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A Study of the Factors Which Determine the Persistence Rate of Adult Basic Education Students

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**A STUDY OF
THE FACTORS WHICH
DETERMINE THE PERSISTENCE RATE
OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION STUDENTS**

A Research Paper
Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Department of Occupational and Technical Studies
at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Master of Science in Education Degree

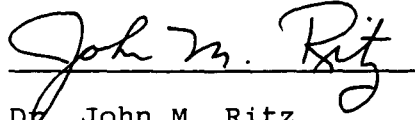
By
Vickie L. Kimmons

August, 1993

APPROVAL PAGE

This research paper was prepared by Vickie L. Kimmons under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Education. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science of Education.

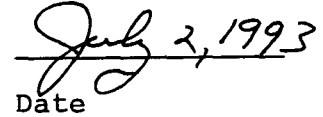
APPROVAL BY:



Dr. John M. Ritz

Advisor and Graduate

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Date

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This study on the factors which determine the persistence rate of Adult Basic Education students would have been impossible to prepare without the assistance provided by many individuals. First and foremost, the author expresses her deep appreciation to the staff and students of the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory. Special appreciation must be given to Ms. Loretta Mbah, Literacy Project Coordinator, for her continuous interest and support.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
RESEARCH APPROVAL	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	
Statement of the Problem	2
Research Goals	2
Background and Significance	3
Limitations	5
Assumptions	5
Procedures	6
Definition of Terms	6
Overview of Chapters	7
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Research Variables	9
Summary	17
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	
Population	19
Instrument	20
Methods of Data Collection	20
Statistical Analysis	21
Summary	22
IV. FINDINGS	
Research Results	24
Research Variables	25
Summary	38

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary	42
Conclusions	44
Recommendations	50

BIBLIOGRAPHY	51
---------------------	----

APPENDIX	52
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LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Analysis of PULL Participants by Race	26
Table 2 Analysis of PULL Participants by Sex	28

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Mean Age of PULL Participants	27
Figure 2.1 Beginning Reading Levels for Persisters	30
Figure 2.2 Beginning Reading Levels for Reluctant Learners	31
Figure 2.3 Beginning Reading Levels for Ps plus others	32
Figure 2.4 Beginning Reading Levels for RLs plus others	33
Figure 3 Years Since Leaving School	35
Figure 4 Mean Grade Level Attained	36

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is the top priority for administrators of Adult Basic Education (ABE) today? It is not the recruitment of students or the marketing of programs. The number one issue in literacy education today is the high rates of student attrition (Quigley, 1992, p. 25).

Recruitment campaigns have been so successful that many ABE and General Education Development (GED) programs are operating at full capacity. In fact, some students must wait until a program has a vacancy and can admit them. Research indicates that many students lose interest and drop out during the initial three weeks of literacy education. According to Quigley, some state literacy programs have attrition rates of over seventy percent while many ABE/GED programs lose over sixty percent of their students (1992, p. 25).

What are the factors which determine whether a student will persist in his or her quest to master basic skills? This research study examined the factors which determine the retention rate in adult literacy programs. The demographic factors examined were age, race, and sex. In addition, beginning reading levels, the students' stated motivations for enrollment, the number of years since leaving formal education, the grade level attained prior to dropping out, and the participants' stated attitudes toward previous school experiences were examined.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine the factors which motivate students to participate in the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Lab (PULL) for six months or longer. The factors which were examined included age, race, sex, stated motivation for participation, number of years since leaving formal education, grade level attained, and participants' attitudes toward previous school experiences.

RESEARCH GOALS

The target population for ABE programs are persons aged eighteen and over who lack a high school diploma. Very few of these eligible individuals, perhaps five percent or less, are currently being served in adult literacy programs (Beder and Quigley, 1990, p. 19). According to Quigley, the attrition rate for these programs runs over sixty percent. This study was undertaken to determine which factors influenced continued participation in PULL. It was guided by the following research questions.

1. Determine the beginning reading levels of participants.
2. Determine stated motivation of participants.
3. Determine age, race, and sex of students.
4. Determine the number of years since leaving formal

education and the grade level attained at that time.

5. Determine participants' attitudes toward previous school experiences.
6. Determine which factors influenced full participation in ABE programs such as PULL.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Administrators of ABE programs no longer have to worry about recruiting students. Successful campaigns have resulted in full classrooms and waiting lists for services. High attrition rates present a major challenge in 1993. ABE/GED courses have attrition rates of over sixty percent while some state literacy programs report rates as high as seventy percent (Quigley, 1992, p. 25).

Two major ABE centers were studied in Pittsburgh during 1989. Students who participated in ABE for over six months were referred to as Persisters or Ps. Reluctant Learners, or RLs, were defined as students who dropped out of ABE during the first three weeks of enrollment (Quigley, 1992, p. 26).

During the Pittsburgh study, interviews were conducted with thirty-seven ABE students. Seventeen Reluctant Learners and twenty Persisters were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by two trained interviewers, a black male and a white female. RLs were

interviewed at neutral sites while Ps were interviewed at the ABE Centers (Quigley, 1992, p. 26).

Quigley provided the following results in his 1992 article. Seventy-three percent of the students were black, approximately sixty-five percent were females, and the remainder were white males. Twenty-seven percent of the participants were between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-three (p. 26). How did Persistent Learners compare to Reluctant Learners?

Persistent learners were older, had been out of school longer, and had completed less formal education. Nineteen percent of the Ps were between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-three, while twenty-two percent of the RLs were between the ages of sixteen to twenty-one. The mean grade level attained by Ps was 8.7 while the mean for RLs was 9.4. On the average, Ps had been out of school for twenty-five years while RLs had been out for 12.4 years (p. 26).

It was interesting to note that RLs were slightly more comfortable in school than Ps. RLs also felt that school held a higher sense of significance than Ps did. Reluctant Learners expressed dissatisfaction with the amount and quality of teacher attention. They also expressed concern that the curriculum was not challenging. Behavioral characteristics of RLs were noted to include aloof behavior, a reluctance to approach the teacher for help, and a failure to develop friendships, both in and out of school. These

characteristics tended to fuel the RLs' dissatisfaction and hasten their subsequent withdrawals (p. 26).

The work of Quigley and Beder served to substantiate the importance of this study. However, there were still many factors which needed to be explored. The cited studies did not compare the age, race, and sex of Ps with that of RLs. In addition, the learners' stated motivations for enrollment were never examined. The goal of this study was to fill some of these gaps in knowledge.

LIMITATIONS

This study was based on the following limitations:

1. The research was limited to the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory (PULL) in Portsmouth, Virginia.
2. The research, conducted by face to face interviews and telephone contacts, was limited to current and former PULL participants.

ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. All participants involved in the study comprehended the purpose of the interview.
2. All subjects answered the questions honestly.

PROCEDURES

The data was collected via face to face and telephone interviews with current and former PULL participants. Information on initial reading levels was obtained by reviewing the assessments completed upon admission to PULL. The information obtained provided insight into the special needs of reluctant learners. As a result of these findings, conclusions were drawn that would further enhance the effectiveness of the services provided by PULL.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1. Adult Basic Education - Educational curriculum and programs designed for persons aged eighteen and over who lack a high school diploma.
2. ABE - Adult Basic Education.
3. General Education Development Equivalency Examination- A test designed to measure basic high school level skills.
4. GED - General Education Development.
5. Literacy - The quality or state of being literate (able to read and write).
6. Non-reader - an adult reading below the fourth grade level.

7. Persisters - students who participated in an ABE program for over six months.
8. Ps - Persisters.
9. Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory - A computer assisted learning program that provides instruction in reading, language arts, spelling, and related subjects for adults reading below the seventh grade level. It is located in the Portsmouth Public Library at 601 Court Street in Portsmouth, Virginia.
10. PULL - Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory.
11. Reluctant Learners - Students who dropped out of an ABE program within the first three weeks of enrollment.
12. RLs - Reluctant Learners.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter I information was presented that dealt with the purpose of this research study and the national problem of high attrition rates in ABE programs. The problem limitations were stated and assumptions were noted. Important terms were defined and the procedures for the research study were explained.

