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Assessment of ELL Written Language Progress in Designated ESL Noncredit Courses at the Community College Level

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Assessment of ELL Written Language Progress in Designated ESL Noncredit Courses at
the Community College Level

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
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Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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December 1, 2015

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Abstract

Assessment of the effect of targeted instruction of functional language skills for English language learners (ELL) enrolled in community college basic skills classes is important as community colleges continue to offer noncredit courses for ELL students designed to improve English skills. The Foundations Skills Committee at a community college in a rural setting in Northern California received a State of California grant to provide basic skills instruction, specifically grammar and sentence structure, to ELL. The present study evaluates the effect of Supplemental Instruction (SI) on improving functional skills in writing.

A review of the literature reveals that community college instructors need to understand and evaluate English as a Second Language (ESL) progress and performance. Accuracy in one's written language production is important as ESL students develop concrete skills in improving form and function in written language production.

Community college students on three campuses participated in the study. The ESL director constructed a questionnaire to measure student proficiency in specific written language skills and administered it to students to establish baseline data at the beginning of a specially designed course. The questionnaire was administered a second time at the conclusion of the course to evaluate student proficiency at the end of the semester.

Results of the study indicated that ESL students' improvement in their functional language skills was mixed. It was difficult to determine if students' functional language skills improved as a result of targeted instruction with the use of tutors, or other factors. Variables that influenced the results included geographic location, training of teachers and tutors, and initial language proficiency of ESL.

Keywords: functional language skills, ESL, community college, Supplemental Instruction

Chapter 1 Assessment of ESL Written Language Progress

The California Community College (CCC) system is committed to providing an accessible and affordable education and serving a mixed population. The 110 community colleges in California serve 2.9 million students (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2010, p.1).

CCC campuses serve both rural and urban communities, diverse cultures and a broad range of ages. The academic leadership of this widespread educational system developed a commitment to offer students 21st -century knowledge and skills to enter a competitive workforce. In addition, CCC instructors assess the readiness and academic ability of many students who plan to enroll in college-level math and English courses. Students transferring to a four-year institution from a CCC must fulfill college-level requirements.

The California Chancellor's Office (2006) reported "... 75 percent of incoming community college students arrive unprepared for college-level English and about 90 percent arrive unprepared for college-level math" (p. 1). State of California funding provided through the Basis Skills Initiative served as the incentive for the ESL faculty director to develop an evaluation process in the form of a questionnaire to measure ESL students' writing accuracy as part of their ESL course. Students enrolled in these classes on three separate community college campuses responded to the same questions at the beginning and at the end of the spring 2015 semester.

Statement of Problem

Many students who enroll in CCC are identified as needing basic skills instruction in English and/or ESL SI support. Arguably, these students are not ready to enter the competitive 21st -century workforce, negotiate academic challenges or meet college-level math and English

course requirements. Students who lack proficiency in English also struggle when taking college credit classes. Unless ESL students build language proficiency in functional language skills, such as writing, they face limited opportunities to continue successfully at the community college level, and to compete in a job market where effective functional language skills are necessary.

Research Question

How effective is basic skills preparation through SI instruction in specially designed ESL classes at the community college level? Specifically, what is the extent of student growth in applying functional language writing skills, comparing baseline data collected at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course, in increasing students' college ability to apply functional language writing skills?

Definition of Terms

Basic skills

This term refers to reading and writing skills all students must acquire and implement while attending school and engaging in the workforce (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2010). The reading and writing skills high school students acquire may be inadequate to meet post-secondary education requirements at the entry level, first year community college setting. There are many conditions that may influence high school students' mastery of selected basic skills in writing. Venezia and Jaeger (2013) examine "the basic content knowledge, skills, or habits of mind they need to succeed... [The authors] Look at the state of college readiness among high school students, the effectiveness of programs in place to help them transition to college, and efforts to improve those transitions" (p. 117). The new Common Core Standards (Porter, McMaken, Hwang & Yang, 2011) nationwide have implemented content

curriculum that engages students in college and career readiness. It is recommended that supplemental teaching is included when students do not meet basic skill standards (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

English as a second language (ESL)

ESL students receive instruction in English throughout their educational experience. However, student background knowledge in their first language may influence the acquisition of English language skills. ESL students cannot benefit from receiving classroom education where they are immersed in English instruction (August & Hakuta, 1997). ESL students may need targeted instruction in functional skills in written language at the community college level.

21st -Century workforce

Educational professionals are expected to prepare students for knowledge-based professions. The common thread, which connects the 21st -century workforce, is the ability to demonstrate basic communication skills in order for students to successfully navigate the job market.

College readiness

College courses engage students in a deep analysis and fast paced understanding of the course material (Conley, 2007). Specific skills for college success are generally required when students enroll in post-secondary courses. Critical thinking on a range of subjects and levels is essential for student success (Conley, 2007). Often ESL students struggle with functional language skills when they transition to the community college setting. Their English skills may limit their opportunity for success in traditional classes. Specific non credit classes where the instructors focus on basic English skills may serve as an interim step in building ESL English proficiency.

Supplemental instruction

SI is a peer based study and learning model designed by Deanna Martin at the University of Missouri-Kansas to enhance and improve students' study skills and course content understanding by reviewing course material with a peer who has previously taken the course(s) and completed the course(s) in above average standing. Peer interaction is intended to assist students with added support by improving basic skills and over-all learning techniques (Curators of the University of Missouri, 2015).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of SI in improving ESL students' writing ability at the community college level. This study compared student growth of specific functional written language skills, using data collected to provide baseline information at the beginning of the semester with data collected at the end of the semester.

Theoretical Rationale

The adult *traditional* learner often enters education with a different set of priorities than the *non-traditional* learner. All the participants in my study were adult night-school students ranging in age from 18 – 61 years old. The mature ages of these students implies that their purpose for returning to school is based on the need to improve their language skills for job opportunities and life-skills. The article *Engaging Adult Learners in Writing/ESL Classroom*, Baitinger (2005) identifies different types of students. The *traditional learner* is a child or early adult whose primary focus is education and instruction (Baitinger, 2005). In other words, the roles these students, children, and siblings perform do not include positions of authority (Baitinger, 2005). The *non-traditional* student maybe in the process of finishing interrupted education. The adult non-traditional learner has the choice to attend classroom instruction.

Typically, the adult non-traditional student is engaged in everyday personal responsibilities while the traditional learner has the opportunity to make classroom education their only focus (Baitinger, 2005). The role of teacher with non-traditional students must move from “teacher-centered” to “learner-centered” (Baitinger, 2005, p. 1). Adult learners are equipped with a vast set of knowledge, personal history and the ability to problem solve. Adult learners, when in an instructional environment, are often self-motivated and willing to collaborate with others. Teacher and student relationships may evolve on an equal foundation as *non-traditional* learners and teachers engage in problem solving as mature adults (Baitinger, 2005).

The researcher’s examination of non-traditional learners identifies four stages of adults as they enter a classroom. *The First step: Easing Anxiety*: The non-traditional adult learner often experiences self-doubt and/or insecurity when asked to demonstrate writing abilities. The English Language Learner (ELL) may enter the learning environment with apprehension and a personal concern about the “levels of abilities and learning or physical disabilities that must be address[ed]” (Baitinger, 2005, p. 3 & 4).

Instructors can encourage positive writing strategies by introducing journal writing to *non-traditional* adult learners. The adult learner can develop basic writing skills by drawing upon personal anecdotes and knowledge (Baitinger, 2005.). *The Second Step: Reading and Writing in Context*, is a complex multi-level learning ability, which “through extensive research on human intelligence, discovered that human beings have what Baitinger calls, ‘Multiple Intelligence’” (Baitinger, 2005, p. 6). Multiple levels of learning are fostered through interactions, which engage the student’s self-expression, physical awareness of one’s surroundings, and emerging social and cultural connectedness. The emphasis is on the ability that students are capable of exploring at their own pace and learning in a way that personalizes

the experience for them (Baitinger, 2005).

The students who participated in Baitinger's study came from a variety of language levels and differing levels of personal commitment to learning English. Participants' backgrounds were diverse and classes surveyed were at three different campus locations in Northern California.

The Third Step: Content Learning involves investigating the student's background knowledge. It allows the student to elaborate as an expert in order to add richness to journal writing and developing writing skills (Baitinger, 2005). In Baitinger's study, the students who participated were mature participants encouraged to reflect on their personal life experiences in order to draw meaning to their language development experience.

