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Deterrents to participation and retention in English as a second language (ESL) programs among adult Hispanic immigrants

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DETERRENTS TO PARTICIPATION AND RETENTION IN ENGLISH AS
A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) PROGRAMS AMONG
ADULT HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

**Deterrents to Participation and Retention in English as a
Second Language (ESL) Programs among
Adult Hispanic Immigrants**

By

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This study explored Hispanic immigrants' perceived deterrents to participation in, and successful completion of, ESL programs in Las Vegas, Nevada. The study used a qualitative research design, as students, teachers, and administrators from two ESL program sites were interviewed in focus groups and individual interviews. Findings suggest that Hispanic immigrants face deterrents due to both their personal situations (personal deterrents) and to ESL program characteristics (institutional deterrents). Furthermore, some institutional deterrents may be easily reduced, which may in turn increase Hispanic ESL program participation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hispanics in the United States number 50.3 million and constitute 16.3 percent of the national population, making them the largest minority as well as immigrant group in the U.S. (2010 Census Data). The fact that this group has by far the lowest level of English fluency in the nation is cause for concern. A 1997 study found that only 4.8 percent of Hispanic immigrants speak English “very well” and 76.6 percent speak it worse than “well.” More than one third (37.1 percent) of all Hispanic immigrants do not speak English “at all” (Espenshade and Fu, 1997). Hispanics’ low level of English literacy and language skills has a direct negative effect on their earnings, social status, and their representation in government (Huntington, 2004; McManus, Gould, and Welch, 1983; Sass, 2000). Furthermore, Hispanics’ lack of English skills creates a barrier to assimilation into American culture, which in turn threatens to harm American cohesiveness (Huntington, 2004).

Despite the consequences of their limited English proficiency, many Hispanics do not take advantage of, or do not successfully complete, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes (Hayes, 1989). These programs could increase Hispanic immigrants’ English fluency and could potentially alleviate the negative effects of their limited English skills. The potential benefits of these programs are, however, restricted by low participation levels (Hayes, 1989). Little research has been conducted to explain this lack of participation, and it may be useful to explore and identify the specific deterrents to both participation and retention in order to make those programs more effective at increasing Hispanic English skills.

Hispanics in the United States

Hispanics are those people who classify themselves as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, or "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" whose origins are from Spain, and the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America (2010 Census Data). According to the United States Census, Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States. As of 2010, there are 50.3 million Hispanics, 16.3% of the total United States population (2010 Census Data). Hispanics are the fastest growing group with a population growth rate of 24.3%, which is more than three times the growth rate of the entire US population (2010 Census Data). Between 2000 and 2010 the growth of the Hispanic population contributed half of the nation's growth (2010 Census Data).

The nation's fastest growing group is also the group that is least proficient in English. Hispanics living in the United States are less proficient in English than other groups who self-report speaking a language other than English at home. A large majority, 59.8%, of people age 5 and older who speak a language other than English at home speak Spanish (2010 Census Data). Out of those Spanish speakers, 48.9% speak English less than "very well" (2010 Census Data). Over 13 million Hispanics self-reported that they speak English less than "very well" (2010 Census Data).

Understanding the obstacles Hispanics face in joining and completing ESL programs is of particular importance in the state of Nevada, which has a denser Hispanic population than most of the country. According to the 2010 Census, Hispanics account for 26.5% of Nevada's population and for 29.3% of the total population of Clark County (2010 Census Data). The Hispanic growth rate is much

higher in Nevada than the national Hispanic growth rate. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population rose by 81.9% in Nevada compared to 43% nationally (2010 Census Data).

Hispanics are not only the largest minority population, but the largest ethnic group in the Clark County School District (CCSD) as well (Clark County School District Accountability Reports). According to the 2009-2010 CCSD accountability report, 41% of the 309,335 students attending Clark County schools are Hispanic (Clark County School District Accountability Reports). 44% of these Hispanic students, accounting for 18.2% of the total student population, are limited-English-proficient (LEP) students (Clark County School District Accountability Reports). This large number of students with limited English proficiency has placed additional burdens on the school system (Plano, 2006) as it tries to meet its students' needs. Since there is such high concentration of Hispanics in Nevada, the effects of limited English language fluency among Hispanic immigrants, and the possible benefits of making improvements to ESL programs, is of particular importance in Nevada.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and identify the deterrents adult Hispanic immigrants face in participating in and completing ESL programs. The findings of this study can be used to inform the ESL program directors and instructors who serve this population in order to influence decisions regarding effective resource management for these programs and to advocate and make policy recommendations to

expand ESL program effectiveness by reducing deterrents to participation and retention.

Research Questions

This study explored Hispanic immigrants' perceived deterrents to participation in, and completion of, ESL programs in Las Vegas, Nevada. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What deterrents do adult Hispanic immigrants encounter in participating in ESL programs in Las Vegas, Nevada?
2. What deterrents do adult Hispanic immigrants encounter in completing ESL programs in Las Vegas, Nevada?
3. What practices and policies do adult Hispanic immigrants believe would minimize these deterrents?

This study used a qualitative approach using focus groups and interviews. The same predetermined questions were asked in each focus group and for each interview, but as the study was designed to be flexible, follow-up questions were adapted to each particular focus group's and interviewee's responses. This allowed the participants to discuss their personal experiences or the experiences of those people the participants knew.

Significance of the Study

The negative effects of Adult Hispanic immigrants' limited English-language skills are well documented. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs can

increase Hispanic immigrants' English-language skills, and, therefore, could potentially alleviate these negative effects. However, the potential benefits of such programs are currently limited by a lack of adult Hispanic participation. Attempts to increase the English-language skills of Hispanic immigrants are, therefore, limited by a relative lack of research exploring the factors that affect adult Hispanic immigrants' participation in these programs. Despite a growing concern with Hispanics' low level of English fluency, only a few studies have focused specifically on deterrents to Hispanic participation in adult education (e.g., Hayes, 1989; Ortega, 2008), and fewer have focused on Hispanic immigrants in Las Vegas (e.g., Ortega, 2008).

Research has suggested that examining differences among groups based on preexisting or socio-demographic characteristics (such as age or educational achievement) is of limited value in trying to understand and reduce obstacles to English-language acquisition, as they are variables that cannot easily be changed (Hayes, 1989). It may be more useful to explore and identify specific deterrents to adult Hispanic participation in ESL programs in order to make those programs more effective at increasing Hispanic English skills, and this may be best accomplished by involving Hispanics directly in the discourse. This may provide useful information for ESL program directors and have policy implications for public and private ESL programs interested in increasing English fluency among Hispanics.

Outline

This study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the study, the research questions, its purpose, and its significance. Chapter Two provides

a review of related literature. Chapter Three describes the participants, and the research design and method to the study. Chapter Four discusses the results and analysis of the data. Chapter Five discusses the conclusion and presents recommendations for policy changes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter identifies and organizes the literature that is related to the areas of the effects of limited English language fluency among Hispanic immigrants and the factors affecting their English language acquisition. This will provide background information and establish the framework for the discussion. This chapter focuses on five issues relevant to Hispanic participation in ESL classes: effects of limited English language fluency among Hispanic immigrants, the importance of language proficiency in citizenship, factors affecting Hispanic immigrants' English language acquisition, ESL program effectiveness, and factors affecting ESL participation.

Effects of Limited English Language Fluency among Hispanic Immigrants

A good deal of research has been conducted to measure the effects of immigrants' lack of English-language skills. The results from these studies indicate uniformly negative effects such as low earnings, educational achievement, social status, representation in government, and assimilation into the dominant culture (Dustmann and Soest, 2002; Huntington, 2004; McManus, Gould, and Welch, 1983; Reitz and Sklar, 1997; Sass, 2000; Tainer, 1988).

Troublingly, the United States' largest and fastest growing group is also among its poorest. According to a 1976 survey of income and education, only 6.3 percent of Hispanic immigrant men who primarily spoke Spanish earned the median income of 15,000 dollars or more annually. This is in comparison with 32.9 percent for immigrant men who primarily spoke English (Tainer, 1988). English language

proficiency has a significant positive influence on earnings for all immigrant groups, and is particularly important for Hispanics, for whom earnings are most affected by English language proficiency (Tainer, 1988). In fact, differences associated with English language skills explain nearly all Hispanic wage differences often attributed to ethnicity, national origin, and time in the U.S. (McManus, Gould, and Welch, 1983).

As of 2010, the median annual salary for Hispanic males is \$27,490. This is significantly less than the median annual salary for the total male population, which is \$42,210. The median annual salary for Hispanic females is \$24,738 while the median annual salary for the total female population is \$32,649. Data from a community survey conducted by the Census Bureau reveal that only 27.8% of Hispanic males work in white-collar jobs compared to 48.9% of the total male population (2010 Census Data). Similarly, 56.3% of Hispanic females work in white-collar jobs compared to 72.4% of the total female population (2010 Census Data).

Hispanics also tend to be less educated. A survey conducted by the US Census Bureau shows that 24.5% of Hispanic males age 25 and over and 23.5% of Hispanic females in the same age range had “less than 9th grade” education compared to 6.7% of all males and 6.3% of all females (2010 Census Data). Additionally, only 58.7% of Hispanic males and 61.7% of Hispanic females had “high school or more,” compared to 83.5% of all males and 84.6% of all females (2010 Census Data). Finally, only 11.5% of Hispanic males and 13.1% of Hispanic females had a “Bachelor’s degree or more,” compared to 27.9% of the total male population and 26.2% of the total female population (2010 Census Data).