Chapter II will discuss literature in relation to the study, while Chapter III will outline detailed procedures for completing the study. The findings will be provided in Chapter IV and Chapter V will contain a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Today's adults will comprise three-quarters of the work force in the year 2000" (Gardner and Marker, 1991, p. 21). Current estimates indicate that twenty-five percent of America's work force is functionally illiterate. Only three-quarters of those who attend high school actually graduate. According to the June 26, 1989, edition of U. S. News and World Report, only sixty-six percent of those who did graduate can order multiple (two) items, from a luncheon menu and correctly calculate the change that they should receive (Gardner and Marker, 1991, p. 21).

The need for ABE is clearly present, yet attrition is a major problem. Attrition rates exceed sixty percent in many ABE/GED courses and over seventy percent in some literacy programs operated by state governments (Quigley, 1992, p. 25). Multiple factors are responsible for the attrition rates cited above. This review of literature examined the impact of students' beginning reading levels, their stated motivations, demographic factors (age, race, and sex of students), number of years since leaving formal education, and attitudes toward previous school experiences. The ultimate goal was to determine which factor(s) influenced full participation in ABE programs such as PULL.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

The research variables examined in this study included beginning reading levels, stated motivation, demographic factors (age, race, and sex), number of years since leaving formal education, and participants' attitudes toward previous school experiences. Each variable was examined individually prior to making a determination of which factors, or combination of factors, influenced full participation in ABE programs such as PULL.

Beginning Reading Levels

Beder and Valentine analyzed participants' reading levels in their study of motivational profiles of ABE students. The population studied included all residents of Iowa who were currently enrolled in ABE programs and who had completed less than eleven years of formal education. The Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery was administered to fifty percent of the random sample. One hundred fifty-three students were evaluated from mid-October to mid-December, 1985. The reading achievement score for the total subsample was eighty-two. Group means were expressed as age equivalent scores with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15 (Beder and Valentine, 1990, pp. 81-90). It is important to note that these subjects were already enrolled in ABE and these scores

did not represent their beginning reading levels.

The authors described six distinct clusters of ABE students. The reading achievement scores of these groups ranged from seventy-three to eighty-six. Cluster One, with an average reading achievement score of eighty-four, and Cluster Three, with a mean reading achievement score of 86, both scored above average on this indicator. It is interesting to note that Cluster One had the smallest number of students required to attend ABE, while Cluster Three had the largest percentage of participants who were required to attend (Beder and Valentine, 1990, pp. 80-90). Despite the fact that this particular study did not draw any correlations between reading levels and persistence in program participation, it appears that there is no correlation between reading levels and the probability of voluntary enrollment.

Hayes studied deterrents to participation in ABE for adults with low literacy skills. The participants in her sample were all reading at or below sixth grade level (Hayes, 1988, p. 2). No further information was provided on skill levels.

Ferrell and Howley defined illiterate adults as those reading below the fourth grade level. They also defined competency-based programs as programs which help adults with elementary reading skills acquire more advanced skills. Functional literacy was defined as the minimum skills needed to obtain a GED or a high school diploma (1991, p. 370).

Hayes and Valentine studied the functional literacy needs of adults with poorly developed skills in 1989. This study defined "low level" readers as those reading at or below the fourth grade level (p. 3). Results indicated that functional literacy needs are highly complex and individualized. Adult educators must learn to obtain direction and guidance from their students when establishing course content (p. 13). Once again, there was no correlation drawn between reading level and persistence in attending ABE programs.

Stated Motivation

Twenty-three million adults were judged to "lack important functional competencies" on the Adult Performance Level Survey in 1975. Even with the initiation of comprehensive literacy education programs, only two to four percent of those eligible were admitted (Cross, 1981, p. 47). Motivation for participation in ABE was reviewed by Beder and Valentine in 1990.

Ten motivating factors were identified in the 1990 study. These included self improvement, family responsibilities, diversion, literacy development, community/church involvement, job advancement, "launching," economic need, educational advancement, and the urging of others (Beder and Valentine, 1990, pp. 85-86).

Factor I, "Self Improvement," or the motivation to

improve oneself, proved to be a highly motivating factor for individuals with low literacy skills. This factor accounted for 8.6 percent of the total scale variance (p. 84).

"Family Responsibilities" was the label used for Factor II. Items cited in this factor included being a better spouse or parent, setting a good example for one's children, being a better provider, and being able to help with children's homework. Although Factor II accounted for only 5.8 percent of the total scale variance, it is important to note that only 37 percent of the participants in the study were currently married and only 63 percent had children living in their homes. This factor would probably have been more important if the study had included more married participants with children living at home (p. 84).

"Diversion" was the label used for the third factor. Some students in ABE programs participated as a form of "social activity and for escape/stimulation." Diversion was a common motivation and accounted for 5.0 percent of the total scale variance (p. 84).

"Literacy Development" was Factor IV and explained 4.6 percent of scale variance. The desire to improve written and oral communication skills prompted these students to participate (p. 84).

Factor V was "Community/Church Involvement." This item accounted for 4.1 percent of total scale variance.

Students who cited this factor wanted to be more active in religious and civic organizations (pp. 84-86).

"Job Advancement" was the sixth factor and accounted for 4.1 percent of the total scale variance. Since only 34 percent of the study participants were employed, this factor probably came out with an artificially low ranking (pp. 86-87).

Factor VII was referred to as "Launching." This item seemed to represent a desire to reclaim one's life and take control of it. Young respondents who appeared to be making the transition from adolescence to adulthood also scored high on this factor. Four percent of the total scale variance came from this factor (p. 87).

Factor VIII, "Economic Need," explained four percent of the total scale variance. The fact that many of the respondents were unmarried and did not have children at home may have artificially lowered the rating on this item (p. 87).

"Educational Advancement," Factor IX, referred to completion of secondary school, as well as, post-secondary education. While it accounted for 3.5 percent of total scale variance, this item had the "highest mean item mean of any factor" (p. 87).

"Urging of Others" was the tenth factor. It referred to external pressure, such as parental urging, to attend ABE. Factor X accounted for three percent of the total scale variance (p. 87).

In her 1992 article, Ziegahn noted some additional motivators for participation in ABE. Individuals already enrolled in ABE programs spoke of desires to read and write, to develop new skills, to earn credentials such as GEDs, and to obtain a "better" job. Fear of "being taken advantage of" due to illiteracy served to motivate some learners (p. 40).

Individuals not currently enrolled in ABE had more of "a general motivation to learn" (p. 40). Numerous desires were expressed by those not currently enrolled. These included desires "to understand, to see results and apply knowledge, to respond to a challenge, and to pass on knowledge" (pp. 41-42).

Demographic Factors

Researchers sought demographic information to determine if age, race, sex, and other factors influenced attendance. Demographic data for the sample studied by Beder and Valentine was as follows. The mean age was thirty and 66 percent of the participants were females. Racial make-up included 88 percent Caucasian, 8 percent African-American, and 4 percent others. Twelve percent were required to attend and fourteen percent stated that they had a disability. While 37 percent were married, 39 percent had never been married. Thirty-four percent were employed and sixty-six percent were unemployed (1990, p. 89).

Ziegahn's 1992 study included fifteen men and twelve women. There were fifteen Native Americans, eleven whites, and one Hispanic. Educational and work histories were also included, but specific ages were not noted (pp. 36-37).

In their 1989 study of functional literacy needs, Hayes and Valentine worked with a primarily black (65 percent) population, the majority of which was female (68 percent) and unemployed (59 percent). The mean age was 29.7 years and the mean grade completed was 9.0 (p. 5).