The Fourth Step: Peer and Community Tutoring, describes how developmental learners become an integral part of the learning community on college campuses. Peer and community tutoring serves to reinforce one's understanding of newly learned writing or reading skills. Non-traditional adult learners who participate in this process enhance their academic skill-set, promoting "learner-centered instruction" (Baitinger, 2005, p. 7).

The present study was designed for the purpose of adding information on student written language improvement during a specially designed community college non-credit class. The evaluation study extends the work of Baitinger (2005) whose work was designed to enrich the adult learner's range of 'Multiple Intelligence' needed to effectively assist the student in improving personal language development. The SI tutor/student interactions with a focus on improving language skills, specifically writing, and language knowledge supported many levels of language acquisition.

Assumptions

It is the researcher's assumption that in order for ESL students to improve written language skills in English, they need a social context, small group and one to one interaction. Language acquisition improves when structure and grammar are introduced and practiced in a formal class setting.

Background and Need

In 2014, a private company in Texas conducted a qualitative study on the linguistic acquisition of 3 students identified as ESL. The researchers conducted this study for the purpose of improving employee performance and customer satisfaction. The participants were from diverse language backgrounds, age ranges and language proficiency levels. ELL's form a growing workforce in the United States (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014). "Research estimates first and second generation immigrants will account for all labor force growth in the United States between 2010 and 2030" (p. 47).

This case study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, researchers identified work duties, company regulations, government mandated guidelines and consumer satisfaction feedback. In the second phase, the researchers studied employees' perception of their English language abilities, and their writing progress. Data revealed an improvement in adult ESL mastery of targeting life skills within the context of instruction based on 21-century workforce requirements (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014).

Many ELLs were citizens who were born in the United States and continued to struggle with language literacy (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014). "U.S. born Hispanics, ages 16 to 25, reported their poor English skills were a major factor for cutting their education short. These daunting findings clearly depict the challenges that lie ahead in any

educational programmatic effort for adult English learners” (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014, p. 48).

ESL literacy education research suggests that one’s cultural and educational backgrounds and commonly used language are considered in developing support programs designed to improve English skills. The ability to understand “a word or text” (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014, p. 46) is understood to be directly related to the learner’s prior knowledge and personal experience with a relationship to the context of the setting. Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory implies that the learner incorporates “experience and knowledge” (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014, p. 46). Teachers and students need to attend to meaning and interpreting text through an ongoing process of evaluation and feedback. Research supports that the rate of language acquisition and specific vocabulary differs that is related to an individual’s language background, instructional experience with a variety of teaching methods and personal connection to content material.

Additional research suggests that meaning, language understanding and acquisition occur with increased vocabulary contact, contextual vocabulary meaning, word dissection and comprehension improvement (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014). The researchers pose the following question. “How does the use of explicit, work-specific vocabulary instruction in English impact knowledge and application of these terms in adult ELL employees?” (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014, p. 49).

The researchers implemented explicit written, oral and visual contextual learning prompts involving activation of metacognitive aptitudes and introduced methods to enhance and improve students’ linguist abilities. As the researchers gathered information, they reviewed the results with participants, providing feedback and then continuing instruction. The researchers were

careful to include only the terms and vocabulary relevant to the participants' job skillset (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014). The findings in this study identified two themes, "policies and procedures" and "customer services" (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014, p. 52).

The participants personally felt that their language proficiency skills were at a low level, and these participants considered themselves to be "limited English speakers" (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014, p. 53). In reality, their English proficiency skills were at *Advanced* levels (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014).

The results revealed that while it was challenging to manage multiple language skill levels, participants' language acquisition improved with teaching material directed to individual skill levels and language experience (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote & Green, 2014). Each participant made progress as indicated by a rubric the researchers used to evaluate performance.

Summary

The community college system offers students from diverse backgrounds and locations the opportunity to further their education and strengthen academic skills. The California Chancellors' Office reported that the majority of graduating high school students, identified as ESL, are not academically prepared for college-level mathematics and English courses. Student academic achievement in using appropriate English grammar and sentence structure serves as an indicator of functional language performance.

An important part of the teaching and learning process includes student/tutor interaction and feedback to foster improvement in functional language production. This evaluation study

describes the effectiveness of SI with tutor support to facilitate written functional language to a select group of post-secondary Spanish speaking students.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section is an examination of the peer reviewed research literature on language proficiency in ESL. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources.

Review of Academic Research

Variations in student skill levels

College ESL students may enter the classroom with a range of writing limitations. By introducing “discourse-level functional writing material” (Carpenter & Hunter, 1981, p. 425) the authors of *Functional Exercises: Improving Overall Coherence in ESL Writing* introduce an instructional approach. Students who need to improve basic writing ability need to master specific skills. Second, the process of writing is complex. Students at an advanced level of proficiency have the ability to understand coherently written papers. Students with limited skill have increased difficulty in understanding well-written papers (Carpenter & Hunter, 1981). Compounding the problem, ESL’s are familiar with different writing conventions that are part of their cultural background, including, “sequence of thoughts, expressed in particular language functions, that is used in recognized types of discourse such as stories, reports, or sets of instructions” (Carpenter & Hunter, 1981, p. 426). An individual’s country of origin reflects one’s culture and language foundation.

The researchers noted a connection between cognitive skills and writing, a factor that may contribute specific knowledge and development to functional language. However, they only described lessons and methods of teaching as an example of an approach to instruction. They did not collect data to evaluate effectiveness of instruction on ESL writing proficiency.

In the article *Setting the Foundation for Working with English Language Learners in the Classroom*, Berg, Petron & Greybeck (2012) provide ideas and strategies for post-secondary teachers who have limited experience with teaching ELL. The following must be considered when teaching ELL students: “ELL lack proficiency in English, but they are not cognitively limited” (p. 35). The ELL adult student’s ability to develop ability in English is contingent on factors that include student’s engagement, and the student’s motivation to acquire and development language (Berg, Petron & Greybeck, 2012).

ELL linguistic acquisition is developed in five stages. The first stage, Silent/Receptive/Pre-productive is usually through body gestures and one word responses. The next stage, Early Production, the student begins to comprehend small sentences that are spoken to them; the student repeats incomplete sentences or formulates a short question. The third stage, Speech Emergence involves introducing the ELL student to develop a simple sentence. The language at this stage may not be grammatically correct. The student should be encouraged to continue speaking, writing and errors should not be criticized (Berg, Petron & Greybeck, 2012). The next stage, Intermediate Fluency, at this point, the ELL Student is using increasingly complex sentences when speaking and writing. The advanced stages include “non-cued conversation and to produce oral and written narratives” (Berg, Petron & Greybeck, 2012, p. 36). ESL students’ existing academic background has an impact their language acquisition. As part of the instructional process the teacher needs to understand the student’s prior learning history. Knowing a student’s experience in learning English may help the teacher in aligning instructional strategies that facilitate learning (Berg, Petron & Greybeck, 2012).

“Literacy must start from the premise that we are multidimensional beings and that our nature particularly pertinent for pre-literate adult learners from refugee backgrounds” (Atkinson,

2014, p. 5). If literacy is at a low-level in one's first language, acquiring new cognitive skill-sets in language literacy and cultural customs adds complexity and increases time for students to become proficient (Atkinson, 2014). The learners' perceptions of their own identity and self-concept influence their ability to evaluate personal language proficiency, and self-identify as beginners or advanced learners.

Atkinson (2014) used a framework, which reflects the concept of meaningful development. One's literacy development is related to the social and cultural interactions and relevant engagement of community contact and meaning making (Atkinson, 2014). "In this project the concept of 'meaningful participation'" refers to a framework designed to encompass people's sense of connection with the society they live in, their community and their own emerging sense of self literacy" (Atkinson, 2014, p. 7).

The participants were ten Togo and Sudan adult language learners from refugee backgrounds with minimal literacy skills, eight women and two men (Atkinson, 2014). The ESL course was designed to meet the individual skill level of each participant over a one-year span focusing "on writing, reading, listening and speaking skills" (Atkinson, 2014, p. 8). The findings revealed that the participants' functional language acquisition ran parallel to their personal reflection of self-identity and how they fit into the cultural framework. The participants demonstrated enthusiasm toward literacy acquisition when they had a sense of belonging to the culture and could identify a purpose for learning (Atkinson, 2014).