Hispanics also score lower on standardized tests. Clark County students with limited English proficiency (LEP) are among the least proficient students in reading and math. For the 2010 Criterion Reference Tests, a district wide test administered to students from third to eighth grade, only 47.8% of third grade LEP students, 32.3% of fifth grade LEP students, and 13.9% of eighth grade LEP students were proficient in math (CCSD Statistical Data). Only 31.7% of third grade LEP students, 7.7% of fifth grade LEP students, and 10.7% of eighth grade LEP students were proficient in reading (CCSD Statistical Data).

Hispanic students' lack of English proficiency may be a factor in their low test scores because the tests are administered only in English. Students who were once classified as LEP, but who subsequently learned English, had much higher proficiency rates in both reading and math. For the 2009 Criterion Reference Tests, 90.3% of former LEP third grade students were proficient in math, 95% were proficient in reading; 82.6% of former LEP fifth grade students were proficient in math, 69.2% of former LEP fifth grade students were proficient in reading; and 56.1% of former LEP eighth grade students were proficient in math, 64.7% of former LEP eighth grade students were proficient in reading (CCSD Statistical Data). Though the low proficiency rates may be attributed to limited English ability, studies have shown that parental involvement significantly improves student performance and attitudes about school. However, many times the parents of students with limited English proficiency do not know how to help their children or cannot understand the homework and are not able to communicate with their child's teacher. Thus, Hispanic parents' limited language skills compound their children's trouble in school.

Hispanic immigrants' limited English fluency also negatively affects their levels of political participation, which, in turn, negatively affects their representation in government (Dustmann and Soest, 2002; Sass, 2000). Though Hispanics are the largest minority group in the U.S., they still trail behind other minorities in political representation. The 2002 Statistical Abstract reported that only 4,303 elected officials in the US were Hispanic, compared to 9,430 elected officials who were African-American (the next largest minority in the US) (2010 Census Data).

Hispanic immigrants' lack of English-language skills also hinders assimilation into the dominant American culture. This not only poses the risk of creating animosity toward Hispanic immigrants, but, as Samuel Huntington argues, creates a "cultural division between Hispanics and Anglos [that] could replace the racial division between blacks and whites as the most serious cleavage in U.S. society" (Huntington 2004, p. 32).

Citizenship and Language

Discussions about citizenship, and its definition, have most often been framed by one of two models: the liberal and the republican. The liberal model focuses primarily on citizenship as a legal status and on the rights, protections, and benefits that accompany this status. The republican model, on the other hand, stresses the duties that accompany citizenship, namely political participation. Under both models of citizenship, language proficiency in a state or political entity's primary language is a prerequisite to, and is fundamentally intertwined with, citizenship.

Citizenship, according to the liberal model, is best understood as a legal status granting citizens a set of rights, protections and benefits. A US citizen, unlike a mere resident, for example, has the right to vote, to run for public office, to easily bring family into the US, to apply for a job with the federal government, and to remain in the US without the risk of deportation. Only a citizen, furthermore, may usually receive economic and social benefits provided by the state (Oakes & Warren, 2007, p. 20). Citizenship understood as this bundle of right is of particular relevance to immigrants in the US, who dream of being granted US citizenship and its accompanying rights, protections, and benefits. As Judith Shklar (1991) argues:

In any modern state and especially in an immigrant society, citizenship must always refer primarily to nationality. Citizenship as nationality is the legal recognition, both domestic and international, that a person is a member, native-born or naturalized, of a state. Such citizenship is not trivial... And the possession of an American passport particularly is profoundly valued, especially by naturalized citizens. (p.3)

The ability to communicate in English is a prerequisite to being granted US citizenship status. Pursuant to federal regulation 8 C.F.R. § 335.2(c), in order to become naturalized US citizens, immigrants must successfully complete an interview in English and a US civics and English exam. In order to demonstrate sufficient English proficiency, immigrants must be able to communicate effectively during the naturalization interview and must be able to pass a speaking, reading, and writing English exam. English language skills are therefore essential to US citizenship status, as described by the liberal model. The fact that English is one of only two

components on the naturalization exam, the other being the civics component, is indicative of the bond between language and citizenship.

While the liberal model of citizenship focuses on status and rights, the classical republican model places great emphasis on the citizen's duty. A citizen in this sense is a person who has an active political life, who directly participates in public debate on issues of public interest, and who pursues the common good (Oakes & Warren, p. 20). This concept of citizenship has been prevalent in western political thought since antiquity. According to Aristotle, a true citizen engages in self-rule through ruling and being ruled, as "[t]he citizen in an unqualified sense is defined by no other thing so much as by sharing in decision and office" (1984, 1275a20-23). Because citizenship exists above all in a democracy (1275b4), a political life requires public deliberation. Aristotle states that "[w]hoever is entitled to participate in an office involving deliberation or decision is... a citizen..." (1275b17-19). In a well-ordered state, according to Rousseau, citizens focus on public affairs rather than private interests and "every man flies to the assemblies" in order to participate in democratic discourse (1993, bk. 3, ch. 15).

Though the republican model of citizenship has lost support in favor of the liberal model, it was maintained throughout the nineteenth century by such figures as Hegel and Tocqueville and is currently regaining popularity as a response to the perceived defects of the inward-looking liberal model (Oakes & Warren, 2007, p. 21). Michael Sandel argues that citizens unencumbered by a sense of civic duty are incapable of sustaining self-rule (1996, p. 6), which requires deliberation with fellow citizens about the common good in order to shape the political community (1996, p. 5). This in turn

requires civic virtues, a knowledge of public affairs, a sense of belonging, concern for the whole, and a moral bond with the political community (1996, p. 5).

Political engagement as required by the republican model of citizenship requires another cultural proficiency that many political philosophers take for granted: language. “Political communities are bound to be linguistic communities because politics is (in some sense) linguistically constructed. We can negotiate our way across language barriers but we cannot deliberate together about the way in which our common life is to be conducted unless we share a language.” (Barry, 1993, p. 227). Because states necessarily use one or two languages to function, individuals who are unable to communicate effectively in a state’s primary language(s) cannot participate in political deliberation and can thus become estranged from public discourse (Valentine & Skelton, 2007).

In a study on political participation among deaf persons, Valentine and Skelton (2007) found that though deaf people fully enjoy the rights, protections and benefits accompanying citizenship status, as defined by the liberal model, deaf persons’ lack of language proficiency prevents them from engaging in political deliberation and, therefore, from becoming full citizens as defined by the republican model of citizenship. Valentine and Skelton (2007) suggest using public funds to promote deaf people’s language rights so that they can more easily communicate and engage in political deliberation. They argue that the reach of deaf people’s language rights needs to be extended in order for deaf and hearing people to meet as equals (Valentine & Skelton, 2007). Though this may be perceived as giving deaf people special treatment rather than treating them as equals, Valentine and Skelton (2007) argue that

in a society where some groups are privileged and others oppressed, it is important to exercise “differentiated citizenship.” They argue that public funds should be used not only to extend language rights for deaf people, but to other cultural and linguistic minorities, because like deaf people, cultural and linguistic minorities are at a disadvantage in the political process, and are unable to engage in political deliberation (Valentine & Skelton, 2007).

Citizenship, whether viewed as a status that grants rights and protections or as a duty to participate in political deliberation, implicitly requires language proficiency in the state’s primary language. In the case of Hispanic immigrants, therefore, a lack of English skills is not only a barrier to becoming US citizens in the legal sense, but for those who are already citizens, to fulfilling their roles as active members of society.

Factors Affecting English Language Acquisition

Many studies explore why Hispanic immigrants have such low levels of English language fluency. These studies measure language acquisition and fluency among various immigrant groups in order to examine the factors that influence the process by which immigrants acquire English-language fluency. Among these, many studies focus on pre- and post-immigration characteristics. Pre-immigration characteristics that affect English-language acquisition include characteristics of the immigrant’s native language (Bialystok, 1997; Espenshade and Fu, 1997), age at immigration (Espenshade and Fu, 1997; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Stevens, 1999), and educational attainment (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Espenshade and Fu, 1997).

The linguistic similarity between the immigrant's native language and English affects an immigrant's ability to acquire English skills (Bialystok, 1997; Espenshade and Fu, 1997). Ellen Bialystok argues, in fact, that the similarity between language structures between the first and second languages is the most important factor affecting acquisition (Bialystok, 1997).

Age at migration has also been identified as an important pre-immigration factor influencing English-language fluency (Espenshade and Fu, 1997; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Stevens, 1999). Immigrants who come to the U.S. at older ages are less fluent in English even when duration of stay and schooling are controlled. This may be due to various factors: a reduced labor market incentive because the higher wages that could be expected from acquiring English fluency would be earned for a shorter period; the greater difficulty older individuals have learning a second language; and the increased exposure, and therefore attachment, to the language of the immigrant's home country that migrating at an older age involves (Espenshade and Fu, 1997; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Stevens, 1999).