Hayes' 1988 study included 160 students reading at or below sixth grade level. The sample was 68 percent female, 65 percent black, and 59 percent unemployed. The mean age was 29.7 years and previous years of educational attainment was 9.0. Their characteristics were described as "typical of urban ABE students" (p. 3).

Barriers to participation in ABE were viewed differently by individuals with different sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, sex, and prior level of educational attainment. The relationship between these characteristics and barriers was reported to be low (Hayes, 1988, p. 2).

Cervero and Kirkpatrick's 1990 study initially included demographic information on the participants' race, sex, and paternal educational attainment. Race and sex were later dropped because a statistically significant relationship could not be established (pp. 83-84). This

proves that the value of some demographic information is questionable at best.

Number of Years Since Leaving Formal Education

Quigley's 1992 study noted that individuals who persisted in ABE programs had been out of school much longer than those who dropped out of ABE (Quigley, p. 26). On the other hand, Beder's 1990 study indicated that an adult's perceived need for ABE decreases as age increases (p. 217). It appeared that the number of years out of school was not frequently evaluated.

Participants' Attitudes Towards Previous School Experiences

Beder and Quigley's 1990 article indicated that those individuals who either dropped out of ABE or simply refused to participate in it have a history of displeasure with "the fabric of our educational system" (p. 21). These students wanted to learn and valued education; however, they rejected the "irrelevant, unacceptable cultural and socioeconomic normative values they see in schooling." Having resisted middle class values during their formative years, they were resisting again by either dropping out of ABE or initially refusing to participate (p. 21). It appears that previous negative experiences resulted in avoidance while previous positive experiences resulted

Determination of Which Factors Influenced Full Participation
in ABE Programs Such as PULL

Quigley's 1992 study indicated that the students most likely to successfully complete an ABE program were those between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-three who had previously obtained a mean of 8.7 years of education. Persistent learners had been out of formal education for a mean of twenty-five years. As in most other ABE studies, the majority of participants were black females (p. 26).

Cervero and Kirkpatrick stated that there is a strong relationship between participation in Adult Education and previous educational attainment. (It is important to note that this is in all forms of Adult Education, not just ABE.) Furthermore, it has been proven that only a little more than ten percent of variations in educational participation can be attributed to demographic factors such as age, sex, and race (1990, p. 79).

Beder and Valentine used cluster analysis to develop six motivational "types". This analysis underscored the diversity of ABE students and the wide range of needs which must be addressed (1990, pp. 93-94).

SUMMARY

In conclusion, the factors which determined student persistence in ABE programs were many and varied. Ziegahn identified two types of motivating forces. Those forces

can lead to participation in an ABE program or they can fuel the individual's "intrinsic desire to learn" (p. 46).

Demographic factors cited in the various studies seemed to indicate that the majority of ABE participants are black females whose approximate age is thirty. Unemployment was a major problem and most participants had completed the ninth grade. Studies indicated that positive previous experience with school encouraged further educational pursuit. The more education that an individual had attained, the more likely it was that he or she would enroll in further adult education programs (Cervero and Kirkpatrick, 1990, p. 79).

Chapter III will outline the methods and procedures used in this study. The instrument which was used for data collection will be discussed. Methods used to collect and analyze data will also be explained.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter explained the methods and procedures used in conducting the survey. Information was provided on the population, administration of the survey, and treatment of the data. The chapter concluded with a summary.

POPULATION

The Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory (PULL) opened its doors in August, 1992. The Procedures Manual for the program provided important information on the population to be served. In addition to having a very high concentration of low income housing, the Tidewater Literacy Council estimated that illiteracy is a problem for approximately 11,000 Portsmouth citizens. The city's public school dropout rate also exceeds the state average.

Forty-six adults were served between August, 1992 and April, 1993. Thus, the original population consisted of forty-six people. The researcher found that it was impossible to contact all of the former participants. While one individual had moved to another state, others did not have telephones or could not be reached at the phone number on file at the PULL program. Therefore, the original population of forty-six decreased to twenty-nine

students who could be reached via telephone or during their class at the literacy laboratory. Sixty-three percent of the original population participated in the study when approached by this researcher.

INSTRUMENT

Since data was obtained via face-to-face and telephone interviews, an instrument was designed to provide an interview format while giving space to record the students' answers. The format allowed for open-ended responses. Areas addressed in the interview included the date, initial date of admission to PULL, date of discharge from PULL, age, race, sex, reading level at the time of admission, stated motivation for attending, date the student left formal education, grade level attained prior to leaving, and attitude towards previous school experiences.

These questions corresponded to the research goals. An interview format was selected because most PULL participants are not able to read and complete written surveys. A copy of the instrument is found in Appendix A.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The researcher telephoned Ms. Loretta Mbah, Literacy Project Coordinator, on March 31, 1993, to explain the

purpose of the study and solicit cooperation. On April 14, 1993, the researcher reviewed the participant files which are housed in the literacy laboratory. A review of these records answered most of the questions listed on the research instrument. Three students who were attending classes on that date consented to personal interviews. It was agreed that additional visits to PULL could be scheduled on an "as needed" basis to complete the interview process. Telephone contact was attempted whenever possible and many students were interviewed over the phone.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Upon completion of the interview process, the forms were separated into four categories. The first category contained Persistent Learners or Ps. These students had participated in the PULL program for six months or longer. The second category contained those individuals who were active participants, but could not yet be classified as Ps due to the six month participation requirement. The third category was comprised of Reluctant Learners or RLs. These students had dropped out of PULL during the initial three weeks of literacy training. The fourth and last group was made up of those adults who had dropped out after the initial three weeks of literacy training and therefore, could not be classified as RLs. Initially, the mean age,

along with the racial and gender composition, of the four categories was calculated. The same method was used to analyze each categories' beginning reading levels, stated motivations for attendance, number of years since leaving formal education, grade levels attained prior to leaving, and attitudes towards previous school experiences. In order to include the data from all twenty-nine respondents, initial comparisons were made between Ps and RLs, then the Ps plus other active PULL participants were compared to the RLs plus other PULL dropouts. Data was presented in tables and figures, as well as in narrative form.

Chi-square was used to determine the significance of frequency data such as race and sex. The t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the mean age, the mean number of years since leaving formal education, and the mean grade level attained. The results for Ps were compared to the results for RLs and the results for Ps plus other active participants were compared to the results for RLs plus other dropouts. Since it was impossible to calculate the mean beginning reading levels with existing data, the t-test was not used in this instance. All results were provided in narrative and graphic form.

SUMMARY

Research data was collected via review of records,

face-to-face interviews, and telephone contacts. Results were categorized into four groups. These included Ps, active PULL participants who had not yet met the six month attendance requirement to be classified as Ps, RLs, and PULL participants who had dropped out after the initial three weeks of literacy training. Frequencies were tabulated for sex and race. Ps were compared to RLs and Ps plus other active participants were compared to RLs plus other dropouts. Chi-square was used to determine the significance of these results.

The mean was calculated for all groups in the areas of age, grade level attained in school, and number of years since leaving formal education. The t-test was administered to determine the significance of these findings. Results were presented in tabular, narrative, and graphic form. Chapter IV will contain the research findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The problem of this study was to determine the factors which motivated students to participate in the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory (PULL) for six months or longer. Numerous factors were examined. These included age, race, sex, stated motivation for participation, number of years since leaving formal education, grade level attained, and participants' attitudes towards previous school experiences. Twenty-nine adults were interviewed. Research results and a summary will be presented in this chapter.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Twenty-nine current and former PULL participants were interviewed during the course of this study. Those who had participated in the program for six months or longer were classified as Persisters or Ps. Individuals who dropped out during the first three weeks of literacy training were labeled Reluctant Learners or RLs. Five students met the criteria needed to qualify as Ps while eight others met the requirements for classification as RLs. Sixteen of the twenty-nine participants did not meet the criteria for either classification. After comparing the Ps to the RLs, each of the original groups was expanded. Ps plus other active participants were compared to RLs

plus other dropouts. This allowed for the review and analysis of all data. The research variables which were examined included age, race, sex, beginning reading levels, number of years since leaving formal education, stated motivation for attending the PULL program, and participants' attitudes towards previous school experiences. Each variable was individually examined and analyzed.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

AGE

Age was the first variable to be examined. The mean age of the twenty-nine adults who participated in the study was 40.72 years. The five Ps who had participated in the PULL program for six months or longer had a mean age of 36.60 years. The eight RLs who dropped out within the first three weeks of literacy training had a mean age of 42.13 years. When the t-test was administered to establish the statistical significance of the age differences between Ps and RLs, t equaled .88. A significant score would have been 2.365 or higher; therefore, this was not significant.