Instructional strategies

Attention to the literature on teaching approaches is important to consider in the design and development of courses to improve language proficiency in ELL. Research emphasizes approaches that may assist students in learning English (Huang & Newborn, 2012).

Language learning strategies

The learning methods and strategies used by ESL students that make knowledge more personally effective and enjoyable. “Learning Strategies are defined as ‘specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques...used by students to enhance their own learning’” (Huang & Newborn, 2012, p. 67).

Metacognitive strategies

Language acquisition is developed through a complex set of organized thoughts, expansion of preparation and assessing the importance of the content material (Lam, 2010). The student’s “thoughts or behaviors” (Lam, 2010, p. 02.2) create and strategize a measured learning outcome.

Cognitive learning strategies

A supportive set of learning techniques used to enhance students’ learning style. Through teacher/student discourse, the student is encouraged to draw understanding from previous experiences to stimulate learning, “self-questioning and speech-to-self talk are important strategic elements in Active Processing” (Collier & Hoover, 1987, p. 12). The elementary progression of reflecting and developing comprehension is increased with “scanning and summarizing, generating questions about, clarifying important elements of, and predicting or elaborating upon the information to be learned” (Collier & Hoover, 1987, p. 12).

Effectiveness of ESL outcomes in writing skills

Camhi (2008) conducted a three-year study which included 1,016 urban community college ELL students. The purpose of the study was to evaluate writing outcomes of ELL

students using different writing approaches. The research literature indicates that ELL classes must have a writing component in order to improve student literacy, but modern day linguists cannot agree on a pedagogical theory on how to cluster instruction in grammar principals. “It is hoped that the research presented here will contribute to the more specific evaluation of how deliberate grammar teaching may be used to support L2 writing development “(Camhi, 2008, p. 4).

The researcher used the Grammar Awareness through Isolation, Integration, and Scaffolding (GAINS) model as described by Camhi (2008, p. 6). The participants were 16-60 years old and came from a variety of cultural and language level backgrounds (Camhi, 2008). The GAINS approach focuses on “writing through both experiential and metalinguistic means” (Camhi, 2008, p. 6). The Writing Assessment Test (WAT) exam was administered to ELL students who planned to enroll in college credit courses (Camhi, 2008.). Those students who developed their writing skills using GAINS incorporated teacher and peer feedback in their writing exercises and deliberately noted grammar content and essay development (Camhi, 2008).

ELL students who prepared for the WAT received a pass rate of 50% compared to a pass rate of 25% of those who did not use the GAINS method (Camhi, 2008). The research suggests that one semester of writing preparation and the writing competency level of the ELL students in this study were not adequate to pass the WAT. “Additional variables to consider in the future research include: degree of student motivation, age, literacy, language input, and experiences outside the classroom” (Camhi, 2008, p.14). This study identified that GAINS has the potential to improve ELL developmental writing skills of students from countries outside the United States as is likely to improve ELL developmental writing skills of students born in this country to immigrant parents (Camhi, 2008).

Continuing with this line of research, Cancino (2015) examined functional language through a conversational lens framework. The participants in the study were five high-level ESL learners. The data collected examined the impact of language acquisition including teacher/student contact through conversational discourse. The teacher, with five years' experience, requested that ESL participants verbally describe and predict a story scenario. The procedures of this study used The Conversational Analysis Approach (CA). The study was conducted in a functional social context, and data were analyzed through a conversational lens (Cancino, 2015). "The types of Structural Organization identified by CA determined solely by the interaction in which participants are engaged" (Cancino, 2015, p. 117). The teacher is key in the students' interaction and development in this process (Cancino, 2015). The researcher suggested that the classroom setting should contain "Communicative Language Teaching or Task-based Language Learning approaches" (Cancino, 2015, p. 118). Walsh (as cited in Cancino, 2015) found that teacher interaction had an impact on student progress when they, the teacher and the student, were actively engaged in conversation. Data indicated that the teachers' direct verbal contact with the students fostered linguistic acquisition when the student received teacher feedback (Cancino, 2015). "Learning is a product of the interaction that takes place between learners and the teacher – "the expert"" (Cancino, 2015, p. 118). The teacher can support the student's verbal conversational flow by offering words or phrases that may help the student complete a thought or express an idea (Cancino, 2015).

Scaffolding, a method of teacher instruction, was used to determine the student's understanding of the task and support understanding by offering words and/or phrases to fill the gap (Cancino, 2015). Scaffolding may present a problem in the classroom when a teacher's eagerness to assist the student in verbal expression may interrupt the student's complete thought

process. The teacher must allow the student to rest between words, phrases and complete thoughts, in order to determine the student's verbal skill ability (Cancino, 2015).

Back-channel Feedback, when the teacher provides the student with short responses, allows the student to stay on track with thoughts and ideas related to verbal interaction (Cancino, 2015). Students elaborated on their thoughts when back-channel feedback was used to support the student's train of thought (Cancino, 2015). Scaffolding and back-channel feedback offer the ESL support in developing language skills and produce longer verbal responses. Drawbacks were found when teachers did not direct their verbal contribution to the support process. Cancino (2015) stated, "This teacher's data show that instances for clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks were not features in her classroom" (p.127). It is important that teachers remain sensitive to every student's interaction, verbal and nonverbal in order to expansion their awareness and implementation of teaching techniques which foster linguist acquisition and promote knowledge (Cancino, 2015).

Di Peitro (1987) examines *Discourse and real-Life Roles in the ESL Classroom*. The researcher analyzed the ESL role in addressing dialog interaction and the *cultural and psychological* differences, which lie in language. "Three types of roles are established and illustrated via dialogs: social, emotive and maturational" (Di Pietro, 1987, p. 27). The roles of each participant in a verbal exchange introduced a minimum of two participants who share a goal. The objective may lay at opposite ends, but each participant play a *role* in verbal exchange (Di Pietro, 1987). The *roles* individuals introduce to a conversation may affect the duration and social questions of politeness to the interaction. The Teacher/Student and Knower/Learner Roles in the Classroom introduce an array of roles the teacher/student and student/student incorporate into the dialog process. The teacher may take on the role of facilitating communication, which

may encourage the student to extend the dialog. This would be an example of *knower/learner* roles. The teacher may engage students to dialog with other students. When the teacher is off-stage, introduced as a spectator and not a participant, the students interact with a peer may produce anxiety. The teacher, who engages the student is labeled as knower/learner, assumes the role outside of the realm of reviewing linguist skills (Di Pietro, 1987). Teachers must stay attuned to current events and the real life scenarios ESL students may encounter. The classroom is a safe environment for the ESL student to experiment with complex and simple outside life scenarios in the classroom (Di Pietro, 1987).

Ferris and Tracy (1996) reviewed the concerns ESL professors observed when ESL students face writing, reading and oral challenges at English language tertiary campuses. They decided that major barriers for ESL were in content area writing courses. “A number of surveys, opinion pieces, and articles on pedagogy have been devoted to the topic of English for academic purposes (EAP) (Ferris & Tagg, 1996, p. 287).

Professors asked ESL students to develop their writing responses with critical thinking strategies and minimized writing exercises that prompted students to elaborate on their personal point of view or experiences. Often ESL students found added challenges with listening and speaking because they were not sufficiently prepared to manage lecture hall note taking requirements (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). Professors commented on students’ lack of self-confidence and hesitation to speak with classmates and express their opinion in open classroom discussions. It is suggested that lecture strategies be implemented with sensitivity to cultural and subject area content be delivered with more examples and deeper explanation. The lecture should never be simplified or reduced but suggests, “strategies for ‘training lectures for international audiences’, particularly ‘the selection of culturally accessible examples when giving explanations’ and ‘the

management of audience” (Ferris & Tagg, 1996, p. 313).

A text based *Systemic Textual Analysis* (STA) is examined by researcher Debbie Guan Eng Ho, and the teacher/student approach to developing ESL writing skills through Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) (Ho, 2009). ESL learners have been instructed to understand parts of written text developed. It is the whole written content that derives the purpose and understanding which drives writing literacy (Ho, 2009). When the researcher analyzed the pre and post writing samples, which spanned over a fourteen-week period, the SFG strategies showed development in writing structure and texture. The improvement was not noted immediately, but over time STA did demonstrate encouraging progress (Ho, 2009).

There are few studies in the research literature with a focus on ESL students who have limited heritage language skills and marginal formal education background as a result of their education in their country of origin. Students with incomplete formal education in their home country often enroll in ESL classrooms in the United States where instruction does not employ use of metacognitive strategies (Luke, 2011).