Research has also shown that educational attainment before immigration is positively related to English language acquisition (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Espenshade and Fu, 1997). Education can affect English acquisition directly by providing opportunities to learn English in school and indirectly by "raising aspirations and creating new opportunities" (Espenshade and Fu 1997, p. 291).

Other studies focus on post-immigration characteristics. Post-immigration factors that affect English-language acquisition include the positive relationship between exposure to the English language and English acquisition (Espenshade and Fu, 1997),

immigrants' socioeconomic status (Espenshade and Fu, 1997), their language environment (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Espenshade and Fu, 1997), and their commitment to living in the U.S. (Espenshade and Fu, 1997).

Exposure to English is frequently measured by the immigrant's length of stay in the US. Empirical evidence shows, however, that the effect of living in the US declines with added exposure, which suggests that the first few years of living in the US are the most important (McManus, Gould, and Welch, 1983). Studies have also shown that an immigrant's socioeconomic status, represented by current economic standing and years of education completed in the US, is positively related to English language acquisition (Espenshade and Fu, 1997). McManus et al. argue that post-immigration education has a greater impact than pre-immigration education (McManus, Gould, and Welch, 1983).

Immigrants' immediate language environment also affects language acquisition by limiting the opportunities and incentives that they have to learn English. High concentrations of immigrants who speak the same language lower the opportunity cost of remaining monolingual and, therefore, reduces English acquisition (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Espenshade and Fu, 1997). Furthermore, "the density, size, and residential segregation of non-English-speaking immigrant groups foster the maintenance of minority-language institutions and socially structured encounters, further reinforcing the use of the immigrant's mother tongue and reducing opportunities and incentives to learn English" (Espenshade and Fu 1997, p. 291).

Immigrants' long-term commitment to living in the U.S. also affects whether they are willing to invest the time, energy, and possibly money in acquiring English fluency

(Espenshade and Fu, 1997). The commitment to remain in the U.S. can be influenced by factors such as long-term investments in U.S.-specific capital, owning a home, and becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. Additionally, immigrants who face high costs of returning home have incentive to stay in the U.S., and are therefore more willing to invest in learning English (Greenwood and McDowell, 1986).

Other studies are based on the assumption that language skills are a form of investment in human capital. According to Chiswick and Miller, “[i]mmigrants who are not already proficient in the dominant destination language(s) make optimal investments in acquiring the dominant language. Investments in language skills may be made before or after immigration...” (Chiswick and Miller 2001, p. 391). These studies find similar determinants of English language proficiency. They identify individual-level factors, such as cultural and other traits that immigrants acquire before migrating to the U.S., endowments (such as educational attainment) they possess at the time they migrate, and their age at migration (Bialystok, 1997; Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Stevens, 1999). They also identify situational factors, such as distance of the U.S. from the country of origin and the linguistic distance between English and the native language (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Urciuoli, 1995).

ESL Program Effectiveness

ESL programs are as varied as the organizations that provide them (Guth, 1993). Though it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of individual ESL programs themselves (Nelson, 1984), studies that have evaluated students’ language proficiency

have shown that ESL programs are effective (d'Anglejan, 1986). As varied as the programs are, they all have similarities. These similarities allow researchers to compare methods among different ESL programs in order to evaluate the efficacy of those methods. For example, some ESL programs employ minimally trained bilingual teachers whereas some employ pedagogically trained native English speakers. Some programs restrict students from using their native language while others encourage it, and some programs use a repetitive style while others focus on a dialogue-based style (Nelson, 1984).

There are four basic types of adult ESL programs: community-based organizations, community college, work-place literacy programs, and adult schools (Guth, 1993). Community-based organizations are usually staffed by community members (Guth, 1993). The instructors are often well-tuned to the needs of the students and often speak the same language as the population they serve (Guth, 1993). Community colleges tend to serve a larger number of students who usually go on for further academic work (Guth, 1993). Work-place literacy programs are typically located in the work place and provide job-specific language and literacy skills (Guth, 1993). Adult school programs are the most similar to community-based organizations. However, they draw from a wider area than community-based organizations and frequently have a diverse mix of students (Guth, 1993). This mix of students gives adult schools the added challenge of providing appropriate ESL materials to all students (Guth, 1993). The educational approach each program uses is dependent on the program's philosophy and, many times, on the source of their funding. For

example, work-place literacy programs are influenced by the employers' agenda (Guth, 1993).

Because of the many different types of ESL programs and their different objectives and views on language proficiency, there is no specific methodology for evaluating ESL programs (Beretta, 1986). For example, a work-place literacy program whose focus is to provide job-specific language and literacy skills may be effective at doing so, but the students may not necessarily be proficient in conversational English. However, a study conducted shows that students who attend language classes typically retain the language skills learned in the classroom even after their program has ended (d'Anglejan, Painchaud, & Renaud, 1986). This study evaluated 81 students' communicative abilities. Two evaluations were given: the first was given two weeks before the end of the program; the second was given six months after the students left the program (d'Anglejan, Painchaud, & Renaud, 1986). The study showed that 78 of the 81 students, or 96%, retained their original language abilities or improved (d'Anglejan, Painchaud, & Renaud, 1986). Though the study showed that, by the end of the program, not all students were proficient enough to compete with native speakers in the job market, the study also showed that language instruction served as a foundation for further language development as those who were least proficient showed the most growth over the six-month period (d'Anglejan, Painchaud, & Renaud, 1986).

ESL programs are effective at improving the communication abilities of its students, but not all methods are as effective as others. One method is the use of technology to improve reading comprehension in non-native English-speaking

students. Studies have found that programs that include computer-assisted instruction are not more effective than similar programs that do not use computers as a supplement to instruction (Kleinmann, 1987).

The uses of a mechanical teaching style versus a communicative style as instructional methods have also been studied. The mechanical style involves more repetition, language drills, and correction of pronunciation with little interaction or informal dialogue between the teacher and student (Nelson, Lomax, & Perlman, 1984). The communicative style involves eliciting responses from students through questions, and correction of grammatical errors rather than pronunciation errors (Nelson, Lomax, & Perlman, 1984). A study involving adult ESL students revealed that the communicative style was more effective than the mechanical style (Nelson, Lomax, & Perlman, 1984). Not only did the communicative style contribute to the students' language proficiency, but also it positively affected the students' motivation and attitude.

Studies have also compared the use and efficacy of English-only instruction versus bilingual instruction. According to Phillipson (1992), in the English language teaching community, five basic principles are commonly accepted as the unofficial rules of English language teaching:

- English is best taught monolingually;
- the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker;
- the earlier English is taught, the better the results;
- the more English is taught, the better the results; and

- if other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop
(Phillipson, 1992).

However, in an informal survey conducted at a Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) conference asking whether ESL students should be allowed to use their native language in the classroom, only 20% of respondents gave an unqualified yes (Auerbach, 1993). Though excluding the students' native language is seen as unrealistic, many teachers feel guilty about allowing it to happen in their class (Auerbach, 1993).

Research and practice, however, support allowing students to use their native language in the classroom (Auerbach, 1993). Incorporating students' native language not only facilitates English proficiency, but also the students' native language literacy (Rivera, 1999). A 1991 study found that allowing the use of the students' native language as well as English facilitated students' transition to English (Auerbach, 1993). According to Auerbach, observed students made very little progress in two to three years in a monolingual classroom, but once a bilingual approach was introduced, their progress was rapid (Auerbach, 1993). Teachers have found that allowing students to use their native language supported a gradual, developmental process (Auerbach, 1993). When students were allowed to use their native language, they eventually became comfortable taking risks with English, and as their English skills improved, the use of their native language naturally dropped off (Auerbach, 1993).

Bilingual instruction also has the added benefit of attracting students who are non-literate and non-schooled in their native language (Auerbach, 1993). Students who had once dropped out of a monolingual class, returned when they learned that classes

were being offered in their native language (Auerbach, 1993). By using a bilingual approach, language and culture shock were alleviated (Auerbach, 1993) and the students were much less intimidated. Students are also less intimidated when their ESL teacher is not a native English speaker.

Though it is a commonly accepted principle that the ideal ESL teacher is a native English speaker, studies show that a minimally trained non-native English-speaking teacher is at least as effective as a pedagogically-trained native English-speaking teacher (Auerbach, 1993). The rationale has been that native English speakers, because of their knowledge of the language, are better able to teach English than those who are not native English speakers. Along with training, native English speakers' fluency, appropriate use of the language, and knowledge of the cultural connotations have supported the proposition that native English speakers are better suited to teach the language (Auerbach, 1993). However, non-native English teachers can acquire these traits as well as ESL pedagogy through appropriate training (Phillipson, 1992). Further, non-native English speakers have an advantage that native speakers do not. Non-native speakers have gone through the process of learning English and have "insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners," (Phillipson, 1992). This insight, along with the ability to speak the students' native language can help alleviate the intimidation and culture shock that many ESL students feel, thus reducing a barrier to participation.

Factors Affecting ESL Participation

ESL programs are generally effective. As studies have shown, when Hispanics attend ESL classes, their language proficiency improves. There are also a variety of ESL classes for Hispanics to choose from depending on their needs. The biggest problem, then, is a lack of participation. In a 1995 survey, only 11% of over 12,000 respondents had participated in ESL classes in the past 12 months (McArthur, 1998). In order to address this problem, ESL programs must first determine the factors affecting ESL participation. Many qualitative studies have been conducted to determine the factors affecting participation in adult basic education classes, but few have specifically studied factors affecting ESL participation. By comparing the deterrents to participation in adult basic education to the deterrents to participation in ESL classes, we can determine the most significant deterrents to participation in ESL classes.

Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) describe six factors that deter participation in adult education: lack of confidence, lack of course relevance, time constraints, low personal priority, cost, and personal problems. Hayes (1989) describes four factors that deter participation specifically in ESL programs: self/school incongruence, low self-confidence, lack of access to classes, and situational constraints. Though lack of course relevance is not listed as a factor that deters Hispanic participation in ESL programs, according to Hayes (1989), the accessibility of Spanish media reduces the need to learn English. This may also reduce the interest in participating in ESL classes. A survey reported that almost half of people who were nonparticipants in

ESL classes who were also uninterested in classes self-reported to reading English “not well” or “not at all” (Mc Arthur, 1998).

Self/school incongruence is analogous to low personal priority. Self/school incongruence describes the perceived need for classes versus the benefits of classes. This barrier was ranked fairly low both in studies that focused on participation in adult basic education (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985) and in those that focused on participation in ESL classes (Hayes, 1989). Hispanics in the study did not perceive a low need to study English or a low benefit from doing so. In short, they understood the importance and benefit of attending ESL classes in order to learn English. One variable that ranked highly in this category was answering questions in class. Many of the Hispanics felt deterred by the thought of answering questions in class (Hayes, 1989), which could be related to a lack of confidence.

Lack of confidence describes barriers such as self-doubt, low academic self-esteem, and a lack of encouragement from friends and family (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985). This barrier was ranked low in studies that focused on participation in adult basic education (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985) but high in studies that focused on Hispanic participation in ESL programs (Hayes, 1989), suggesting that Hispanics are more deterred than other groups from taking adult education classes because of low confidence. A factor that might contribute to low academic self-esteem in Hispanics is a lack of literacy in their native language, which may be attributable to a lack of formal schooling. Students who lack literacy skills in their native language may not have had a formal education or may have had a negative school experience (Beder, 1990). Students who are unfamiliar with the school setting

are also unfamiliar with what to expect from classes (Hayes, 1989). They expect to make fast progress, become disheartened when they are not making progress quickly enough, and then drop out.

Lack of access to classes was not a barrier in studies that focused on participation in adult basic education, but it was a barrier in studies that focused on participation in ESL classes. Specifically, a lack of knowledge of available ESL classes was cited as an important barrier to program participation (Hayes, 1989). This is supported by a 1998 survey in which 59% of the three million adults who had not participated in ESL classes responded that they were interested in taking classes, but did not know of any classes (McArthur, 1998).

Situational and time constraints were the highest-ranking deterrents to participation in ESL classes as well as in adult basic education classes (Hayes, 1989; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985). Factors such as finding a job, and not having time for school were among the most significant barriers in this category as well as the study as a whole (Hayes, 1989). In a 1998 study, 40% of those who were aware of ESL classes responded that a lack of financial resources was the main barrier to participation, 26% responded that the cost of the class was the main barrier, and 23% responded that childcare/transportation was the main barrier (McArthur, 1998). All three studies showed that situational and time constraints were the largest barriers to participation.

Different types of people were more affected by certain barriers to participation than others. Mothers of young children are more deterred by a lack of time because of childcare responsibilities, and by the financial difficulties they experience because of

unemployment (Hayes, 1988). Older adults are deterred by their overall diminished perception of a need for education for career development (Hayes, 1988). Younger adults were more deterred by their negative educational experiences than by work or family commitments (Hayes, 1988).

By comparing the deterrents to participation in adult basic education to the deterrents to participation in ESL classes, we can determine some of the significant deterrents to participation in ESL classes. According to previous studies, the significant barriers to participation in ESL classes are time and situational constraints, such as lack of childcare or transportation, and lack of access to classes. By identifying the most significant barriers to certain groups of people, ESL programs can make changes to their programs in order to accommodate and possibly eliminate some barriers to participation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the deterrents adult Hispanic immigrants face in participating in and completing English as a second language (ESL) programs. Many Hispanics do not take advantage of, or do not successfully complete, ESL classes (Hayes, 1989). Little research has been conducted to explain this lack of participation, particularly from the participants' point of view. Exploring and identifying specific deterrents to adult Hispanic participation in ESL programs in order to make those programs more effective at increasing Hispanic participation and their English skills may be best accomplished by involving Hispanics directly in the discourse. This may provide useful information for ESL program directors and have policy implications for ESL programs interested in increasing English fluency among Hispanics.

This study used a qualitative research method, specifically a combination of focus groups and individual interviews. Individual and focus group interviews are two of the most common methods used in qualitative research (Patton, 1980; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research methods are often used when researchers seek to establish common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). Focus groups, in particular, are valuable in that they take advantage of a group's interactions to "produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1988). Through the interviewing process, the researcher has access to the participants, their experiences and perceptions, and how those experiences and perceptions affect them (Gubrium &

Holstein, 2001). The combination of focus group and individual interviews serves to strengthen the research project, as the topics discussed in the focus groups serve as a guide to the individual interviews (Morgan 1988).

Design

I conducted focus group interviews and individual interviews to identify the deterrents adult Hispanic immigrants face in participating in and completing ESL programs. I chose to conduct focus group interviews because ESL students are sometimes hesitant to discuss the difficulties they have experienced in learning English, and the focus group setting is often ideal for researching sensitive topics (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, and Robson, 2001). In a focus group setting, “participants may feel more relaxed and less inhibited in the co-presence of friends,” (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, and Robson, 2001).

I first conducted focus group interviews with students, which provided me with a rich data set pertaining to the deterrents the students have faced in participating in ESL programs. The focus groups also provided a starting point and direction for conducting individual telephone interviews, from which I could get more specific or personal opinions. I conducted individual interviews of current students as well as students who had left an ESL program without completing it. By interviewing current as well as former students, I was able to learn about the specific deterrents to both program participation and retention. Finally, I interviewed program instructors and administrators. By interviewing students as well as teachers and administrators, I was

able to compare and contrast their insights and opinions on the factors affecting participation and retention.

Participants

The participants were students currently enrolled in an ESL program, students who had previously been enrolled but had not completed a program, program instructors, and program administrators. I conducted three focus groups and sixteen individual interviews. I conducted the three focus groups with students from the ESL program From Dreams to Reality (FDR) Institute. I then conducted four interviews with students who were currently enrolled in the FDR Institute, four interviews with students who were currently enrolled in the Clark County Library District's Computer Assisted Literacy in Libraries (CALL) ESL program, and four students who were previously enrolled, but left the FDR Institute's ESL program without completing it. Finally, I interviewed two program administrators and two instructors, one of each from each of the two program sites.

Participation in the focus groups and interviews was voluntary. I contacted the FDR Institute and the CALL program to obtain permission to speak to classes and to present the students with the study topic. I then visited the program sites and gave a short presentation on the study, and its purpose. Those students who wanted to participate in the study were asked to write their names on a focus group or individual interview sign-up sheet. The students who volunteered for individual telephone interviews were asked to write their phone numbers along with a time that would be convenient for them. The FDR Institute provided telephone numbers of ten, randomly

chosen, former students who had not completed the program. Out of the ten former students, four agreed to participate in the study.

ESL Program Sites

I conducted the study with students, instructors, and administrators from two large ESL programs in Las Vegas, Nevada: The FDR Institute and the CALL program. I chose these two programs because they are both large, well-known ESL programs, have different sites located throughout the city, and provide daytime and nighttime classes. These factors were important in providing access to a large and varied sample of Hispanic immigrants interested in learning English. Furthermore, these two programs in many ways represent the differing methods and philosophies of ESL instruction relating to the use of technology, mechanical versus communicative instruction, English versus bilingual instruction, and pedagogically trained native-English speaking instructors versus native Spanish-speaking instructors. These two programs provide a sort of cross section of Las Vegas ESL programs, and I expected to find and explore at each site different dimensions of deterrents to ESL program participation.

The FDR Institute is one of the largest private ESL programs in Las Vegas and has been providing ESL classes since 1991. Students pay \$100 per eight-week level, but some students may receive a scholarship based on financial need. The program serves approximately 400 students daily. The classes are from Monday to Friday for two hours per day. The FDR Institute gives four classes during the day: two classes from 9:00 am to 11:00 am and two classes from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. It also gives four

classes in the evening: two classes from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm and two classes from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

There are eight levels in the program and each level lasts eight weeks (for a total of 640 hours). Students may initially take an entrance exam to determine their initial level and must pass exams at the end of each level in order to progress to the next. The beginning levels teach basic skills such as numbers, greetings, and the verbs in the present tense. The intermediate levels focus on teaching regular and irregular verbs in the past and past participle tenses and applying them to conversations that the students have in class. The advanced levels are conversational classes and focus on more complicated English grammar structures and idiomatic expressions. The beginning classes are given mostly in Spanish, the intermediate classes are mostly in English, and the advanced classes are only in English. All FDR instructors are native Spanish speakers. The program does not use technology-assisted learning.