Ps plus other active participants, which included fourteen adults, had a mean age of 38.50 years. RLs plus other dropouts, which consisted of fifteen people, had a mean age of 42.80 years. When the t-test was administered, t equaled .98. This was not significant, since a statistically significant score would have been

2.131 or higher. Figure 1 provides a graphic portrayal of the age means for each category.

RACE

The racial composition of PULL participants included African-Americans (89.65 percent), Asians (3.45 percent), Caucasians (3.45 percent), and Pacific Islanders (3.45 percent). Persisters were 40 percent African-American, 20 percent Asian, 20 percent Caucasian, and 20 percent Pacific Islander. Both the RLs and the RLs plus others were 100 percent African-American. The Ps plus others were 78.57 percent African-American, 7.14 percent Asian, 7.14 percent Caucasian, and 7.14 percent Pacific Islander. Table 1 provides an analysis of the data.

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF PULL PARTICIPANTS BY RACE

RACE	Persisters	Reluctant Learners	Ps Plus Others	RLs Plus Others
African-Americans	2	8	11	15
Asians	1	0	1	0
Caucasians	1	0	1	0
Pacific-Islanders	1	0	1	0

SEX

Study participants included twenty-nine adults. There

Mean Age of PULL Participants

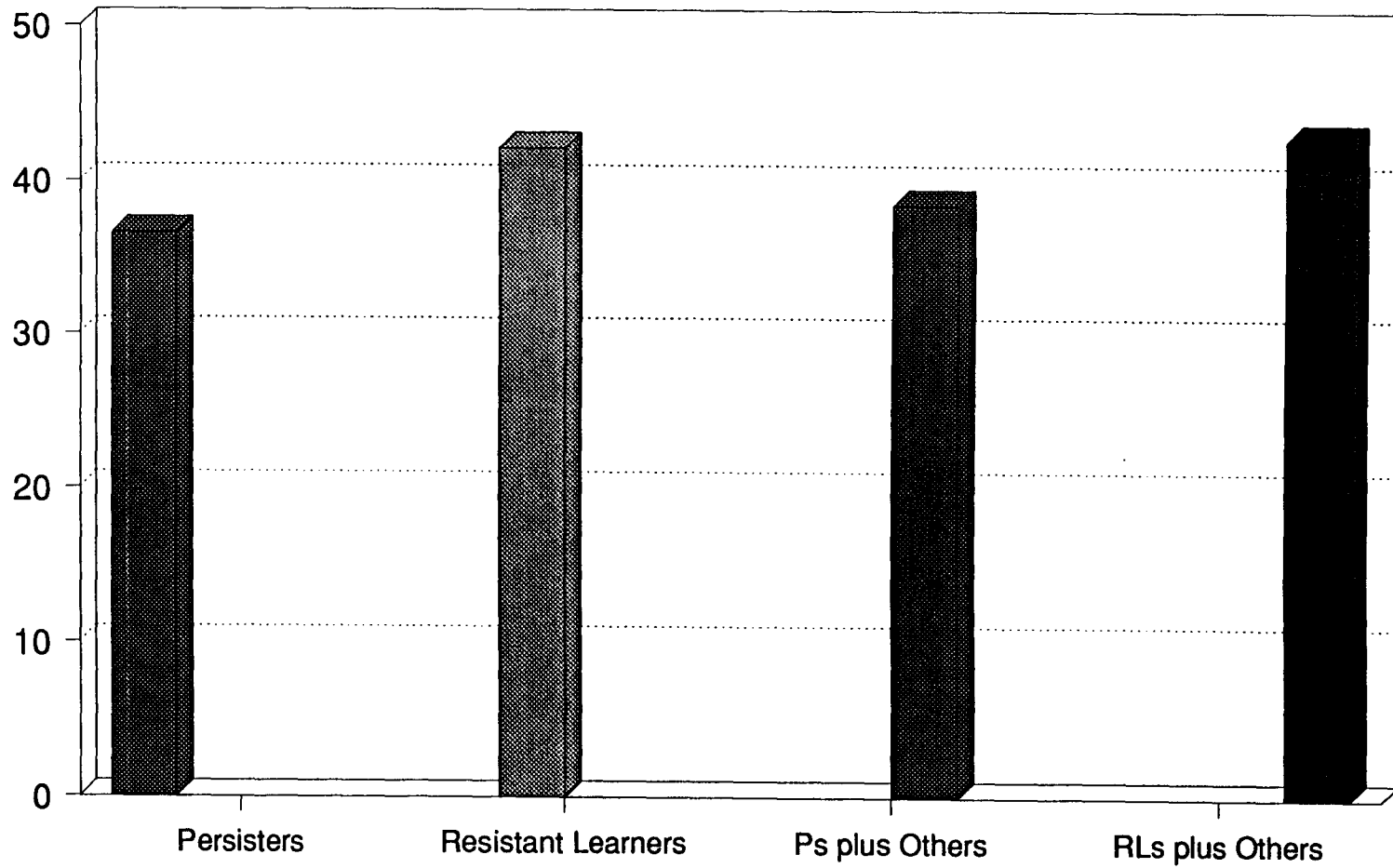


Figure 1

were sixteen males (55.17 percent) and thirteen females (44.83 percent). The Ps had three males (60 percent) and two females (40 percent). The eight RLs included five males (62.50 percent) and three females (37.50 percent). Ps plus other active participants had a total of ten males (71.42 percent) and four females (28.56 percent). The fifteen RLs plus other dropouts included six males (40 percent) and nine females (60.00 percent). The chi-square test was administered to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the sex and race of PULL participants. The score of .05 was not significant. A score of 3.84 or higher would have been statistically significant. Table 2 provides an analysis of PULL participants according to sex.

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF PULL PARTICIPANTS BY SEX

SEX	Persisters	Reluctant Learners	Ps Plus Others	RLs Plus Others
Male	3	5	10	6
Female	2	3	4	9

BEGINNING READING LEVELS

Due to the fact that many reading levels were recorded as ranges, rather than specific scores, it was very difficult to analyze the data for this variable. Scores

for the five Ps ranged from unspecified to a grade level of 4.6. Therefore, it was impossible to determine a mean reading level for this group. (Figure 2.1 provides a complete analysis of beginning reading levels for Ps.)

Similar scores were reported for the eight RLs. Beginning reading levels recorded in student files ranged from the unspecified to a high grade level of 6.6 to 7.5. Figure 2.2 provides a complete analysis of beginning reading levels for RLs.

The fourteen Ps plus other active participants had a wide array of scores. They ranged from unspecified to a grade level of 7.0. Figure 2.3 provides further detail.

Specific beginning reading levels were provided for ten of the fifteen RLs plus other dropouts. The mean beginning reading level for those ten students was a grade level of 3.8. Further detail is provided in Figure 2.4.

NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE LEAVING FORMAL EDUCATION

The number of years since leaving formal education was calculated for all four categories. The mean for the Persisters was 17.00 years, while 19.83 years was the mean for the RLs. Ps plus other active participants had a mean of 19.76 years. The mean for RLs plus other dropouts was 21.16 years. The t-test was administered to both sets of data to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed. While the resultant score for Ps and RLs was .58, a score of 2.365 or higher was required

Beginning Reading Levels Persisters

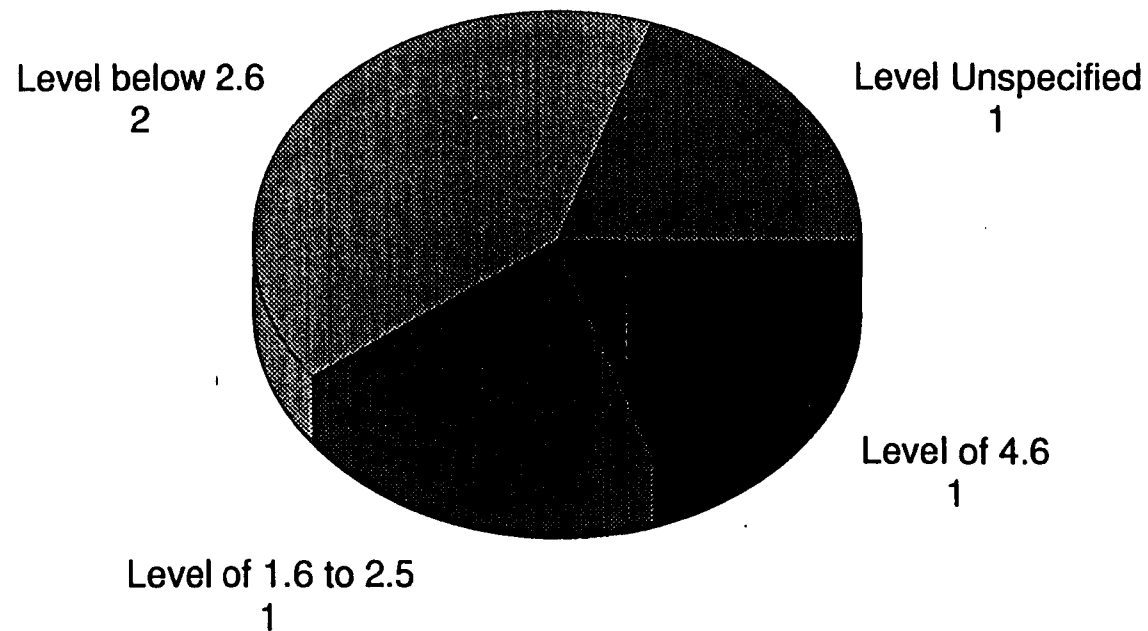


Figure 2.1

Bottom Number Denotes Number of Scores

Beginning Reading Levels Reluctant Learners

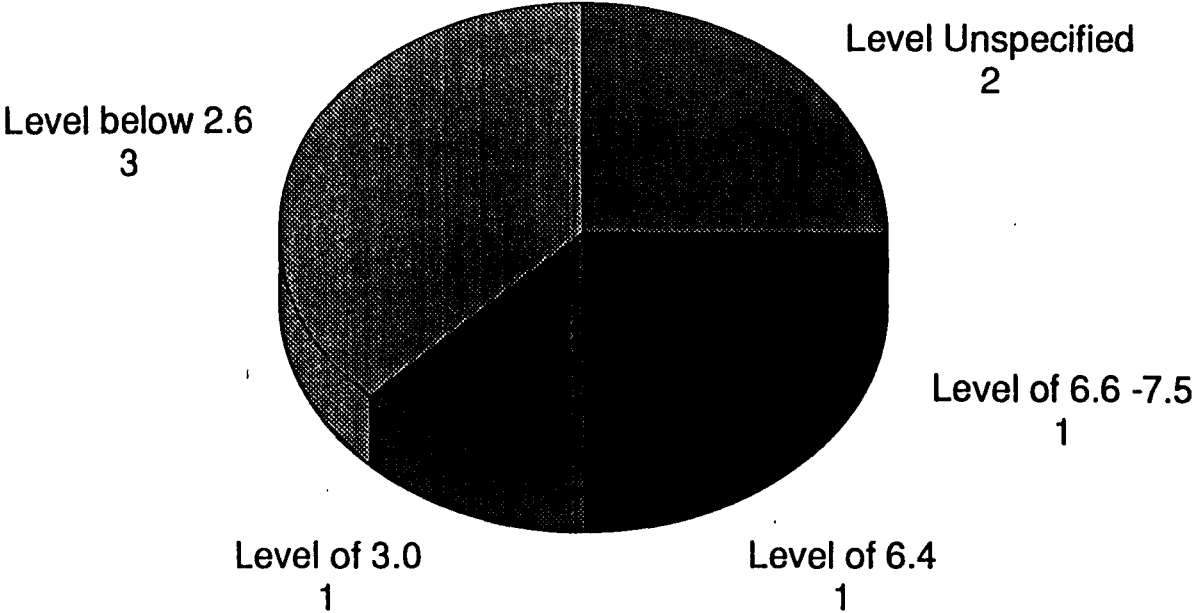


Figure 2.2

Bottom Number Denotes Number of Scores

Beginning Reading Levels Ps Plus Other Active Participants

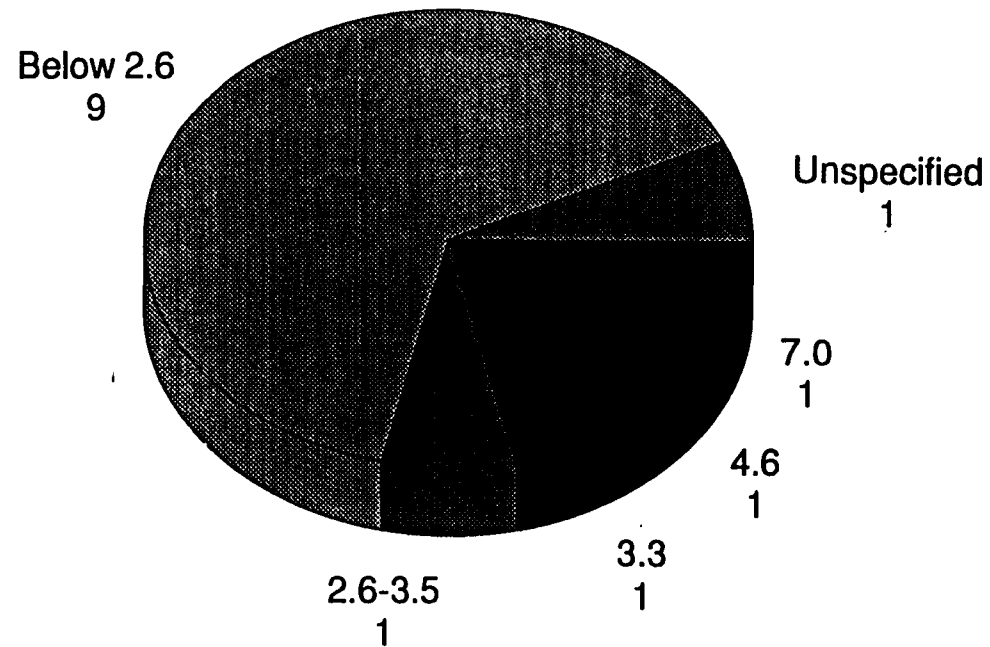


Figure 2.3

Bottom Number Denotes Number of Scores

Beginning Reading Levels RLs Plus Other Dropouts

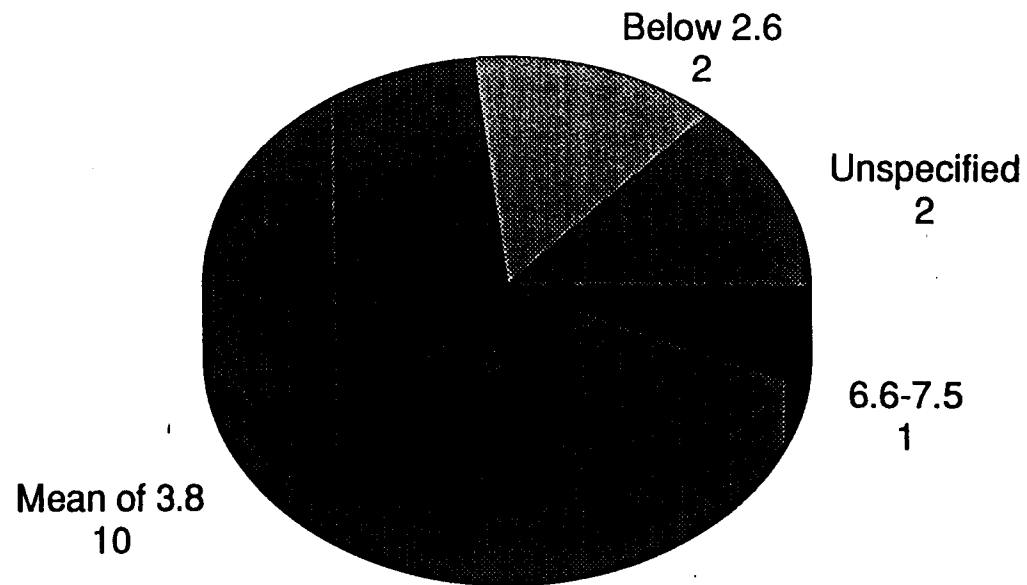


Figure 2.4

Bottom Number Denotes Number of Scores

to be considered statistically significant. The t-test score for Ps plus others and RLs plus others was .36. A score of 2.131 or higher would have been statistically significant. Figure 3 provides a graphic representation of this data.

GRADE LEVELS ATTAINED PRIOR TO LEAVING SCHOOL

Mean grade levels attained ranged from 8.00 years for the RLs to 10.40 years for the Ps. Ps plus others had a mean of 9.38 years and RLs plus others had a mean of 8.47 years. Figure 4 provides a graphic representation of the data. The t-test was administered to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between Ps and RLs. The resultant score of 1.12 was not significant. If t had equaled 2.365 or higher, it would have been statistically significant. The score of .71 was obtained when the t-test was performed on the data for Ps plus others and RLs plus others. This score was not significant. If t had equaled 2.131 or higher, it would have been statistically significant.

It is important to note that fourteen of the twenty-nine adults who participated in this study identified themselves as former special education students. Therefore, grade levels attained did not necessarily represent the students' true academic levels.