The researcher examined three adult immigrant educational programs that instructed students in Spanish education and ESL classes. The purpose of the dual language immersion was to increase cognitive skills in both languages. The researchers examined what motivated the participants to enroll in basic education courses, gathered strategies to encourage participation and studied areas of difficulty in the participants’ learning progress (Luke, 2011). Participants were highly motivated to increase language proficiency in their heritage language and second language skills. The interviews and observations conducted by the researcher gave personal observations and opinions the participants held about themselves as ESL students and 21st - century work force (Luke, 2011). “We learned that, despite shame and pervasive feelings of

being “useless” to society, participants were highly motivated to take advantage of multilingual educational services, and the community purpose in the classroom and program kept them coming to class, despite numerous obstacles” (Luke, 2011, p.21). This research revealed a need for further analysis to examine heritage language support in ESL education. The barriers and challenges which plagued participants from lack of transportation, family obligations and a low-self image did not stop the participants from enrolling in ESL courses and ultimately expressing they viewed this experience as a positive contribution to their potential job opportunities and personal sovereignty (Luke, 2011).

A Community within the Classroom: Dialogue Journal writing of Adult ESL Learners, author Jungkang Kim (2005) examines adult ESL writing development through *dialog journal* writing. Teachers who implement “the pedagogical practice of dialog journaling” (p. 21) have reported that ESL students cultivate and introduce personal anecdotes, which build ownership in the writing development process (Kim, 2005). ESL students found increasing meaning and purpose in the journal writing process, as they were able to reflect on personal experiences and draw meaning through *learning/living content*. *Dialogue journal writing* formed an environment where the writing literacy promoted a *learner-centered curriculum* (Kim, 2005). The students in this classroom came from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds; though, they arrived as recently as two years prior to enrolling in this course, they were placed in an advanced ESL writing course. The journal writing developed a community within the classroom where the teacher began to identify and support the students’ personal struggles and meet the language needs of the students (Kim, 2005). “Their journal, therefore became a site of identity construction where they explored knowledge, reflected on their living contexts, and learned about self in relation to others in the new social and cultural setting” (Kim, 2005, p. 29). It was

their life experience and linguistic knowledge that furthered their metacognitive strategies increasing their over-all interest and meaning in language acquisition (Kim, 2005).

Summary

Functional language acquisition remains an individual experience for each community college student whose primary language is not English. One's language experience, social and cultural identity, linguistic skill and education background have an impact on learning the English language. The research literature reveals that a number of factors influence student success, such as instructional focus and design. When ESL participants cultivate social and cultural connectedness to language acquisition the literature indicated that the student's desire or motivation to acquire language knowledge surpasses obstacles and challenges the ESL in learning English.

In order to facilitate learning the teacher must assess each student's language ability, social and cultural background, which may influence the student's approach to learning. A survey of one's language ability may serve to evaluate the student's metacognitive capacity, if perceived at a low-level, this does not mean the ESL learner's cognitive process is limited. The instructional approach should be tailored to the student's current cognitive ability, cultural background, social relevance and purpose for 21st-century job-skills.

The research showed that the obstacles, which plague ESL learners, are manageable when the learner is personally connected to the purpose of acquiring a second language. Kim's (2005) teaching approach developed personal meaning to language with dialog journal writing. The participants drew on personal life content, which created learning/living content. The student engaged in learner-centered curriculum. The teacher and student were involved in close

dialogue with each other, allowing them the opportunity to pay careful attention to language development.

Language acquisition is a personal and unique experience. Limited research is available on the effectiveness of college level classes that target English language skills. The present study extends the literature by adding to the evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional strategies a specially designed noncredit course at three community college sites in Northern California. The ESL instructors designed lessons that focused in learning and applying basic written language skills.

Chapter 3 Method

Research Approach

How effective is basic skills preparation through SI instruction in specially designed ESL classes at the community college level? Specifically, what is the extent of student growth in applying functional language writing skills, comparing baseline data collected at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course, in increasing students' college ability to apply functional language writing skills?

In the beginning of the spring 2015 semester, a questionnaire, designed by the ESL program director, was administered to three ESL classes at separate locations in Northern California. The participants completed a questionnaire in three ESL 500 classes at Lakeside, Valley View and Redwoods College Community Colleges. The names of the community colleges are all pseudonyms to protect confidentiality of participants.

The instructor of record from each class administered the questionnaires. Students were instructed to independently answer 10 questions to the best of their ability. The students were not given a time limit to complete the questionnaire. The instructor remained in the classroom while the ESL students completed the questionnaire. The students' written language skills were evaluated and measured.

The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the semester. The instructor administered the same questionnaire at the end of the semester. Throughout the semester the SI tutor assisted participants with writing skills instruction. When the students completed the untimed questionnaire, the instructor of record at each of the three community college locations, collected the questionnaires. The students' language development was evaluated and measured

in comparison to the initial questionnaire completed at the beginning of the semester. The researcher used a pre-test/ post-test comparison to record data for this study.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number 10368.

Sample and Site

This evaluation study (Patten, 2014) measured functional language writing skills, sentence structure, grammar and punctuation at three community colleges in Northern California. There were a total of 7 questionnaires collected from Lakeside Community College. Redwoods Community College had 12 participants with 9 from Valley View campus. The participants who completed their questionnaire at Lakeside Community College wrote their responses in English. Several questionnaires from Redwoods and Valley View were completed in Spanish. If students responded in Spanish, their questionnaires were eliminated from the study.

Factors such as fluctuations in enrollment and irregular attendance influenced the results. The number of students who completed the first and second questionnaires varied, thus limiting the number of total students who completed the course, with entry and exit data from the questionnaires. Only 6 students at Lakeside Community College completed questionnaires, 13 from Redwoods Community College and 2 from Valley View Community College.

Access and Permissions

With the permission of the ESL director, the researcher examined responses to the questionnaire. Baseline data and data collected at the conclusion of a specially designed non

credit course with a focus on improving functional writing skills were collected on participants as part of the Foundations/Basic Skills grant from Office of the Chancellor of the California Community College District.

Measurement

The ESL director developed 10 questions. The questions were short answer prompts designed to measure the students' functional writing skills. The post-test participation included Spanish speaking adult students with an age ranged 18 – 61 years old. There was no information on the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The study served as a pilot project.

The post-test questionnaire analysis:

- Lakeside, 5 females and 1 male
- Valley View, 2 females
- Redwoods, 7 females and 6 males

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were collected at three community college sites from the director-constructed set of questions administered at the beginning and end of the spring 2015 semester. The questions were designed to measure student knowledge and accuracy in writing skills, specifically grammar and sentence structure. Data were then analyzed and reported in tables for the purpose of comparing student performance at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

Data Analysis Approach

An experienced lead professor designed the questionnaire. The ESL faculty director at Redwoods Community College, with 6 years professional experience in this position, created the pre and post-test questionnaire that served to evaluate the ESL students' basic skill proficiency in written functional language. The following parts of sentence structure and grammar were

included in the pre and post-test questionnaire: Complete sentences, usage of capital, letters in proper nouns, correct singular/regular and irregular nouns, the use of the verb to be (am, is, are), identification of possessive adjectives, use of contraction, proper use of commas, correct placement of apostrophes and placing periods at the end of sentences. The researcher and the ESL program director analyzed the results.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Classes

The researcher conducted the study in February to May 2015; the participants' ages ranged from 18 – 61 years old. The final analysis, Lakeside, 5 females and 1 male; Valley View 2 females; Redwoods 7 females and 6 males. The participants responded to 10 items on a written questionnaire. The same questionnaire was administered at the beginning and the end of the semester spring semester. The students' responses at the beginning of the semester were used to establish a baseline of their written functional language ability. Data were collected to measure the academic growth on students in three community college ESL courses, Redwoods, Valley View, and Lakeside. The following list of hours of *Supplemental Instruction* (SI) instruction was administered at the participating community colleges. SI was implemented once a week for 2 ½ hours at Redwoods Community College and twice a week for 3 hours at Valley View Community College, and Lakeside did not receive SI. This group served as my control group.