The CALL program is a medium-sized, city-managed, free ESL program that offers classes at various locations throughout the city. The CALL program consists of one six-week level and classes meet four times a week for three-hour class sessions. In order for students to receive a certificate of completion, students must have attended a minimum of 40 hours (out of 72). The CALL program focuses on teaching employability skills and computer literacy. It alternates between teacher-centered classes and computer lab classes. Students attending the CALL program learn basic conversation such as greetings and talking about their family. They also learn how to apply for a job and learn basic computer skills. The classes are given only in English and the instructors are discouraged from speaking to their students in Spanish.

Data Collection

In accordance with accepted qualitative research practice (Krueger and Casey, 2000), I conducted three focus groups, each of six to ten participants, and sixteen individual qualitative interviews designed to explore deterrents to ESL program participation and retention among adult Hispanic immigrants.

The identification of a sufficiently large group of non-English-speaking Hispanic adults among the general population posed logistical problems for this first stage of the study. The participants of the focus groups were therefore drawn from Hispanic adults currently participating in ESL classes. The participants were asked what deterrents they had experienced before they began to attend classes. This sample could provide information about the most appropriate deterrents for program directors and instructors to address, which according to Hayes (1989), are “those that had the potential to be modified, as evidenced by the ultimate participation of the respondents, yet were identified as barriers important enough to prevent previous participation.”

The focus group interviews and individual interviews were conducted in June 2010. Each focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes and each individual interview lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The first focus group had nine participants, and the second and third focus groups had seven participants each. Two focus groups were conducted after morning classes and one was conducted before an evening class in order to explore possible differences in deterrents to participation between daytime and nighttime students. The morning focus groups were conducted after the students’ regularly scheduled classes and the evening focus group was conducted before. All of the focus groups were conducted and video-recorded in a

classroom. The members of each focus group were classmates. Having the participants come from the same class helped the participants' feel comfortable and enabled them to be less inhibited about their responses. The participants were asked a variety of questions in order to explore their experiences. In accordance with standard focus-group practice (Krueger and Casey, 2000), predetermined questions were asked, but the conversation was designed to be flexible, with follow-up questions adapted to each particular focus group's responses. Each of the focus group and individual interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The basic questions asked in all focus groups were:

- 1) What obstacles or deterrents to participation in ESL programs, if any, have you experienced?
- 2) Do you know someone else who has experienced obstacles or deterrents to participation in English programs? If so, what were they?
- 3) Have you or someone you know left an English program without completing it? What were some reasons for this?
- 4) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics participate?
- 5) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics successfully complete the program?

The basic questions asked in individual interviews with current students were:

- 1) What obstacles or deterrents to participation in ESL programs, if any, have you experienced?
- 2) What do you think ESL programs can do to help Hispanics participate?

The basic questions asked in individual interviews with former students were:

- 1) What were some of the reasons for leaving the program?
- 2) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics successfully complete the courses?

I conducted individual interviews of FDR instructors and administrators in order to explore their beliefs about deterrents to ESL program participation and completion. As in the focus groups, I facilitated discussion through open-ended questions. These interviews were conducted in English.

- 1) What do you think are some obstacles or deterrents to Hispanic participation in ESL programs?
- 2) What do you think are some obstacles or deterrents to the successful completion of ESL programs among Hispanics?
- 3) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics participate?
- 4) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics successfully complete the program?

I began each focus group and individual interview session by briefly explaining the process and purpose of the study. I also reminded them that the focus group would be video recorded. Prior to the focus groups, each participant read and signed the informed consent form agreeing to a) participate in the focus group and b) to be video recorded. Prior to the individual telephone interviews, also I briefly explained the process and purpose of the study and informed the interviewee that the conversation would be recorded. I then read the informed consent agreement to the participant and received their oral agreement to participate in the interview and be audio recorded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of data, of making an interpretation of its larger meaning (Creswell, 2009). This process involves several components (Creswell, 2009). Creswell's (2009) six-step strategy for data analysis, which this study followed, is:

- Organizing and preparing the data
- Reading through the data to obtain a general sense of the information
- Coding the data and categorizing them
- Generating themes for analysis
- Preparing the data for the qualitative narrative
- Interpreting the data; diverging from or confirming past information

After conducting the focus groups and interviews, I transcribed the video and audio recordings and then translated the students' transcriptions to English (maintaining, as much as possible, the participants' original thought as well as linguistic style). After a careful review of the transcriptions, I found commonalities among the participants' responses and experiences, as well as issues about which they had expressed strong agreement or enthusiasm. The commonalities and the issues they felt were important became central themes (e.g. personal and institutional deterrents to participation, person and institutional deterrents to retention). After identifying the central themes, I used the transcriptions to find various categories related to the central themes (e.g. lack of childcare, work commitments, lack of money). I then used the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO, to help organize the data by coding and categorizing the transcriptions. As noted above, I already had a sense of what the prevailing themes

were after the interviews. I used these themes to code the transcriptions. Through the software, I was able to search for each mention of any given theme. The software provided statistical information regarding the frequency of any theme's mention and sorted them together for easy reference. Furthermore, NVIVO allowed me to run a search of the most frequent terms. Looking at this list mostly confirmed what I had thought to be the main themes.

Limitations of the Study

This study was not without some limitations. First, the sample size was limited in that the participants were taken from two ESL programs in the city. However, the two ESL programs from which participants were selected were differently structured; the FDR Institute is a private for-fee ESL program and the CALL program is a free public program. Second, the qualitative interviews were conducted over the telephone. Studies have shown that in-person interviewing yields slightly better data than telephone interviewing and that respondents are more “acquiescent, evasive, and extreme in their responses in telephone interviews,” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). While I found this to be somewhat true with the interviews of former students as they were not expecting a phone call for this study, the current students I interviewed were not evasive or acquiescent. Furthermore, the data I obtained from both current and former students provided unique experiences and perspectives that positively contributed to the study. Lastly, identifying and contacting participants who had been completely deterred from attending ESL classes posed a logistical problem. Therefore, all the participants, other than the instructors and administrators, were or had been

enrolled in an ESL program, and had thus overcome any potential deterrents to participation. Although the participants in the study had joined ESL programs, all of them had at one time experienced deterrents to doing so and were able to provide useful information about those experiences.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Participant Background

A total of thirty-nine people were interviewed in this study. Two of the participants were ESL program administrators and two of the participants were ESL instructors. Four of the participants were former ESL program students who did not complete the ESL program at the FDR Institute. The thirty-one remaining participants were ESL students who were attending ESL classes while the study was conducted. The age range for the student participants was from 20 to 62. Fourteen student participants were male and twenty-one were female. Of the twenty-one female student participants (both current and former students), thirteen were mothers of school-aged children and one identified herself as a single mother.

The level of English fluency was varied among the student participants. Eleven of the thirty-one current students were in beginning-level ESL classes. This includes the four students from the CALL program. Eleven current students were in intermediate classes and had either passed an oral and written placement exam created by the FDR program or had successfully completed the first two or three levels at the FDR Institute. Nine current students were in advanced classes and had attended the FDR Institute for at least forty weeks and completed at least five levels.

Two focus groups were conducted after morning classes and one was conducted before an evening class in order to explore possible differences in deterrents between daytime and nighttime students. Interestingly, the majority of the participants in the morning focus groups were women and the majority of the participants in the evening

focus group were men. According to an FDR program instructor, the majority of students who attend morning classes are women, primarily mothers of school-aged children, and the majority of students who attend evening classes are men.

Summary of the Interviews

The basic questions asked during the interviews were:

- 1) What obstacles or deterrents to participation in ESL programs, if any, have you experienced?
- 2) Do you know someone else who has experienced obstacles or deterrents to participation in English programs? If so, what were they?
- 3) Have you or someone you know left an English program without completing it? What were some reasons for this?
- 4) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics participate?
- 5) What do you think English programs can do to help Hispanics successfully complete the program?

The research questions and responses can be categorized into three major themes: deterrents to participation, deterrents to retention, and participant recommendations. Several sub-themes were discovered as deterrents to participation and retention. These themes were identified in the focus groups and individual interviews as participants frequently mentioned and agreed upon certain ideas.

Deterrents to Participation in ESL Programs

Nine sub-themes related to deterrents to participation in ESL programs were discovered. They can be categorized into two groups: personal factors and institutional, or program-based, factors. The five personal deterrents are: a perceived lack of need for classes, fear related to being deported, family commitments, job commitments, a lack of money, and a lack of transportation. The four institutional deterrents are: lack of services such as childcare, inaccessible class schedules, lack of information regarding ESL schools, and prohibitive costs.

Deterrents to ESL Program Participation

Personal	Institutional
1) Lack of need	1) Lack of services (e.g., childcare)
2) Fear of being deported	2) Inaccessible class schedules
3) Lack of time	3) Lack of information
4) Lack of money	4) Prohibitive cost
5) Lack of transportation	

Personal Deterrents

1) Lack of Need

Unsurprisingly, participants who did not perceive a need to learn English were less likely to attend ESL classes. For some students in the study, this lack of need was attributed to not being employed, having only Spanish speaking acquaintances, or living in communities where Spanish is the primary language. One participant said, “it would be very good for there not to be so many places where Spanish is spoken because it makes it easy for us not to try to learn English.” For most who experienced

this deterrent, however, even employment did not necessarily increase their need for English. One participant, who has lived and worked in the United States for seven years, said:

“In landscaping, for example, everyone speaks Spanish, so you don’t need English. If you see, for example, that your boss speaks English, you want to learn it, too. You try harder. But in landscaping, where the foreman usually speaks Spanish, you ask yourself, ‘why learn English?’”

