout among adult ESL students: A constructivist analysis* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Lancaster, Bailrigg, Lancaster, UK. Retrieved from <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.305073>
- Seidman, A. (2005). Where we go from here: A retention formula for student success. In Seidman, A. (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 295–316). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Schalge, S. L., & Soga, K. (2008). "Then I stop coming to school": Understanding absenteeism in an adult English as a second language program. *Adult Basic Education & Literacy Journal*, 2, 151–161.
- Shvidko, E., Evans, N. W., & Hartshorn, J. K. (2015). Factors affecting language use outside the ESL classroom: Student perspectives. *System*, 51, 11–27.
doi:10.1016/j.system.2015.03.006
- Thomas, W. I. (1949). *Social structure and social theory*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Tierney, W. G. (2000). Power, identity, and the dilemma of college student departure. In Braxton, J. M. (Ed.), *Reworking the departure puzzle* (pp. 213–234). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89–125. doi: 10.3102/00346543045001089

- Tinto, V. (1985). Dropping out and other forms of withdrawal from college. In Lee, N., Levitz, R., Saluri, D., & Associates (Eds.). *Increasing student retention* (pp. 28–43). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Tracy-Mumford, F. & Baker, T. (1994). *Student retention: Creating student success* (ERIC Digest). Washington, DC: National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED375299) Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED375299>
- Tsui, A. (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning. In Bailey, K. & Nunan D. (Eds.), *Voices from the language classroom: Qualitative research in second language education* (pp. 145–167). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Valentine, T., & Darkenwald, G. G. (1990). Deterrents to participation in adult education: Profiles of potential leaders. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41, 29–42.
- Wesely, P. M. (2010). Student attrition from traditional and immersion foreign language programs. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 4, 804–817. doi:10.1111/j.1749-818X.2010.00241.x

Appendix A

1

Questionnaire

Your answers on this questionnaire will be completely confidential.

We want to improve the Provo Adult ESL Program. Your answers on this questionnaire will help us understand what improvements can be made. We invite you to give us your honest feedback so that we know what to change.

If you agree to it, we may invite you to participate in an interview so that you can tell us about your experiences and thoughts in greater detail. Thank you for helping us to improve the Program.

When you missed your English classes, what were the main reasons that you didn't attend?

Please, indicate to what degree *each* of these reasons affected your decision to *not* attend your classes.

Reasons "I did not attend because..."	Please, indicate to what degree <i>each</i> of these reasons affected your decision to <i>not</i> attend your classes.				
	It Didn't Affect Me	It Slightly Affected Me	It Affected Me Some	It Affected Me Notably	It Affected Me A Lot
1. Because my work interfered or I found a job	1	2	3	4	5
2. Because I didn't have enough time to attend my class	1	2	3	4	5
3. Because my class was at an inconvenient time	1	2	3	4	5
4. Because my class was offered at an inconvenient location	1	2	3	4	5
5. Because of transportation problems	1	2	3	4	5
6. Because my family did not encourage me to attend	1	2	3	4	5
7. Because I needed to focus on my family or family-related problems	1	2	3	4	5
8. Because I had to take care of my children	1	2	3	4	5
9. Because of health problems	1	2	3	4	5
10. Because my class was not the right level for me	1	2	3	4	5
11. Because my class was too difficult	1	2	3	4	5
12. Because I was not confident in my ability to learn	1	2	3	4	5
13. Because I did not feel comfortable with my classmates	1	2	3	4	5
14. Because I was not making progress	1	2	3	4	5
15. Because I fell behind and couldn't catch up	1	2	3	4	5

See next page



16. Because my class was not teaching me what I wanted to learn	1	2	3	4	5
17. Because my class was not helping me with my goals	1	2	3	4	5
18. Because I had learned everything that I wanted to learn	1	2	3	4	5
19. Because my class was disorganized	1	2	3	4	5
20. Because my teacher was not well prepared	1	2	3	4	5
21. Because I did not feel comfortable with my teacher	1	2	3	4	5

Statements	How much do you agree with <i>each</i> of the statements on the left?				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. The enrollment process was smooth and organized, and didn't take too much time	1	2	3	4	5
23. I understood what my teacher wanted me to do in the class	1	2	3	4	5
24. My class was organized and the schedule was clear	1	2	3	4	5
25. My English was improving	1	2	3	4	5
26. My teacher cared about me and was aware of my needs	1	2	3	4	5
27. My teacher was helpful and answered my questions	1	2	3	4	5
28. The things I was learning were helping me to reach my goals	1	2	3	4	5
29. I felt comfortable with my classmates and enjoyed working with them	1	2	3	4	5
30. I felt comfortable with my teacher and enjoyed attending my class	1	2	3	4	5
31. The book(s) helped me	1	2	3	4	5

If there is another reason why you couldn't attend your class or if you wish to make any additional comment, you may write it here:

See next page



Please answer the following questions about yourself. Remember that your answers are completely confidential.