Years Since Leaving School

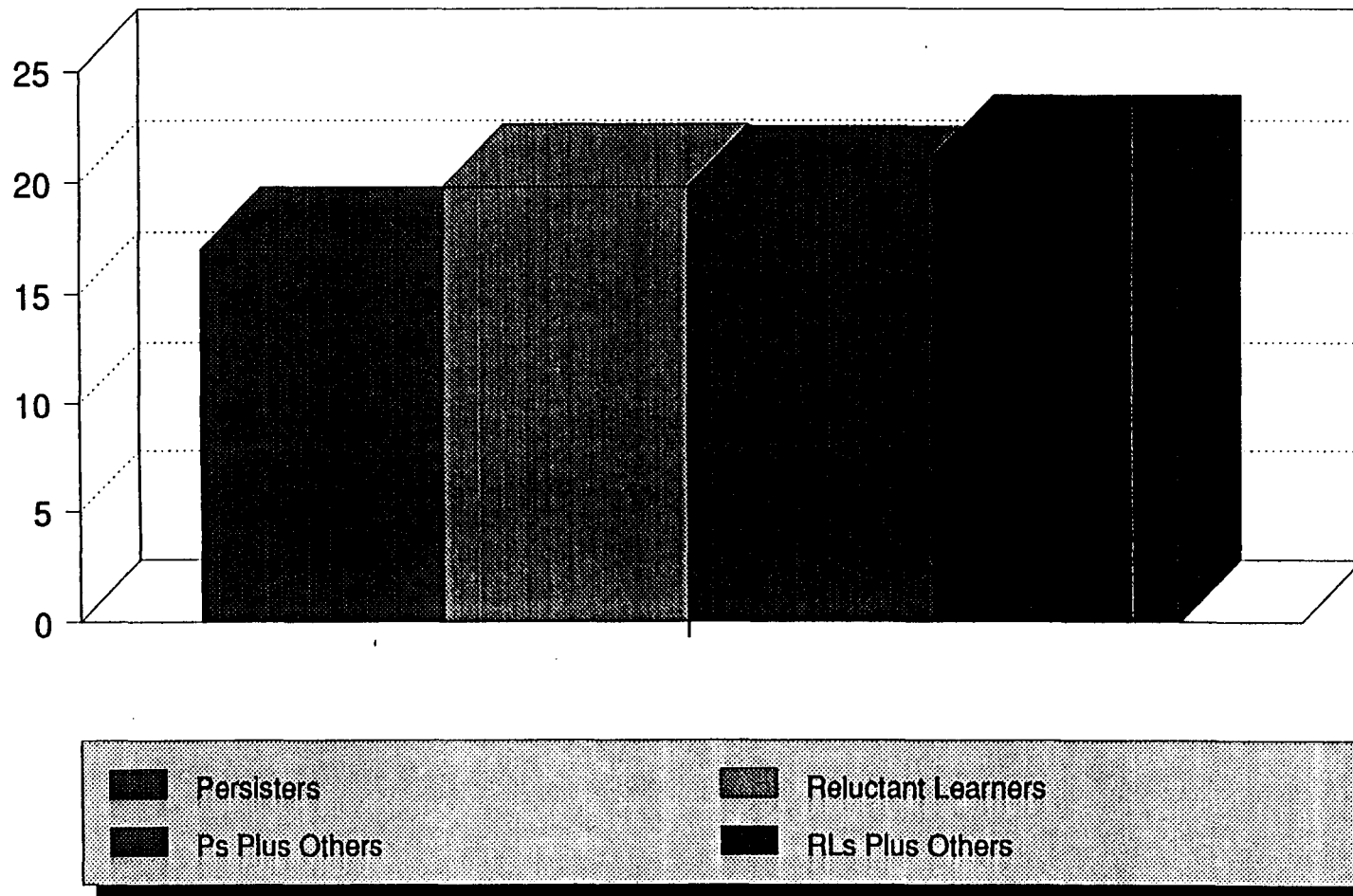


Figure 3

Mean Grade Level Attained

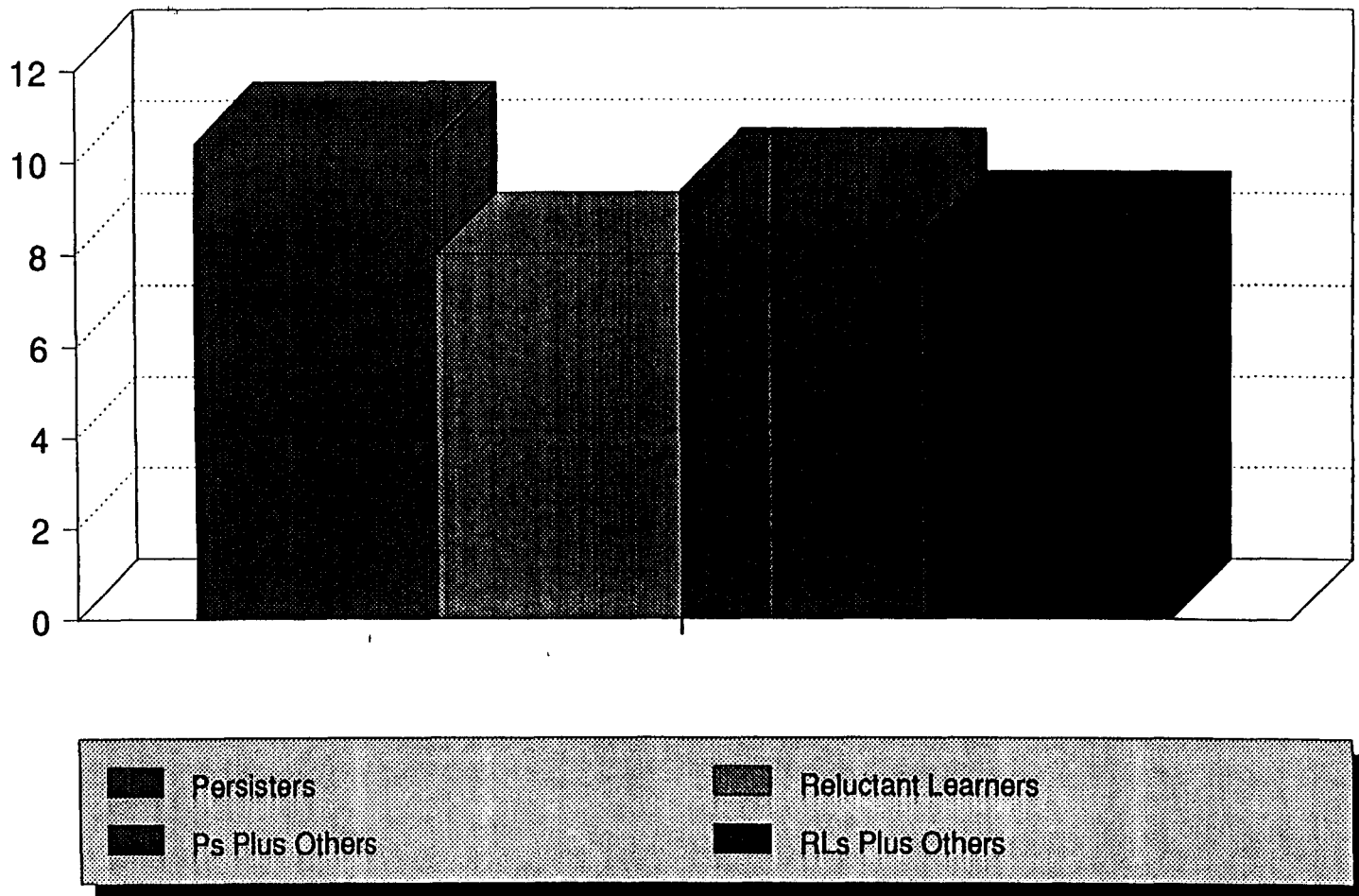


Figure 4

STATED MOTIVATION FOR PARTICIPATION

All twenty-nine participants expressed a desire to improve their reading skills. Two more specific desires which were voiced by Ps included being able to read to one's children and improving basic usage of the English language for a foreign student. The expressed desire of one RL was to earn his GED. Specific goals of the Ps plus other active participants included reading the Bible, improving one's self-esteem, learning English, and reading to one's children. The RLs plus other dropouts had two participants with special requests. These were to read and understand the Bible better and to earn one's GED.

ATTITUDES TOWARD PREVIOUS EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The last research variable examined was attitudes toward previous educational experiences. All five (100 percent) of the Ps voiced positive attitudes toward previous school experiences; however, one student stated that he had been "pushed through" while another stated that his attitude depended upon the teacher. The eight RLs reported mixed emotions. Five (62.50 percent) voiced feelings such as "love or like." Two others (25 percent) provided responses such as "O. K. and all right," while another student (12.50 percent) stated that he did not "fit in."

Mixed emotions were also expressed by the fourteen Ps plus other active participants. Eight adults (57.14

percent) gave positive responses such as "love or like." Two students (14.29 percent) said that school was "O. K." Boredom was expressed by one student (7.14 percent) and one woman (7.14 percent) expressed fear for her safety at the public school she had attended. Two students (14.29 percent) indicated that teachers were not interested in the "slow" students and did not do their jobs.

A wide array of responses were offered by the fifteen RLs plus other dropouts. There were six (40 percent) positive responses where students used terms such as "love or like." Five participants (33.33 percent) said that it was "O. K., all right, or fine." Four students spoke of not "fitting in, not liking it, and having teachers who did not know how to work with slow students."

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to determine the factors which motivated adults to participate in the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory (PULL) for six months or longer. Factors which were examined included age, race, sex, stated motivation for participation, number of years since leaving formal education, grade level attained, and participants' attitudes toward previous school experiences. Results for each factor were individually analyzed and discussed. The following profiles were generated for each of the four categories.

Persisters were those adults who had participated in PULL for six months or longer. The mean age was 36.60 years and the racial composition of the group was 40 percent African-American, 20 percent Asian, 20 percent Caucasian, and 20 percent Pacific Islander. The sex ratio was 60 percent male and 40 percent female. Sixty percent of the students had beginning reading levels which fell below 2.6, twenty percent scored a grade level of 4.6, and twenty percent of the records did not specify a beginning reading level. The mean number of years since leaving school was seventeen and the mean grade level attained was 10.40. The stated motivation for participation was to improve reading skills and all of the Ps had positive attitudes toward previous school experiences.