Several students expressed that the greater the need to learn English for work, the more motivated they become to attend classes:

“I worked at a restaurant, in the kitchen and I only spoke Spanish. And I was coming to school and studying and doing my homework... a little. When I started working at an electric company, it was a lot harder because they spoke English. But it made me work harder to learn. I started coming to school everyday.”

Needing English language skills for work, however, is not enough to guarantee a need to learn English, and therefore, does not in itself eliminate this deterrent to participation. Some Hispanic immigrants develop work-related English skills. That is, they can communicate effectively for work purposes, but they are not proficient in English:

“Sometimes it seems enough to speak the English you need for work. So you develop a work vocabulary. I can talk to my boss about things related to work, but if I go to the doctor, and he tells me to raise my

arm, for example, I don't understand him. But in regular situations, it seems that it's enough to speak just what you need at work.”

2) Fear of Being Deported

Because many Hispanic ESL students are undocumented immigrants, fear can also be a deterrent to program participation. Several students shared the fear they experience on a daily basis due to their citizenship status. One woman in a focus group said that she sometimes decides not to go out for fear that she might get a traffic ticket and that the police officer might discover that she is undocumented and deport her. Several other students nodded in agreement. The fear of this potential risk seems to increase when they consider large Hispanic gatherings, such as at ESL schools, which they fear might attract unwanted attention.

“I've lived here for two years, and I didn't know about any schools. Sometimes, you arrive in the U.S., and you don't know anything and you don't know anything about English schools. And sometimes we're scared to look because we're illegal. And we think these opportunities don't exist for illegals. So we're too scared to look for school information.”

The ESL instructors and administrators have also noted that Hispanics' fear of being deported is a deterrent to participation.

“Often they ask what paperwork or what documentation they need to submit. I think that they're afraid of the citizenship component of participating in public services.”

3) Lack of Time

Many students also perceived a lack of time as a deterrent to program participation. This lack of time is principally connected to work and family (and, in particular, children) commitments. A man said, “Many times, it’s a question of time. You have work, children, a family. You have so many things to do, that it’s hard to study, to go to school everyday.” Another participant said, “I have two jobs because I have to help my family and I have to pay my expenses.”

Furthermore, most of the women in the study agreed that, because of traditional Hispanic culture, in which the woman does all the housework, this deterrent was particularly applicable to them:

“I think we women have more responsibilities. We have to work, cook, clean, and help the kids with their homework. We’re busier than men. Men only go to work and go home to relax. This makes it difficult for us to go to class, and if we do go to class, it makes it difficult for us to do our homework and to study.”

“Being a single mother, we get double responsibilities because we have to work, take care of the kids, be a mother and father because I have to take them to school, provide for them, get them shoes, all the essentials.”

“The obstacle for me was that I came to this country with the sole idea of making money. I had two jobs, so at what time could I go to class? I used to work from 4:30 am until 8:00 or 9:00 at night.”

“The most common obstacle is the lack of time or a change at work. One has to work and also wants to learn English, but the schedules aren’t compatible and we have to try to see how we can make work and school schedules compatible.”

“Because here, in this state, compared with California or other states, here work is twenty-four hours a day.”

“My biggest obstacle was my work schedule. I didn’t get to class on time. Here in this program, we’re required to get to class on time and to come the four days a week, but, from the beginning, my biggest problem was work.”

Teachers and administrators also acknowledged family and work commitments as a deterrent to participation. Hispanics may have the desire to learn English, but some do not have the time to dedicate to going to English classes while working and raising a family.

Though family responsibilities can take away time that could otherwise be used to participate in ESL programs, families can also be a source of motivation to learn English. A mother said, “I started studying because of my daughter, to help her study. But she learned English fast. She beat me! But that motivates me to learn English. She motivates me.”

4) Lack of Money

Lack of money was a minor deterrent to participation. Some students linked work commitments with a lack of money. For some, participating in ESL classes was not a

priority when they were worried about paying their own bills and helping their family in their native country:

“I have two jobs because I have to help my family [in my country] and I have to pay my expenses.”

“Many times it comes down to economic reasons. ‘I don’t have money for class or transportation.’ Because you have to pay for class and also the time you’re in class is time you can’t be working.”

5) Lack of Transportation

Another minor deterrent to program participation was a lack of transportation. Many students, especially those who have just arrived in the United States, do not have cars or cannot afford cars and use public transportation to travel throughout the city. This can be a deterrent to those who live far from available ESL classes as it would cost them time to travel to and from classes.

Institutional Deterrents

1) Lack of Services

The students also expressed several institutional factors that had prevented them from participating in ESL programs in the past. Many voiced that a lack of services at the school site, such as computer-aided learning or computer literacy classes deterred them from participating. Some said that they needed computer skills as much or more than English skills, and so they had taken the time to take computer classes before

studying English, though they would have preferred to study both together at the same site if it had been possible.

Childcare, however, is the service that was most strongly called for, particularly among the women in the evening groups. The women in the morning group also mentioned this but were not as passionate as those in the evening, most likely because they go to class while their children are in school, and thus, require childcare to a lesser extent. A mother in the evening group said:

“I’m a mother too and this is the second time I’ve started classes. I didn’t finish the first time because my kids were little. Especially moms because we’re the ones who have to take care of the kids. If we leave them alone at home, something can happen. I think that’s why a lot of immigrants don’t study English because they go from work directly home to take care of the kids. I think it’s very important, especially for moms.”

“We have kids, and in my case, I have granddaughters to take care of. I leave them with somebody. If there were a place where they could take care of our children for the two hours of class.”

“At work, the majority of my coworkers are women, and we work nights... I tell them to study and they say, ‘I can’t, I don’t have anybody to take care of the kids.’ Most of them tell me that. ‘I have little kids from two to four years old,’ for example, ‘and they’re not in school, and I don’t know where to take them.’ It’s always, always been like that, at least in my job.”

The program administrators and instructors also identified a lack of childcare as a deterrent to participation. Neither the FDR Institute nor the CALL program offer childcare and the programs have lost potential students because of a lack of this service.

2) Inaccessible Class Schedules

Many of the students also fault inaccessible class schedules as a reason for not joining an ESL program earlier. One student in a focus group summarized the groups thoughts amid nods of agreement, “Some schools just don’t have flexible schedules... You get off work, and they don’t have any classes at that time.” This may be particularly relevant in a 24-hour city, such as Las Vegas, where people work around the clock and many services are only provided during regular business hours. Some Hispanic immigrants, for example, work during the day and would like to study at night but are unable to because their nearby ESL school only operates in the morning.

“I didn’t go to those schools because of the schedule...My work schedule is not fixed, in construction, there are times that I get out later and can’t make it to class.”

“They didn’t have classes at the time I needed, I couldn’t go because of the class schedule.”

“Sometimes we’re working during the class times offered by the school, or sometimes we’re working at 5:00 pm and we can’t make it to a 5:00 pm class, which may be the time that the level you’re in is offered. So, one has to wait until that level is offered at a good time.”

3) Lack of Information

Students also agreed that a lack of information is a deterrent to program participation. Many felt, though a few disagreed, that there is not enough information about ESL programs available to Hispanic immigrants, or perhaps that this information was not disseminated through channels that would reach them (e.g., Spanish newspapers, radio and television advertisements, or advertisements in Spanish grocery stores).

“When I came here, no one told me that we could study English. I didn’t know. A friend finally told me after I had been here for a year.”

“I got here, and I didn’t know where any ESL classes were. I couldn’t participate in anything. I just now found out about the classes.”

“I always wanted to study English since I came here, but the problem was that I didn’t have information about where the schools were. I didn’t know where to look for them. It wasn’t until five years later that a friend told me that these classes existed.”

“I didn’t have any information either. I also found out about this program through my sister, who in turn, found out from a friend.

Information is lacking. People only know certain areas and the information needs to be disseminated throughout the city.”

“I live close and I didn’t know about this school, and I’m close.”

“Well, when I came to this country, the first obstacle that I encountered is that I couldn’t find a place, I couldn’t find information about a school where I could learn English.”

Many of the students mentioned that they only heard about ESL programs through friends or family. Very few participants mentioned radio or newspaper advertisements.

4) Prohibitive Cost

Some students had also been deterred from participating in an ESL program, or knew others who had been, because of the class fees. When asked if they knew that free ESL classes are offered at different schools, most said that they did, but that those classes were known to be ineffective.

“I studied in Arizona and the schools were really expensive.”

“It’s sometimes the cost.”

“There aren’t a lot of accessible schools that offer classes at a low cost.”

“I started my classes at the community college and I went there for two levels. And one of my problems was that, for me, it was a little expensive.”

Deterrents to Retention in ESL Programs

Eleven major themes related to deterrents to retention in ESL programs were discovered. These eleven themes can also be categorized into two groups: personal factors and institutional factors. The five personal deterrents are: a perceived lack of need for further improvement, psychological fear, a changing work schedule, lack of money, and family commitments. The six institutional deterrents are: inflexible class

schedules and rules, a lack of motivational practices, lack of bilingual instruction, lack of structured levels and progression, a low quality of instruction, and a lack of childcare.