32. What is your gender?	male	female					
33. What is your age? (Choose one)	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+	
34. What is your highest level of education?	a) Did not finish high school b) High school diploma c) Associate degree d) Bachelor's degree e) Graduate degree						
35. What class level were you attending the last time you attended your classes? (circle one)	Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. How important were each of these reasons in your decision to learn English? (Mark the importance of each reason)		No Importante	Algo Importante	Muy Importante			
a) I want to go to an English-speaking school	1	2	3				
b) I want to get a better job	1	2	3				
c) I want to feel more comfortable living in the U.S.	1	2	3				
d) I want to be able to help my children and family	1	2	3				
e) Because English is very important in today's world	1	2	3				
f) Because I really like English and American culture	1	2	3				
g) Because I want to become a U.S. citizen	1	2	3				
h) For fun and pleasure	1	2	3				
i) For other reasons (please explain):	1	2	3				

See next page



-
37. What is your current employment status? a) Employed full-time
b) Employed part-time
c) Not employed
-
38. In what city do you live? City: _____
-
39. What country are you from? Country: _____
-

We have two more important questions:

-
40. Would you be willing to have a short interview so that you can tell us more about your experience with the program? (circle one)
- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
-
41. *If* you answered 'Yes' to the above question, please fill out this information:
- Name _____
- Best way to contact you:
- a) Phone _____
- b) Email _____
- Best time of day to contact you:
- a) Morning
- b) Afternoon
- c) Evening
-

Thank you for your time!!



Appendix B

1

Cuestionario

Sus respuestas en este cuestionario serán completamente confidenciales.

Queremos mejorar el programa de ESL (Inglés como segundo idioma) para adultos. Sus respuestas en este cuestionario nos ayudarán a entender las mejoras que se pueden realizar. Le invitamos a responder con sinceridad para poder saber qué cambios hacer.

Si así lo desea, nos gustaría también invitarle a participar en una entrevista donde podrá expresar con mayor detalle sus experiencias y opiniones. Gracias por ayudarnos.

Cuando usted faltó a sus clases de inglés, ¿cuáles fueron las principales razones por las cuales no asistió?

Por favor, indique en qué medida cada uno de los siguientes motivos le afectó para no asistir a sus clases.

Motivos “No asistí a mis clases...”					
	No Me Afectó	Me Afectó Poco	Me Afectó Algo	Me Afectó Mucho	Me Afectó Bastante
1. Porque mi trabajo me lo impedía o porque encontré trabajo	1	2	3	4	5
2. Porque no tenía tiempo suficiente para asistir	1	2	3	4	5
3. Por el horario de las clases	1	2	3	4	5
4. Por la ubicación de las clases	1	2	3	4	5
5. Por cuestiones de transporte	1	2	3	4	5
6. Por falta de apoyo familiar	1	2	3	4	5
7. Porque necesitaba enfocarme en mi familia o por problemas familiares	1	2	3	4	5
8. Porque tenía que cuidar a mis hijos	1	2	3	4	5
9. Por problemas de salud	1	2	3	4	5
10. Porque la clase no era del nivel adecuado para mí	1	2	3	4	5
11. Porque mi clase era muy difícil	1	2	3	4	5
12. Porque no estaba seguro de mi capacidad de aprender	1	2	3	4	5
13. Porque no me sentía a gusto con mis compañeros de clase	1	2	3	4	5
14. Porque no estaba progresando	1	2	3	4	5
15. Porque me quedé atrasado y no alcanzaba a ponerme al día o al nivel del resto de la clase	1	2	3	4	5

Vaya a la siguiente página



16. Porque la clase no me enseñaba lo que yo quería aprender	1	2	3	4	5
17. Porque la clase no me ayudaba con mis metas	1	2	3	4	5
18. Porque había aprendido todo lo que quería aprender	1	2	3	4	5
19. Porque mi clase era desorganizada	1	2	3	4	5
20. Porque mi maestro(a) no estaba bien preparado(a)	1	2	3	4	5
21. Porque no me sentía a gusto con mi maestro(a)	1	2	3	4	5

¿Cuán de acuerdo está con cada una de las siguientes declaraciones que están a su izquierda?