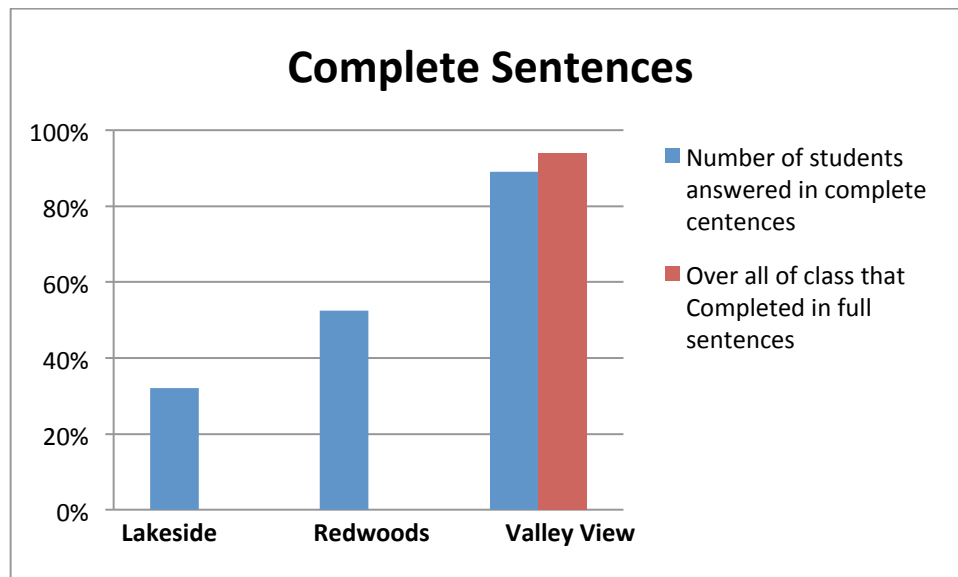
The students did not have help from the instructor, the SI tutor or their classmates in completing the questionnaire. Students' grammar and sentence structure were analyzed. The following grammar points were identified; complete sentences; usage of capital letters in proper nouns; correct singular/regular and irregular nouns; use of the verb to be (am, is, are); identification of possessive adjectives; use of contraction; proper use of commas; correct placement of apostrophes; placing periods at the end of sentences.

Analysis

Writing complete sentences

At Lakeside and Redwoods, out of the 10 questions, no complete sentences were accomplished. The questions were answered in one word or a combination of words. Data collected showed 37% completed sentences from Lakeside, 52.5% from Redwoods. Valley View's data measured 89% of the participants wrote in complete sentences and overall students wrote 94% in complete sentences. The students from Valley View scored twice as high as Lakeside and Redwoods combined. This data are from the first set of questionnaires collected.

Table 1: Complete Sentence

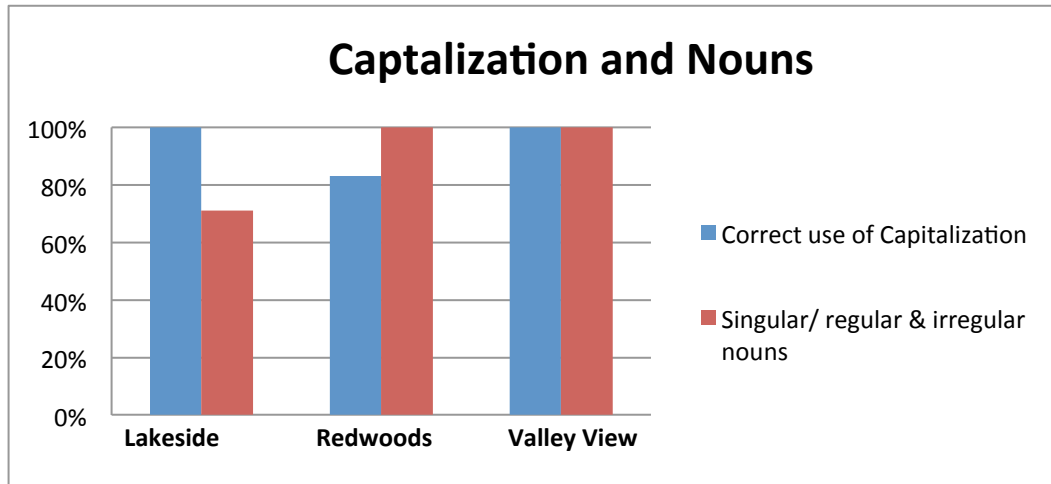


Usage of capital letters in proper nouns and correct singular/regular and irregular nouns

At Lakeside and Valley View 100% of the surveys showed correct use of capitalization in proper nouns. At Redwoods 83% of the participants used capitals with proper nouns. However,

students from Valley View and Redwoods scored 100%, whereas Lakeside showed 71% in singular/ regular and irregular nouns.

Table 2: Capitalization and Nouns

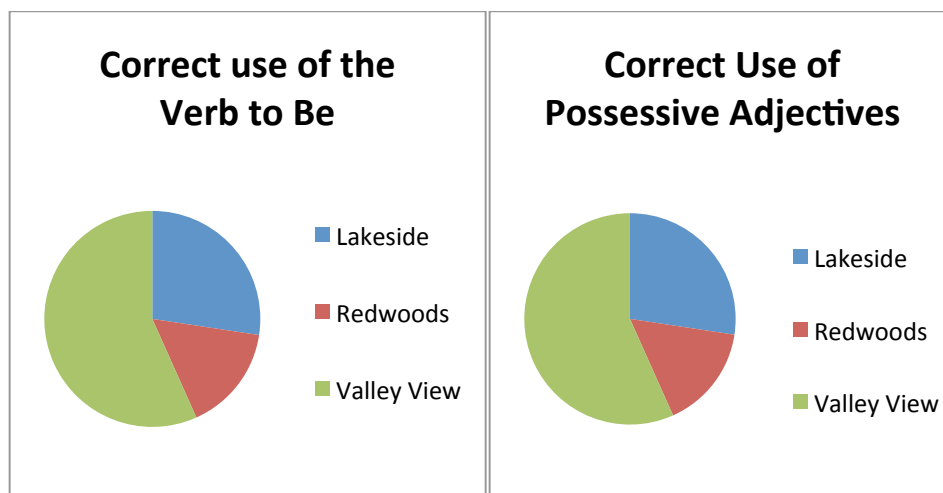


Lakeside and Redwoods students each showed strengths in different areas; Lakeside students were stronger in the use of capital letters in proper nouns, compared to Redwoods students who showed improvement in use of singular/ regular and irregular nouns. However, Valley View students demonstrated skill strength in both areas.

The use of the verb to be (am, is, are) and identification of possessive adjectives

Valley View students scored 89% in both correct usage of the verb *to be* and in possessive adjectives. Lakeside questionnaire showed 29% correct usage of the verb *to be* and 43% correct use of possessive adjectives. Redwoods received 25% in both correct use of the verb *to be* and in possessive adjectives.

Table 3: Correct Use of Verb To Be and Correct Use of Possessive Adjectives



In these two observations one with a focus on correct use of the verb *to be* and correct use of possessive adjectives, Valley View students demonstrated a higher skill level compared to Lakeside and Redwoods students in both areas. However, students from Lakeside were higher when compared to Redwoods students in both areas.

The use of contractions

100% of Redwoods students' responses to the questionnaire showed improved skill ability in the use of contractions, while 98% of Valley View students' questionnaires showed a good understanding and 72% of Lakeside questionnaire demonstrated their improved ability. In this observation, Redwoods' results were better than Valley View and Lakeside. There was not a big difference (2%) between Valley View and Redwoods. There was a greater difference in performance between student from Redwoods and students from Lakeside, (28%).

Proper use of commas, correct placement of apostrophes, placing periods at the end of sentences

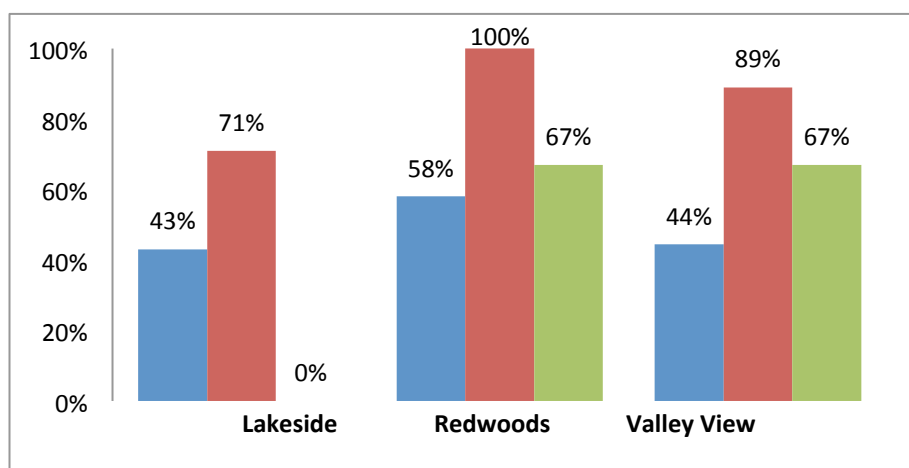
Punctuation was measured by three factors: usage of comma, correct placing of apostrophes, and periods. Student performance by school is as follows:

Redwoods: 58% on correct use of commas, 100% on apostrophes, and 67% on periods

Valley View: 44.4% correct on commas, 89% on apostrophes, and 67% on periods.