Reluctant Learners dropped out of the PULL program during the first three weeks of literacy training. The mean age was 42.13 years and all of the students were African-Americans. The group was 62.5 percent male and 37.5 percent female. Beginning reading levels ranged from unspecified to a grade level of 7.5. (Twenty-five percent of the scores were unspecified and 37.5 percent of the scores fell below 2.6.) The mean number of years since leaving school was 19.83 and the mean grade level attained was 8.0. The stated motivation of all students was to improve their reading skills. Attitudes toward previous school experiences were mixed. Positive responses came from 62.50 percent of the participants, while 25 percent

appeared to be neutral and 12.50 percent were negative.

Persisters plus other active participants included those who attended for six months or longer and those who had not yet met the six month time requirement that would qualify them to be classified as Ps. The mean age was 38.50 years and the racial make-up of the group was 78.54 percent African-American, 7.14 percent Asian, 7.14 percent Caucasian, and 7.14 percent Pacific Islander. Sexual composition was 71.24 percent male and 28.56 percent female. Beginning reading levels ranged from below 2.6 (64.28 percent) to the seventh grade level (7.14 percent). The mean number of years since leaving school was 19.76 and the mean grade level attained was 8.71. The predominantly stated motivation for attendance was to improve reading skills and attitudes toward previous school experiences were primarily positive (57.14 percent).

RLs plus other dropouts composed the last category. The mean age was 42.80 years and the racial composition was 100 percent African-American. Forty percent of the students were male and sixty percent were female. Beginning reading levels ranged from unspecified to a grade level range of 6.6 to 7.5. The mean reading level for 66.67 percent of the group was a grade level of 3.8. The mean number of years since leaving formal education was 21.16 years and the mean grade level attained was 8.46. The stated motivation for attendance was to improve reading levels and the attitudes toward previous school experiences

were 40 percent positive, 33.33 percent neutral, and 26.67 percent negative.

Chapter V is entitled Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations. The researcher will use the data presented in this chapter to draw conclusions about persistence rates in ABE. Recommendations for further research will also be made.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a summary, conclusions, and recommendations. The summary will contain an overview of the first four chapters. Conclusions will be drawn by answering research goals using the data collected during the study. Recommendations for future research will be made based upon the results of the study.

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to determine the factors which motivate students to participate in the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory (PULL) for six months or longer. The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. Determine the beginning reading levels of participants.
2. Determine the stated motivation of participants.
3. Determine age, race, and sex of students.
4. Determine the number of years since leaving formal education and the grade level attained at that time.
5. Determine participants' attitudes toward previous school experiences.
6. Determine which factors influenced full participation in ABE programs such as PULL.

In their 1991 article, Gardner and Marker stated that twenty-five percent of America's work force is functionally illiterate (p. 21). While adult literacy programs enjoy high enrollments, they are also faced with very high attrition rates. ABE/GED courses and some state literacy programs experience attrition rates of over sixty percent (Quigley, 1992, p. 25). These facts demonstrate the significance of this study.

Research was limited to the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory. Information was obtained by reviewing student folders and by interviewing current and former PULL participants in person and over the telephone.