Declaraciones	¿Cuán de acuerdo está con cada una de las siguientes declaraciones que están a su izquierda?				
	Muy En Contra	En Contra	Neutral	De Acuerdo	Muy De Acuerdo
22. El proceso de inscripción fue sencillo y organizado y no me llevó demasiado tiempo	1	2	3	4	5
23. Entendía lo que el maestro quería que hiciera en la clase	1	2	3	4	5
24. Mi clase fue organizada y el horario fue claro	1	2	3	4	5
25. Mi inglés estaba mejorando	1	2	3	4	5
26. Mi maestro(a) se preocupaba por mí y estaba pendiente de mis necesidades	1	2	3	4	5
27. Mi maestro(a) fue de gran ayuda y respondía a mis preguntas	1	2	3	4	5
28. Las cosas que aprendía me ayudaban a alcanzar mis metas	1	2	3	4	5
29. Me sentía a gusto con mis compañeros de clase y me gustaba trabajar con ellos	1	2	3	4	5
30. Me sentí a gusto con mi maestro(a) y disfruté asistiendo a clase	1	2	3	4	5
31. El libro de texto me ayudó	1	2	3	4	5

Si hay algún otro motivo por el cual no asistió a sus clases o si quiere hacer otro comentario, puede escribirlo aquí:

Vaya a la siguiente página



Por favor responda a las siguientes preguntas en cuanto a usted. Recuerde que sus respuestas son completamente confidenciales.

32. ¿Cuál es su sexo?			Hombre	Mujer					
33. ¿Cuál es su edad? (Marque uno)	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44			
	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+			
34. ¿Cuál es su nivel más alto de educación? (Seleccione uno)	a) No terminé la preparatoria b) Certificado de preparatoria c) Carrera técnica d) Licenciatura e) Posgrado								
35. ¿Cuál fue el nivel de la clase de inglés a la que asistió por última vez ? (Seleccione uno)			Nivel	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. ¿Cuán importante ha sido cada uno de los siguientes motivos en su decisión de aprender inglés? (Marque la importancia de cada motivo)			No Importante	Algo Importante	Muy Importante				
a) Quiero asistir a una escuela de habla inglesa			1	2	3				
b) Quiero tener un mejor trabajo			1	2	3				
c) Quiero sentirme más a gusto viviendo en los Estados Unidos			1	2	3				
d) Quiero poder ayudar a mis hijos y a mi familia			1	2	3				
e) Porque el inglés es muy importante en el mundo de hoy			1	2	3				
f) Porque me gusta mucho el inglés y la cultura americana			1	2	3				
g) Porque quiero llegar a ser un ciudadano de este país			1	2	3				
h) Por diversión y placer			1	2	3				
i) Por otros motivos (por favor especifique):			1	2	3				

Vaya a la siguiente página



4

37. ¿Cuál es su situación actual de empleo?
(Seleccione uno)

a) Empleado a tiempo completo
b) Empleado a tiempo parcial
c) Sin empleo

38. ¿En qué ciudad vive? Ciudad: _____

39. ¿De qué país es usted? País: _____

Tenemos dos preguntas más que son importantes:

40. ¿Estaría dispuesto a participar en una corta entrevista para decirnos más acerca de su experiencia en el programa?

Sí No

41. Si su respuesta fue 'Sí' a la pregunta anterior, por favor rellene la siguiente información:

Nombre _____

La mejor forma de comunicarse con usted:

- a) Teléfono _____
- b) Email _____

La mejor hora del día para ponerse en contacto con usted (seleccione todo lo que se aplique):

- a) Por la mañana
- b) Al mediodía
- c) Por la noche
-

¡Muchísimas gracias por su tiempo!



Appendix C

1

Interview Script for Students

Thank you for meeting with us today. We just want you to be aware that we are recording this interview so that we clearly understand your perspective and can report your statements accurately.

Our primary goal is to understand what elements of the program influence students' desire to attend their classes. This will help us understand what changes could be made to the program.

So, our first question is:

1. When you didn't attend your classes, what were the main reasons that you did not attend?
2. Could you explain your feelings about the program and your class(es) in greater detail?
3. You marked [specific answer option from questionnaire], could you explain the reasons why you answered this question this way?

[Whether or not the following questions are asked will largely depend on how the interviewee answers the preceding questions; they are intended to be examples of the kinds of questions that could be asked]

- a. What caused you to feel that [reference questionnaire factor (e.g., *your class wasn't helping you with your goals*)]?
- b. With respect to [reference questionnaire factor (e.g., *the organization of your class*)], what changes could be made for the class to function to better?
- c. In your opinion, what could your teacher have done to be more aware of and responsive to your needs?
- d. What could have been done to make you feel more comfortable and enjoy attending your class?