Lakeside: 43% on commas, 71% on apostrophes, and 0% on periods.

Table 4: Use of Aggregate Data: Commas, Apostrophes and Periods



The punctuation data, Redwoods obtained the highest in correct use of commas and apostrophes, and tied with a 67% on correct the use of periods with Valley View. There was a big difference in the number of students who correctly placed periods at the end of the sentence. Lakeview's students did not place periods at the end of their sentences.

In conclusion, Valley View, Lakeside and Redwoods questionnaire demonstrated different areas of strength. Valley View questionnaire demonstrated more skill ability in three areas:

1. Complete sentences
2. Usage of the verb to be
3. Possessive adjective

Valley View students performed better in grammar in the following areas (Complete sentences, Capitalization, Usage of the verb to be, and Possessive adjectives) when compared to the Redwoods.

Valley View performed better on the questionnaire when compared to Lakeside, Valley View to Lakeside in 8/9 areas:

1. Complete sentences
2. Contractions
3. Usage of the verb to be
4. Plural nouns
5. Possessive adjective
6. Comma
7. Apostrophe
8. Periods

Redwoods performed better than Valley View in the following areas:

1. Contractions, Usage of commas, Usage of apostrophes.
2. Mendocino was better than Lake in 6/9 areas.
 1. Complete sentences
 2. Contractions
 3. Plural nouns
 4. Comma

5. Apostrophe

6. Periods

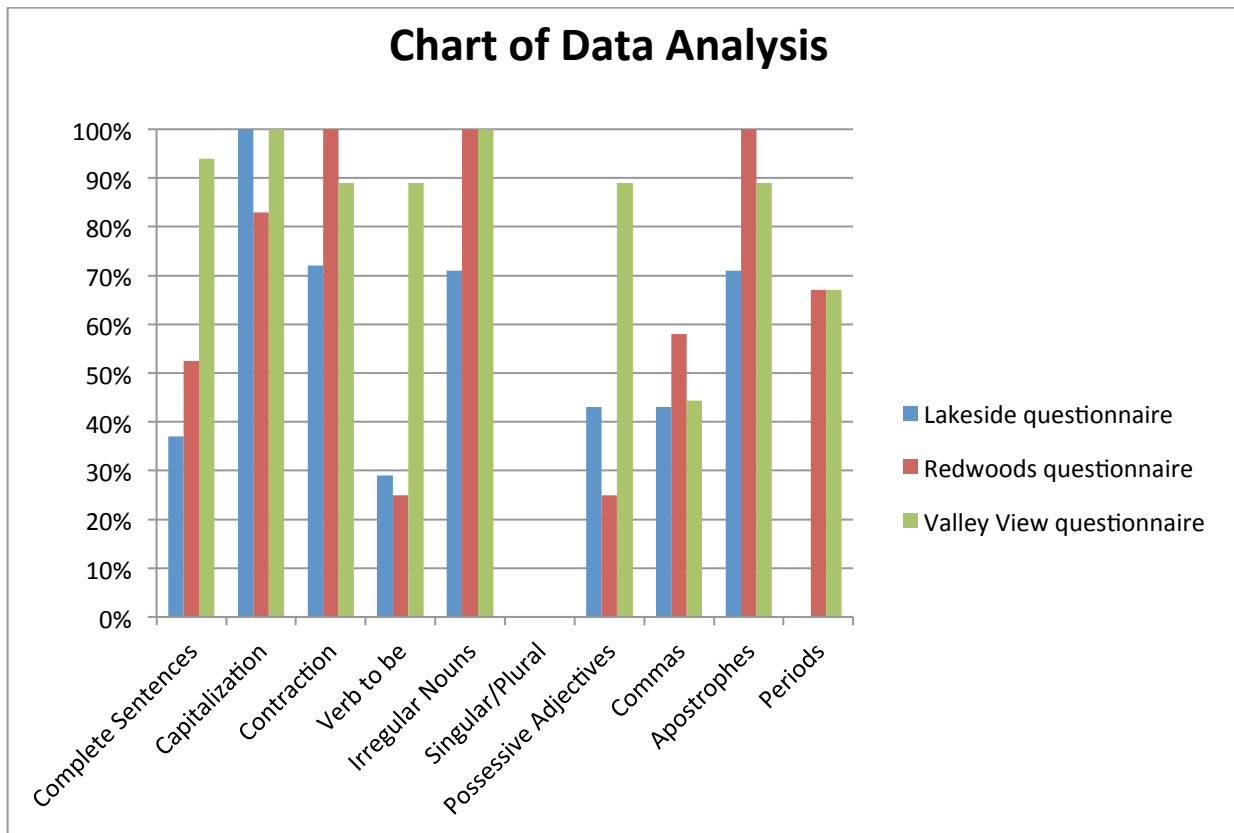
Lakeside students showed improvement in three areas compared to Redwoods: Capitalization, verb to be, and possessive adjectives.

Valley View's results were better than Lakeside in all categories.

The Data below are the results of the first questionnaire administered in February 2015.

Table 5: Chart of Data Analysis

	Lakeside questionnaire	Redwoods questionnaire	Valley View Questionnaire
Complete Sentences	37%	52.5%	94%
Capitalization	100%	83%	100%
Contraction	72%	100%	89%
Verb to be	29%	25%	89%
Irregular Nouns Singular/Plural	71%	100%	100%
Possessive Adjectives	43%	25%	89%
Commas	43%	58%	44.4%
Apostrophes	71%	100%	89%
Periods	0%	67%	67%

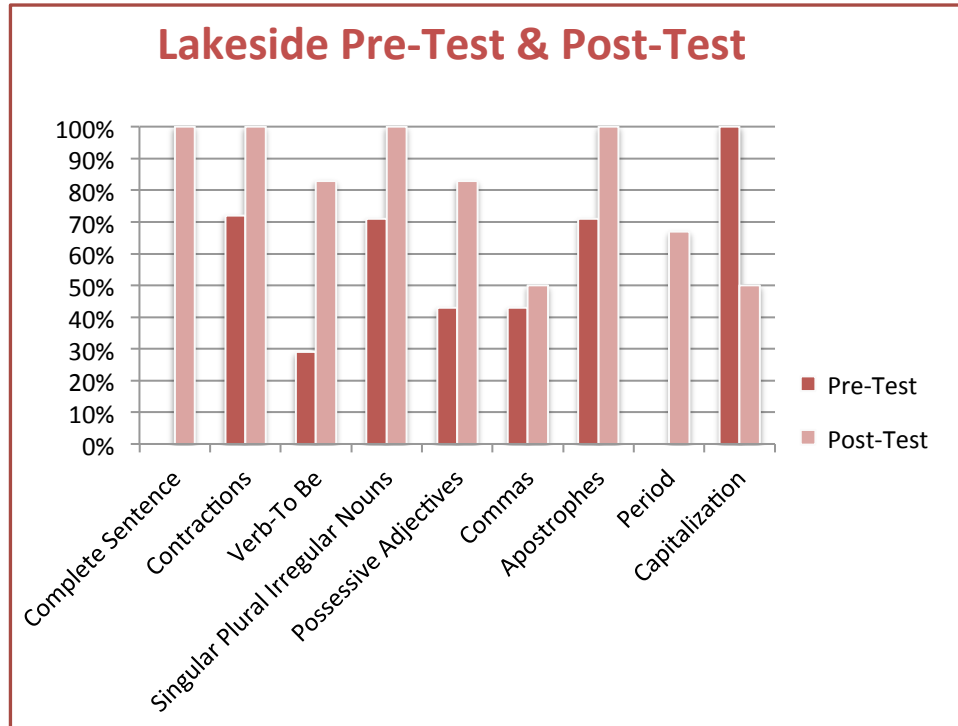


Post-test questionnaire findings:

The participants' ages ranged from 18 – 61 years old. Participants in the final analysis included the following: Lakeside, 5 females and 1 male, Valley View 2 females, Redwoods 7 females and 6 males.