The population consisted of current and former PULL participants. While forty-six adults have been served by PULL since it opened in August, 1992, only twenty-nine individuals, or sixty-three percent, participated in the study. The research instrument was designed to provide an interview format while giving space to record the students' answers. The interview questions corresponded to research goals.

Data collection was accomplished via review of student records, face-to-face interviews, and telephone contact. Upon completion of the interview process, interview forms were reviewed and classified as either Ps, RLs, Ps plus other active participants, or RLs plus other dropouts. Ps participated in the PULL program for six months or longer and RLs dropped out within the first three weeks of literacy

training. Ps plus other active participants included Ps and active students who had not yet met the six month criteria to be classified as Ps. RLs plus other dropouts included the RLs and those who had dropped out after the first three weeks of literacy training.

The mean age along with the racial and gender composition of each category was determined. The beginning reading levels, stated motivation, mean number of years since leaving school, mean grade level attained, and attitudes toward previous school experiences were established for each category. Chi-square was used to determine the significance of frequency data such as race and sex. The t-test was administered to determine if a significant relationship existed between mean ages, mean number of years since leaving school, and mean grade levels attained. Data was presented in narrative, graphic, and tabular form.

CONCLUSIONS

The problem of this study was to determine the factors which motivate students to participate in the Portsmouth Urban Literacy Laboratory (PULL) for six months or longer. It was guided by the following questions.

1. Determine the beginning reading levels of students.

It was not possible to establish mean reading levels for each category because beginning reading levels

were frequently expressed as grade level ranges or not specified in PULL records. Grade levels ranged from unspecified to 4.6 for the Ps, unspecified to 6.6-7.5 for the RLs, unspecified to 7.0 for the Ps plus others, and unspecified to 6.6-7.5 for the RLs plus others. The mean beginning reading level for 66.67 percent of the RLs plus others was 3.8.

It was impossible to draw any conclusions with the data provided. Beder and Valentine examined beginning reading levels in their 1990 publication; but, did not draw a correlation between reading levels and persistence (pp. 81-90).

2. Determine stated motivation of participants.

All PULL participants indicated a desire to improve their reading skills. According to Beder and Valentine's 1990 publication, this could be viewed as self-improvement and/or literacy development (p. 84). Specifically stated goals included reading to one's children, reading the Bible, earning one's GED, improving self-esteem, and learning English as a second language. Reading to one's children would fall under family responsibilities, reading the Bible qualifies as community/church involvement, earning a GED is a form of educational advancement, and improving one's self-esteem is a form of self-improvement (Beder and Valentine, 1990, pp. 81-90). The goals of the Ps fell under family responsibilities and literacy

development while the goal expressed by the RL was one of educational advancement. The goals of Ps plus others fell under family responsibilities, literacy development, self-improvement, and community/church involvement. RLs plus others had goals in the areas of community/church involvement and educational advancement. Obviously, the most motivating factors for PULL participants were self-improvement, literacy development, family responsibilities, community/church involvement, and educational attainment. No further conclusions could be drawn.

3. Determine age, race, and sex of students.

The mean age for all participants was 40.72 years. Ps had a mean age of 36.60 years, RLs had a mean age of 42.13 years, Ps plus others had a mean age of 38.50 years, and RLs plus other dropouts had a mean age of 42.80 years. In his 1992 publication, Quigley stated that the students most likely to complete ABE courses fell between the ages of twenty-eight to thirty-three years old (p. 26). While seven PULL participants fell into that age range, only one currently qualified as a P. Three others are active and will eventually become Ps if they remain in the program. One RL and two other dropouts fell within that range. Quigley also stated that the Ps were older than the RLs and that 22 percent of the RLs fell between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one (1992, p.

26). Data from the PULL program did not support either statement. The mean ages of RLs and RLs plus other dropouts did support Beder's 1990 statement that an adult's perceived need for ABE decreases as age increases (p. 217). When the t-test was administered, the resultant scores of .88 and .98 were not significant.

Race was the next factor to be examined. The racial composition of the entire group was 89.65 percent African-American, 3.45 percent Asian, 3.45 percent Caucasian, and 3.45 percent Pacific Islander. The Ps were 40 percent African-American, 20 percent Asian, 20 percent Caucasian, and 20 percent Pacific Islander. The RLs and RLs plus others were 100 percent African-American. The Ps plus others were 78.57 percent African-American, 7.14 percent Asian, 7.14 percent Caucasian, and 7.14 percent Pacific Islander. These results did concur with Quigley's 1992 study where he stated that those most likely to complete the program were African-Americans (p. 26).

Sex was the next factor to be examined. PULL participants were 55.17 percent male and 44.83 percent female. The majority of Ps, RLs, and Ps plus other dropouts were male. It was interesting to note that RLs plus others were 60 percent female. Since sixty percent of the Ps were male, PULL results do not support Quigley's statement that females are most likely to

successfully complete the program (1992, p. 26). Chi-square was administered to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between race and sex. Results of .050 were not significant.

4. Determine the number of years since leaving formal education and the grade level attained at that time.

Ps had been out of school for a mean of 17 years, RLs for a mean of 19.86 years, Ps plus others for a mean of 19.76 years, and RLs plus others for a mean of 21.16 years. Once again, these results did not support Quigley's 1992 Pittsburgh study. He stated that Ps had been out of school longer than RLs (p. 26). Obviously, this was not the case for PULL participants. Administration of the t-test indicated that a statistically significant relationship did not exist between the mean years out of school for Ps and RLs (t equaled .58) and for the mean years out of school for Ps plus others and RLs plus others (t equaled .36).

Mean grade level attained was the next variable examined. Ps completed a mean of 10.40 year, RLs completed a mean of 8.0 years, Ps plus other active participants completed a mean of 9.38 years, and RLs plus other dropouts completed a mean of 8.47 years. Once again this data contradicted Quigley's Pittsburgh study which stated that Ps had less formal education (1992, p. 26).

When the t-test was administered, the score for Ps and RLs was 1.12, while the score for Ps plus other active participants and RLs plus other dropouts was .71. These results were not statistically significant.

5. Determine the participants' attitudes toward previous school experiences.

One hundred percent of the Ps spoke of positive previous school experiences, even though some remembered being "pushed through." RLs had a 62.50 percent positive response rate, Ps plus other active participants had a 57.14 percent positive response rate, and RLs plus other dropouts had a forty percent positive response rate. The response rate from the Ps supported Beder and Quigley's 1990 statement that previous positive experiences resulted in persistence (p. 21). However, it must be noted that the RLs' positive response rate exceeded the positive response rate of Ps plus other active participants.

6. Determine which factors influenced full participation in ABE programs such as PULL.

The typical persister in the PULL program was an African-American male with a mean age of 36.60 years. He had been out of school for seventeen years, had attained a grade level of 10.40, and had a positive attitude towards previous school experiences.

Unfortunately, very few generalizations can be made from this study because the results of t-tests

and chi-square indicated that there were no significant relationships among the data. The data did support the following two statements. "Previous positive experiences resulted in persistence" (Beder and Quigley, 1990, p. 21). "Adults' perceived need for ABE decreases as age increases" (Beder and Quigley, 1990, p. 21).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered and the conclusions drawn, the researcher has made the following recommendations.

1. The PULL program should continue to serve the residents of Portsmouth.
2. A more consistent method of measuring and recording beginning reading levels for new PULL participants should be developed. This could be accomplished by identifying and using an assessment device designed for individuals who read below the second grade level.
3. Future research should examine variables such as referral source, employment status, marital status, and handicapping conditions.
4. Since over 48 percent of PULL participants identified themselves as former special education students, research should be done on the integration of special needs learners into existing ABE programs.

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APPENDIX A**RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Interview Format

Date _____

Date admitted to PULL _____

Date discharged from PULL _____

Age _____ Race _____ Sex _____

Reading Level at time of admission _____

Stated motivation for attending _____

Date left formal education _____

Grade level attained prior to leaving _____

Attitude toward previous school experiences _____