2

4. What changes could be made so that the program could help you with your goals and meet your needs?
5. Is there anything else about your experience with the program that you would like to share with us?

[Other questions will be interspersed with the above set of questions; the questions that are asked will largely depend on the responses that the interviewee gives to the initial and following questions]

Thank you for meeting with us today. Your answers will help us as we consider how the program could be improved.

Appendix D

1

Interview Script for Students (Spanish)

Gracias por reunirse con nosotros hoy. Queremos que sepa que estamos grabando esta entrevista para que entendamos su perspectiva y para que sus comentarios sean informados con exactitud.

Nuestra meta principal es lograr identificar qué elementos del programa tienen alguna influencia en el deseo de los estudiantes para asistir a sus clases. Eso nos ayudará a entender qué cambios se podrían hacer para mejorar el programa.

Para empezar, la primera pregunta que queremos hacer es:

1. Cuando usted faltó a sus clases de inglés, ¿cuales fueron las principales razones por las cuales no asistió?
2. Podría usted explicarnos de sus sentimientos sobre el programa y su(s) clase(s) con mayor detalle?
3. Usted marcó [specific answer option from questionnaire], ¿podría usted explicar las razones por las cuales usted contestó esa pregunta de esa manera?

[Whether or not the following questions are asked will largely depend on how the interviewee answers the preceding questions; they are intended to be examples of the kinds of questions that could be asked]

- a. ¿Cuales fueron las razones por las cuales usted sintió que [reference questionnaire factor (e.g., *la clase no le ayudaba con sus metas*)]?
- b. Con respecto a [reference questionnaire factor (e.g., *la organización de la clase*)], ¿Qué cambios deberían hacerse para que funcione mejor?
- c. En su opinión, ¿Qué podría haber hecho su maestro para estar más pendiente de sus necesidades?

2

- d. ¿Qué cambios podrían haberse hecho para que usted se sintiera más a gusto y disfrutara asistir a su clase?
4. ¿Qué cambios se podrían hacer para que el programa pueda ayudarle con sus metas y necesidades de aprendizaje?
5. ¿Tiene usted alguna otra sugerencia o opinión acerca de su experiencia con el programa que quiera compartir con nosotros?

[Other questions will be interspersed with the above set of questions; the questions that are asked will largely depend on the responses that the interviewee gives to the initial and following questions]

Gracias por colaborar con nosotros hoy. Sus respuestas serán de gran ayuda mientras consideramos cómo podemos mejorar al programa.

Appendix E

1

Interview Script for Teachers

Thank you for meeting with us today. We just want you to be aware that we are recording this interview so that we clearly understand your perspective and can report your statements accurately.

Our primary goal is to understand what elements of the program influence students' desire to attend their classes. This will help us understand what changes could be made to improve the program.

First, we would like to show you the questionnaire that the students filled out.

[questionnaire will be shown to interviewee]

So, our first question is:

1. When students don't attend their classes, from your perspective, what are the main reasons that they don't attend?
2. From your perspective, what key factors in program procedures, structure, and organization may affect students' motivation and attendance patterns?
3. What classroom practices may have an effect on students' motivation and attendance patterns?
4. With reference to this particular section of the questionnaire [show specific section (see below)], how do you think most students would respond to this section?

Statements	How much do you agree with each of the statements on the left?				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. The enrollment process was smooth and organized, and didn't take too much time	1	2	3	4	5
23. I understood what my teacher wanted me to do in the class	1	2	3	4	5
24. My class was organized and the schedule was clear	1	2	3	4	5
25. My English was improving	1	2	3	4	5
26. My teacher cared about me and was aware of my needs	1	2	3	4	5
27. My teacher was helpful and answered my questions	1	2	3	4	5
28. The things I was learning were helping me to reach my goals	1	2	3	4	5
29. I felt comfortable with my classmates and enjoyed working with them	1	2	3	4	5
30. I felt comfortable with my teacher and enjoyed attending my class	1	2	3	4	5
31. The book(s) helped me	1	2	3	4	5

If there is another reason why you couldn't attend your class or if you wish to make any additional comment, you may write it here:

5. Based on your experience, what program factors had/have had an affect on your ability to be a successful teacher in the program?
6. What changes could be made so that the program could better meet students' needs?
7. Based on your experience as a teacher in the program, is there anything else that you feel is important to share?

[other questions will be interspersed with the above set of questions; the questions that are asked will largely depend on the responses that the interviewee gives to the initial and following questions]

Thank you for meeting with us today. Your answers will help us as we consider how the program could be improved.