Participants in Lakeside, Redwoods and Valley View Community Colleges made mixed progress in functional language writing skills. Due to the variables present in the study, the classes that received SI, Redwoods and Valley View, did not show measurable language acquisition compared to the course at Lakeside, which did not receive SI.

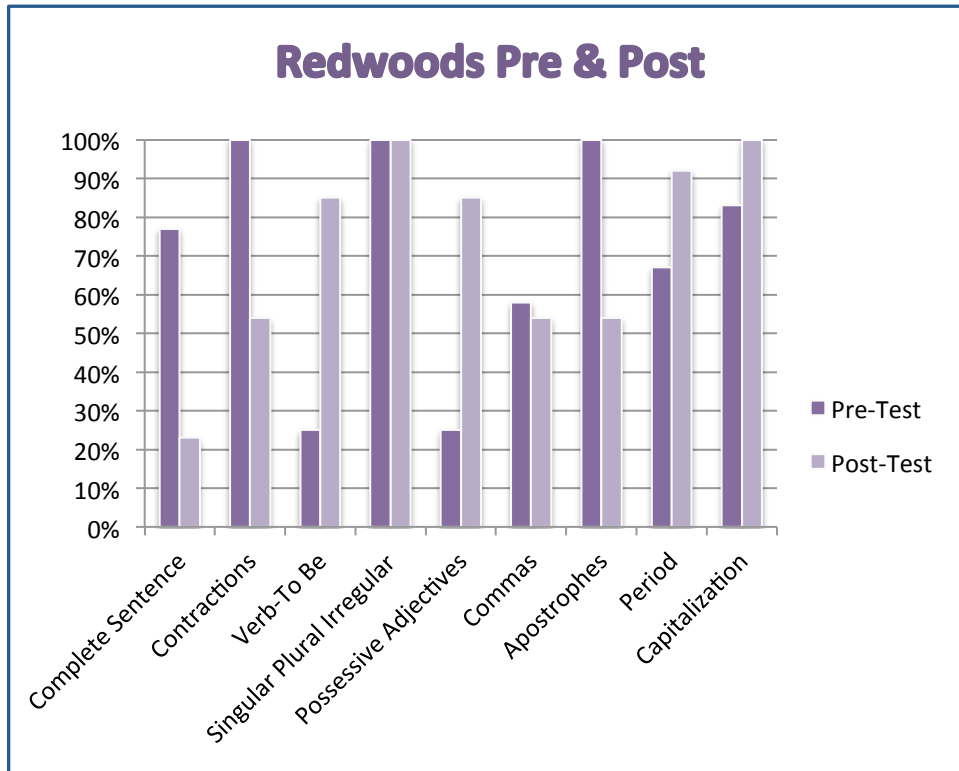
Table 6: Lakeside Pre-Test & Post-Test



Lakeside Center Functional Skills Assessment Results		
Skill	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Complete Sentence	0.00%	100.00%
Contractions	72.00%	100.00%
Verb-To Be	29.00%	83.00%
Singular Plural Irregular Nouns	71.00%	100.00%
Possessive Adjectives	43.00%	83.00%
Commas	43.00%	50.00%
Apostrophes	71.00%	100.00%
Period	0.00%	67.00%
Capitalization	100.00%	50.00%
Total Percent	429.00%	733.00%
Average Skill Percent	47.67%	81.44%
Average Skill % Improvement		33.78%

Participants who did not receive SI demonstrated improvement in 7/9 functional language skills.

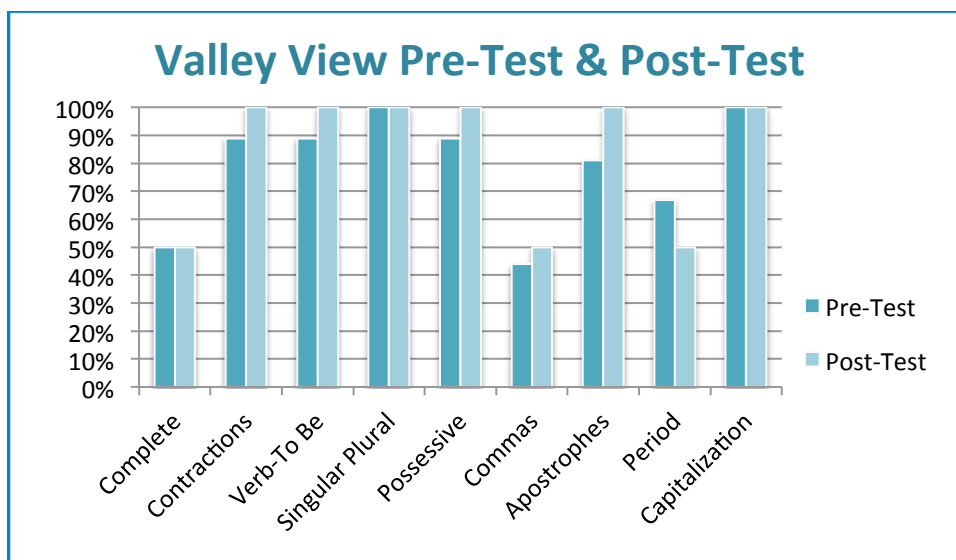
Table 7: Redwoods Pre & Post



Participants received SI demonstrated improvement 5/9

Redwoods Center Functional Skills Assessment Results		
Skill	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Complete Sentence	77.00%	23.00%
Contractions	100.00%	54.00%
Verb-To Be	25.00%	85.00%
Singular Plural Irregular Nouns	100.00%	100.00%
Possessive Adjectives	25.00%	85.00%
Commas	58.00%	54.00%
Apostrophes	100.00%	54.00%
Period	67.00%	92.00%
Capitalization	83.00%	100.00%
Total Percent	635.00%	647.00%
Average Skill Percent	70.56%	71.89%
Average Skill Percent Improvement		1.33%

Table 8: Valley View Pre-Test & Post-Test



Participants (students) received SI demonstrated improvement 7/9

Valley View Center Functional Skills Assessment Results		
Skill	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Complete Sentence	50.00%	50.00%
Contractions	89.00%	100.00%
Verb-To Be	89.00%	100.00%
Singular Plural Irregular Nouns	100.00%	100.00%
Possessive Adjectives	89.00%	100.00%
Commas	44.00%	50.00%
Apostrophes	81.00%	100.00%
Period	67.00%	50.00%
Capitalization	100.00%	100.00%
Total Percent	709.00%	750.00%
Average Skill Percent	78.78%	83.33%
Average Skill Percent Improvement		4.56%

Themes

All participants at three school sites showed general improvement. The average total score per skill improved by 33.78% for the Lakeside center, 1.33% for the Redwood center, and 4.56% for the Valley View center. This theme, though reflecting the qualities of the education centers generally, does not correlate SI and grammar and sentence structure improvement for ESL students. In fact, the data appears to demonstrate the opposite. However, as noted in the limitations section, the research methodology was flawed because of the following: no control group, small sample size at each school site, and varied teaching styles at each location.

Thus, the results of this study do not support that ESL students improve in functional writing skills, specifically in applying grammar and sentence structure, within the context of a specially designed basic skills class with SI. However, the results of the study are important in understanding the need to evaluate ESL programs at the community college level in terms of student improvement in functional English language skills.

Summary

The pre-test and post-test revealed mixed results in the examined categories: sentence structure and grammar use. This reflects the reality of this limited control, small sample size study. The participants varied in age, language ability, classroom attendance and SI contact. The questionnaires were administered in three different Northern California Community Colleges, which had different instructors of record teaching the courses. The number of hours of SI interaction for each student was not measured. Given the variation in instruction and SI contact and pre-test/post-test student participation, the results revealed inconsistent results in the measurement of written functional language skills. The following notable results were obtained:

A.) Improvement was demonstrated for all centers, regardless of SI.

B.) Lakeside center SI demonstrated an assessed improvement in 7 of 9 functional language skills; the Redwoods center SI demonstrated an assessed improvement in 5 of 9 skills, and the Valley View center SI an assessed improvement in 7 of 9 skills.