Personal	Institutional
1) Lack of need for further improvement	1) Inflexible class schedules and rules
2) Psychological fear	2) Lack of motivational practices
3) Changing work schedule	3) Lack of bilingual instruction
4) Lack of money	4) Lack of structured levels and progression
5) Family commitments	5) Low quality of instruction
	6) Lack of childcare

Personal Deterrents

1) Lack of Need for Further Improvement

Every student, English speaker or otherwise, has different educational goals. Oftentimes, Hispanic ESL students are not interested in completing an entire course, but, rather, learning what they feel is enough English for their daily lives. Thus, though they have not successfully accomplished the program goals, they have accomplished their personal goals. Most of the participants agreed that they knew someone who fit this case.

“I think a lot of people, a lot of my friends, anyway, quit classes because they just want to learn a little, enough to survive. As long as they understand and speak it a little. I have a lot of friends who get to the intermediate classes and quit because they’re satisfied. And they don’t think they need any more English for work. But they don’t really speak well.”

“Some guy from my job actually came and registered for the first level. But he didn’t come to the second and I asked him, ‘Hey, why don’t you go anymore?’ and he says, ‘Oh, it’s that I have two jobs and I already know what they were teaching.’ But they’re going to give you more information.”

Instructors and administrators also noted that this was a deterrent. The instructors and administrators linked students’ lack of need not only with the availability of Spanish media and large Spanish-speaking communities, but also with their plans to return to their country of origin. According to the CALL program administrator, one of the three major reasons that students give for leaving the program is that the student is returning to his country of origin.

“Many people come to live in the United States, but they long to return or go back to their home countries. The aim is just to make money, save as much as they can and then return. So they come to the United States, but they don’t come to live but just for a temporary time and then go back. With that mentality, they don’t feel, they don’t think, they will have to learn the language, which is a long-term process to start.”

“We get a lot of drop-outs from students saying... ‘I have to go back to Mexico to take care of so and so.’”

2) Psychological Fear

Personal fear of being mocked or answering incorrectly can also deter students from completing an ESL program. ESL classes, like many other foreign language

classes, are often based on repeating words and sentences, answering questions, and forming discussions. ESL students are often asked to repeat or answer a question in front of the class. This can be very stressful for some students, who are embarrassed to answer incorrectly. This stress is magnified if they feel others may mock them for answering incorrectly.

“I’ve noticed, unfortunately, that we, as Hispanics, mock other Hispanics who don’t speak English or don’t speak it well. Sometimes I notice that people in class make fun of other students, and I ask, ‘Why go to class? So people can make fun of me?’”

“You want to answer, ‘May I go to the bathroom?’ but you forget and you feel terrible, like they are going to scold you. How embarrassing!”

“The last time, when I left a program, I got a mental block, there was so much information that I had a mental block... They tell me to go up to the board and my nerves betray me.”

This stress and anxiety of being called on by the teacher makes attending class a daily torture ritual. Several participants said that either they or someone they knew had quit an English program due to stress and anxiety.

3) Changing Work Schedule

The vast majority of participants in all three of the focus groups had left an ESL program before completing it because of a change in work schedule. Though some had not experienced this, all knew someone who had. The participants were particularly passionate about this particularly frustrating issue.

“I was studying in the morning and working at night, but they changed my hours at work, and so I couldn’t finish because the school didn’t have night classes. I had to find a new school and start over a few months later. By that point, I had forgotten almost everything I had learned. That demotivated me a little.”

“I had problems with my job. I got laid off and then I got a job with a different schedule and I was working on call, I could barely go to class. So I thought that it didn’t make sense to pay to go one day a week or two. But I liked the class a lot and everything was really good and I was sad to leave because I was already in level five, I think. I’m thinking about returning maybe, but with my schedule...”

Another student’s similar experience demonstrates how detrimental work schedule changes can be to learning English.

“... my hours were different, and I couldn’t study. Then I registered again for classes but my job changed my schedule, and I left the classes again. This happened two or three times. It’s been seven years, and I really want to learn English; I don’t want to quit.”

In situations like these, ESL students have very little choice but to stop studying because they need to work to support themselves and their family; they cannot afford to leave their jobs or cannot refuse to work overtime.

“We had a test on Wednesday, and I couldn’t go because they changed my work hours. I told my supervisor that I had a class, a test, but he

just said he was busy. What could I do? I can't miss work. So I called the school and I said I couldn't go."

"They change my schedule and they told me, 'Triny, can you work overtime?' What I wanted was work."

"We don't say 'no.'"

When students leave the CALL program, they are asked to give a reason for their decision to leave. For the CALL program, a change in work schedule was the second most cited reason for leaving the program.

"Because they work in the casino industry, their hours shift with whatever the needs of the industry needs of their assistance."

"A lot of them are there when they first start off, they have nothing to do, they are not working at the time, and they are already in the process of trying to look for employment, and they get hired, and it conflicts with the time, and of course, they can't finish."

Institutional Deterrents

1) Inflexible Class Schedules and Rules

This institutional deterrent is related to students' inability to successfully complete their ESL classes due to a change in work schedule and the ESL school's inability to change the students class schedule. Participants shared experiences in which they detailed rigid class schedules and absence policies. Some participants also expressed displeasure with programs taking long breaks in between levels.

“There are schools where you’re not allowed more than two or three absences. And you can’t change your class schedule. So if they change your work schedule, you have to leave your classes.”

“I was going to the Community College. They don’t charge anything, but what I don’t like about that program is that we have eight weeks of classes and one month of vacation. I like classes to be continuous... I would forget everything I learned in the month we had off.”

“Many times schedules don’t coincide with the fact that people have to work and have to go to school.”

“If somebody enrolls in a morning class, they have to go in the morning; if they enroll in an evening class, they have to go in the evening. But let’s say that they change my schedule at work, I would like to be able to come here and ask the school if they could change me from evening to morning classes.”

2) Lack of Motivational Practices

A lack of program-based motivational practices was cited several times as a cause for leaving a program before successful completion. Participants shared experiences in which the school offered no celebration or even a certificate for level or program completion. This demotivated them because it negatively affected their sense of progress and advancement. They felt that schools such as these did not seem to care for the students and did not foster a sense of community.

“There are some teachers that encourage students to keep studying, that give you motivation to make an effort. And there are others who, I don’t know, don’t make people interested in school. And you know, just like there are people who make you feel good, who make you want to study more, there are people who take away your motivation. And many times we are left with those experiences and we don’t want to go to school.”

3) Lack of Bilingual Instruction

A large majority of participants cited a lack of bilingual instructors as a reason for leaving an ESL program. Many felt that they did not learn with an ESL instructor who did not speak Spanish.

“I lasted one month in a class with no Spanish and the class ended up with no students. Nobody went because nobody was understanding or learning.”

“They are really demanding. You get there and they say, ‘you’re not going to speak in Spanish.’ They demand a lot from you, they need to be more understanding with people.”

“[B]y the third day, the teacher didn’t talk to us in Spanish anymore. Nobody understood anything...it was a level one! But she said that we weren’t going to speak Spanish anymore... I went for two months, which was how long the level lasted. And, in the end, I didn’t understand anything. She wanted us to speak in English, but to me it

seemed really illogical. How do you want me to speak in English if you don't explain to me how to do it?"

"If they don't speak Spanish sometimes it's difficult to learn and understand and you get frustrated."

"For two months, I was going to a school where they don't speak Spanish. It was very difficult for me with the verbs and the different tenses, for example. The teacher didn't know how to explain it. Well, she explained it in English, but we didn't understand. Because you have all these tenses. Present and past are easy, but then the past participle, I don't... it was difficult for me when she didn't speak Spanish."

When asked about the importance of having a bilingual teacher in the beginning levels, all the participants agreed that it was "fundamental." The administrators and instructors also agreed that having a bilingual teacher was important to keeping students.

"I think that what might help a little bit is if the teachers were more bilingual. Because we're told not to speak Spanish because they're learning English and a lot of times we write what we speak on the board and they don't understand. And when they feel like they're not getting it, then they just give up. I think that if the teachers were bilingual they could explain it in Spanish as well as English it might help them a little bit more.

4) Lack of Structured Levels and Progression

In addition to a bilingual teacher, the participants felt that a lack of structured levels and progression contributed to their leaving an ESL program in the past. Some participants felt that some programs would “repeat the same thing over and over.”

“What interests me is to learn fast and to receive quality instruction because I asked other people and they said that many people go to those programs and a new person starts and then everybody has to go back to the beginning. So they’re not advancing, their program isn’t well defined or structured, so that was one of my concerns.”

“I want to make progress, and in those schools, that repeat and cover the same things over and over again, I won’t make progress. I want to really learn.”

5) Low Quality of Instruction

Many participants cited low quality of instruction as a reason for having quit an ESL program in the past. Their perception of the quality of instruction was primarily based on the teacher’s degree of concern for the students’ learning, the teacher’s ability and willingness to explain the material, a focus on teaching English, and the teacher’s ability to speak Spanish. The participants agreed that many ESL teachers do not seem to care about their student’s learning.