C.) Lakeside center no SI showed the greatest improvement in overall scores (per skill component average): a 33.78% improvement over 4.56% (Valley View) or 1.33% (Redwoods).

The results of the study do not support a correlation between SI and ESL improvement in select functional written language skills.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

How effective is basic skills preparation through SI instruction in specially designed ESL classes at the community college level? Specifically, what is the extent of student growth in applying functional language writing skills, comparing baseline data collected at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course, in increasing students' college ability to apply functional language writing skills?

The major findings in the study indicate measuring language acquisition must be capturing with a limited number of variables. The complexity inherent in the language acquisition process was evident in the results of the study.

- Three sample classrooms, at three distinct locations, with participants from mixed linguist backgrounds levels.
- Each participant received a varied quantity of SI contact.
- Participants may not have received SI contact.
- Tutor experience varied in each classroom.
- Participants (students) purpose for language acquisition was diverse and this was not examined.

The researcher concluded that functional language acquisition as evaluated by student mastery of specific written language skills, sentence structure and grammar, in three ESL community college classes recognized mixed language progress in the nine functional language areas examined. In a study that involves program evaluation, multiple variables in the testing environment, the participant population and SI contact time and varying SI tutoring experience complicate interpretation of the results. Further research must be conducted on a small number of

students with limited and precise functional language skills evaluated. SI/participant contact time must remain consistent throughout the designated research time and across instructional courses and locations.

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

The literature review reveals that many variables influence ESL students in learning functional language skills. Carpenter and Hunter (1981) discuss language acquisition through the lens of “discourse-level functional writing material “and *Functional Exercise: Improving Overall Coherence in ESL Writing* (p. 425). The participants in this study represent a range of writing proficiency levels. They had the opportunity to develop their functional language abilities through a variety of writing exercises implemented with a focus on their background knowledge. Carpenter and Hunter (1981) identify the uniqueness in cultural writing conventions inherent in one’s cultural experience and diversity. “The discourse: stories, reports or sets of instructions” (p. 425) expressed by cultural origins reveals that the participants in my study approached ESL functional written language from their diverse cultural backgrounds. The data collected in the present study demonstrated perceivable improvement in each ESL class.

Madrigal-Hope, Villavicencio, & Green (2014) identified the following themes, “policies and procedures” and “customer services” (p.52). The participants who took part in this literature review study had a personal connection to these themes, as they were part of their job skills and purpose to improve their language skills. The adult ESL participants in my study and throughout the literature review, often if not always, found purpose in language acquisition when personal connection and the possibility of career advancement through language improvement were included.

The literature review by Berg, Petron and Greybeck (2012), examined five stages of linguistic acquisition. The writing process in the present study documented a range of ESL writing abilities. The third stage of this study involves *simple sentence* development and students' grammar may not be correct, but they are highly encouraged to speak and write in order to develop their speaking and writing skills. The participants in the present study were developing their functional writing language skills which placed them in stage three of Berg, Petron & Greybeck's study, working towards *Intermediate Fluency* and *increasingly complex sentences*, stages four and five.

Sentence structure development is an important aspect and process in acquiring language. Research shows that personal connection to language and one's knowledge base is critical when learning a second language. The literature review, Atkinson's (2014) study implemented the framework concept *meaningful development*. The ESL director developed a series of questions which examined the participants' writing skills and their cultural background. The two fold process allowed the instructor to evaluate the participants' writing proficiency to gain a better understanding of student connectedness to community and language background, mirroring Atkinson's (2014) research. That study revealed when ESL have a sense of belonging to the community or to the classroom they possess an increased enthusiasm for learning.

According to Baitinger (2005) teacher/participant interaction is critical as adult ESL community college students who are *nontraditional learners* and are managing personal life responsibilities, linking their purpose and language learning to 21st-century life skills. The participants in my study were *nontraditional learners*. The age ranges of participants in the present study were 18 – 61 all attending night courses. The ESL night school students (all 3 classes) who participated in my study experienced nontraditional student challenges. They found

it difficult to maintain regular attendance and many students dropped their class at the end of the semester or stopped coming to class, which impacted the data collection.

The writing process combined with student motivation in learning a second language were reoccurring themes throughout the literature. Di Pietro's (1981) research examines the personal meaning and background knowledge that each student carries through the learning process is unique. The teacher should go beyond the *Teacher/Student* role and assume the *Knower/Learner* role, not only in observing language skills, but also in creating a safe environment in order for students to learn. The ESL teachers in my study had a unique opportunity to interact and understand the adult ESL students' diverse cultural backgrounds and language abilities. The students who participated in my study were from a range of ages and backgrounds making the teaching and learning environment a unique experience for both the teachers and students. In order to create an optimal learning experience, it is the teachers' responsibility to develop a comfortable and safe space for this vulnerable population.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

The study included a small sample size, three separate settings, and variations in tutor experience and student-tutor contact in an instructional setting. Lakeside Community College served as my control group.

Implications for Future Research

One major theme that this study identified is the progress that ESL learners can make in a short period of time. This study documents improvement of ESL in functional writing skills during a one semester community college course. While it is difficult to determine the relationship between instructional practice and student outcomes, it is important to note that students did improve their writing skills during a specially designed class that included tutor

support. Though, the study revealed that Lakeside Community College made the greatest improvement. Due to the gaps in my study, I recommend conducting additional research.

Further studies are needed to address multiple factors that influence student success in learning English at the community college level. Specifically, program evaluation studies which are extended over a long period of time using a control or comparison group in measuring progress in basic skills language mastery, are important in expanding the research literature.

Overall Significance of the Study

The study, ESL written language production, mirrored the difficulty most researchers find in measuring language learning. One's relationship to language, culture and social surroundings influence each person's purpose and ability to develop and acquire a second language. The examination of the literature in the present study identified these findings. Language ability is influenced by many factors. Assessment of language functioning in students whose primary language is not English may be subjective. In order to measure written language development and production, researchers need to design studies that evaluate student progress in varying instructional settings.

Understanding and quantifying written functional language acquisition must involve a narrow focus of language learning objectives and limited variables as adult ESL participants' prior linguistic background is broad, diverse and multi-leveled. The study revealed there are many levels of complexity in linguist learning. Prior language knowledge, language ability, social and cultural connectedness and personal purpose to learning a second language are all areas that influence language acquisition.

There are statistical limitations as a result of the small number of students used in each sample, no more than 13 per center in the present study, without intense monitoring of students.

Since the findings do not suggest any major correlation between functional skill improvement and supplemental instruction, the study is significant primarily for its use in devising future studies, and accessorially as assessment of the quality of the educational centers at three community colleges in Northern California.

One aspect that can be carried over from this study into further investigations is the use of questionnaires as a tool for gathering data. Students are unaware of the exact purpose of the assessment, that of evaluating their functional written language skills. This factor may contribute to reducing student anxiety during the data collection phases of a study. An in-depth case study approach could be used to evaluate this language program.

About the Author

I have been exposed to a second language as far back in my childhood as I can remember. My family always spoke two languages in the home English and Spanish. Around the dinner table or when information needed to be expressed without the children knowing details of adult conversation, the adults communicated in Spanish. I often considered this particular form of communication a code language.

With the opportunity, I found to conduct a study on ESL functional language acquisition, I immediately reflected on the ESL experience my grandfather encountered upon immigrating to California from Chihuahua, Mexico, not long after the Mexican Revolution ended in 1921. As a child and into my mid-teens, I spent many summers by my grandfather's side. He would share his personal experiences about the Mexican Revolution. I would so eagerly request, "tell me another story about the revolution Grandpa." He never hesitated and he would pause for a moment and with a broad arm motion and carefully crafted words, take me to a place where villains and heroes once existed. I didn't know my grandfather possessed an accent until one day

when I asked him to speak to my 5th grade class. I was so proud of him, and I wanted to share my grandfather with the world. He immediately declined the invitation and informed me that he did not feel comfortable due to his accent.

The road that led me to investigate English Language Learners has served to expose the challenges and stages of language learning my grandfather most likely experienced. He did not have the opportunity to enroll in an ESL course, but he discovered his purpose and meaning in acquiring a second language. I now have a clearer understanding of the personal journey each person must explore and the challenges ESLs encounter. As an educator and learning facilitator, I am better equipped to serve ESL students.

I embrace and honor the courage my grandfather found to leave his birth country, his culture and his first language. I dedicate my research thesis to my grandfather and honor his determination and purpose in acquiring a second language.

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