“I was in a school and the teacher told us, ‘copy the verbs. Conjugate the verbs. Memorize them.’ And I asked what they meant and how to pronounce them. And she told me, ‘starting today, only speak to me in

English.’ And I asked her, how I was supposed to speak to her in English if I don’t know it. That why I was going to class - to learn it because I don’t know it. How do you want me to speak to you in English? I came for you to teach me. It was cheap, though, only twenty dollars per year. But what was the point?”

“Sometimes the teacher doesn’t bother to explain anything or to answer your questions. They just want you to repeat and they want to do their own thing.”

“They only taught how to fill out job applications, no grammar.”

“I started to look for ESL classes and there was a program in a middle school close to my house, so I went. But they didn’t help me at all. I left the program exactly how I went it, with zero understanding. The class didn’t help me. I looked for another one close to my house, and it was the same thing.”

Some students have attended free ESL classes and felt that the classes did not provide a high quality of instruction. So, though cost is sometimes a deterrent, many students would prefer to pay for high quality classes than attend free low-quality classes.

“There are lots of schools that are free and I attended some of them, too. But I think it’s not, I don’t know, it’s not the same. It’s not at the same level of quality... and there are lots of people who go and don’t take the English classes seriously.”

The teacher’s inability to explain material is perhaps why so many participants quit a program or know someone who has because the teacher was not bilingual in English

and Spanish. The students unanimously agreed that they prefer bilingual teachers because the teachers can explain in Spanish what they are learning in English. A student said:

“When the teacher doesn’t speak Spanish, the class doesn’t help. When we have a question, when we want to know what the teacher is saying, we can’t ask. It’s something that needs to be taken into consideration – bilingual people – so the student can learn. Because when a person only speaks one language, and you come, and, you don’t know anything. You’re like (shrugs and looks confused).”

Another student agreed and expressed why this is a deterrent to retention in an ESL program, “Then I was at a school where the teacher only spoke English. And I had a lot of questions about the present and past tenses, but she couldn’t answer my questions. And there were a lot of students there who had repeated the level two or three times and didn’t know anything. I felt I wasn’t learning anything, so I left. I felt I was wasting my time.”

Participant Recommendations

Based on their experiences, the participants offered what they believe would minimize these deterrents to ESL program participation and retention and would increase the probability of success for both ESL programs and students. To minimize deterrents to participation, they recommend: increasing the availability of, and disseminating in Hispanic circles, information regarding ESL programs; providing accessible and flexible (day and night) school hours; providing needed services,

especially childcare; and providing assurance that they will not be deported while attending classes. To minimize deterrents to program retention, the participants recommend: providing flexible school hours so they may change their class schedule if their work hours change; writing letters to employers requesting that they respect (as much as possible) the students' class schedules when making their work schedules; providing bilingual teachers; and creating a sense of community and celebrating student achievement through graduation ceremonies and certificates.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview

This qualitative study aimed to explore and identify the deterrents adult Hispanic immigrants face in participating in and completing ESL programs. I conducted three focus groups with current ESL students, twelve individual interviews with students or former students, and four interviews with program administrators and instructors. The study drew on existing literature relating to the effects of limited English language fluency, the importance of language proficiency in citizenship, factors affecting English language acquisition, ESL program effectiveness, and factors affecting ESL participation. The overarching question that the study explored was Hispanic immigrants' perceived obstacles to participation and completion of ESL programs. This section will summarize and discuss the results and provide recommendations for addressing the perceived obstacles and for future research.

The findings of this study were consistent with past research. In the focus group and individual interviews, nine major themes related to deterrents to participation in ESL programs were discovered and categorized into two groups: personal factors and institutional factors. The five personal deterrents are: a perceived lack of need for classes, fear related to being deported, lack of time due to family and job commitments, lack of money, and lack of transportation. The four institutional deterrents are: lack of services such as childcare, inaccessible class schedules, lack of information regarding ESL schools, and prohibitive costs.

Of these deterrents to participation, lack of time due to family and job commitments, lack of childcare, and lack of knowledge of or access to classes were the highest-ranking deterrents to participation. Again, these results were consistent with past studies that also showed that lack of knowledge of classes, family and job commitments, and a lack of childcare were barriers to participation.

Eleven major themes related to deterrents to retention in ESL programs were discovered and were likewise categorized. The five personal deterrents are: a perceived lack of need for further improvement, psychological fear, a changing work schedule, lack of money, and family commitments. The six institutional deterrents are: inflexible class schedules and rules, a lack of motivational practices, a low quality of instruction, lack of childcare, lack of bilingual instruction, and a lack of structured levels and progression. Of these deterrents to retention, a changing work schedule, lack of childcare, a low quality of instruction and lack of bilingual instruction were the highest-ranking deterrents to retention in this study. Of particular interest was participants' reaction and comments on what they perceived to be low quality teaching methods and their opinions about bilingual instruction.

Prior research has produced mixed results on various teaching methods. The results of this study indicate that, at least from the students' perspective, bilingual instructors and conversational classes with teacher interaction are preferable. Many of the participants cited low quality of instruction as a reason for having quit an ESL program in the past. Those who left an English program because of a perceived low quality of instruction noted that they felt that the programs they left were too repetitive, that insufficient progress was made, and that there was not enough teacher

interaction or guidance. This supports a previous study that preferred a communicative style over a mechanical, or more repetitive, teaching style. The study revealed that the communicative style was more effective than the mechanical style (Nelson, Lomax, & Perlman, 1984). Not only did the communicative style contribute to the students' language proficiency, it also positively affected the students' motivation and attitude.

This study also confirmed prior research supporting the employment of bilingual instruction. The students interviewed for this study unanimously agreed that they preferred classes in which the teacher was able to communicate and explain concepts in Spanish, and classes in which students were able to speak Spanish in the classroom. Furthermore, students felt less language and culture shock and were less intimidated in programs with bilingual English instructors and in programs in which students are able to speak Spanish in the classroom. This provides further support in favor of placing non-native English-speaking teachers, even those with less formal training, in ESL instructor positions, as prior studies have shown that these teachers are at least as effective as pedagogically trained native English-speaking teachers (Auerbach, 1993).

Recommendations

The information from this study may be useful to programs that aim to help Hispanics learn English. As stated above, the largest problem is not in ESL program efficacy, as generally ESL programs are effective, but in a lack of participation. ESL programs, then, should address and minimize the obstacles to participation that immigrants face. This includes more effective methods of disseminating information

to Hispanic circles, implementing child-care, and providing more flexible schedules. Providing flexible schedules is of particular importance in Las Vegas as it is a 24-hour city.

The participants themselves made recommendations, based on their experiences, that they felt would minimize these deterrents and maximize their potential for success in ESL programs. Some of the students' recommendations have not been previously identified and may be relatively easy to implement, such as increasing the availability of information regarding ESL programs (flyers and posters could be disseminated in Hispanic circles at little cost), providing assurance that they will not be deported while attending class, writing letters to employers requesting that they respect (as much as possible) the students' class schedules when making their work schedules, creating a sense of community and celebrating student achievement through graduation ceremonies and certificates, and, most importantly, employing bilingual instructors.

Many of the recommendations could be implemented without the need for additional resources. For example, by allowing students to alternate between already existing daytime and evening classes in order to accommodate changing work schedules, ESL programs would allow many students to continue their ESL education and would not incur any additional expenses. Implementing other recommendations, however, might require more resources than ESL programs have at their disposal. For example, providing more classes throughout the day, providing childcare services, and hiring and training more bilingual instructors would require additional funds. This might not be practicable, particularly in the case of public ESL programs. As Valentine and Skelton (2007) suggested, however, using public funds to promote

language rights is desirable, as it promotes equality among persons belonging to a state that functions through a primary language. As a linguistic minority, many Hispanic immigrants lack sufficient English-language skills to effectively engage in public deliberation and to participate in the political process. By providing to ESL programs the resources necessary to reduce the institutional factors that deter Hispanic immigrants from participating in or completing in English classes, the city would not only help current and future ESL students, but would enrich itself by developing in its residents the skills necessary to engage in public life.

The students' experiences, perceived deterrents, and recommendations can provide useful information for ESL program directors and administrators. Even by addressing one or a few of the obstacles that potential students face in participating and completing programs, ESL programs might be able to serve more students, thus increasing Hispanic English fluency.

Conclusion

Hispanics are the largest minority as well as immigrant group in the U.S. (2010 Census Data). This group has the lowest level of English fluency in the nation. Low levels of language proficiency have negative effects on their earnings, educational achievement, social status, representation in government, and assimilation into the dominant culture. Furthermore, a lack of English skills is a barrier to obtaining US citizenship and to participating in political discourse as a citizen. ESL programs could increase Hispanic immigrants' English fluency and could potentially alleviate the negative effects of their limited English skills.

Despite the consequences of their limited English proficiency, many Hispanics do not take advantage of, or do not successfully complete, ESL classes (Hayes, 1989). The potential benefits of ESL programs are, therefore, limited by low participation levels (Hayes, 1989). This study aimed to identify the obstacles Hispanic immigrants perceive to participation in ESL programs. Involving Hispanic immigrants directly in the discourse confirmed the information provided by previous studies and provided new information regarding the specific deterrents to ESL program participation and retention. It is this researcher's hope that the identification of these obstacles might help ESL programs in Las Vegas, Nevada to better address the needs of current or potential students.

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