

Analysis of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program in Cultural Institutions: Educational Opportunity for Adult Immigrants in New York City

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The objective of this research is to investigate the educational services for immigrants through the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program in cultural institutions such as library and museum in New York City. Due to the rapid growth of immigrant population, the role of cultural institutions in providing learning environment for adult immigrants has expanded drastically. In this study, the following questions are considered. How does the ESOL program in cultural institutions reflect the needs of diverse communities? How does the ESOL program encourage immigrants to participate in society? To answer these questions, interviews to ESOL program coordinators and teachers were conducted in February 2014. Two distinctive approaches to language instruction have been introduced in the ESOL program of library and museum. In a global age, designing the program that considers ethnic context is necessary since immigrants face difficulties in holding on to their heritage and adapting to new culture. Both accepting new culture and maintaining cultural identity are important for immigrants to participate in the community. The ESOL program of library and museum reflects the current needs of immigrants, reduces their risk of isolation from the community and encourages them to participate in society. There is an urgent need to develop educational program that is addressed to the multicultural population and serves as a bridge between the immigrants and American society. It can be stated that both library and museum in New York City have the important task of satisfying immigrants' needs and encouraging them to participate in the society.

Key words: Immigrants, ESOL, United States, Library, Museum

1. Introduction

The rapid immigrant population growth has had a great impact on cultural institutions' educational role to immigrants. In recent years, cultural institutions have increased educational opportunity for immigrants and these programs encourage adult learners to participate in the community.

In order to understand the current state of education for adult immigrants in the United States, this paper will investigate the educational services of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program for immigrants in cultural institutions. In this study, I will focus on the ESOL program offered

for adult immigrants in cultural institutions such as library and museum in New York City. How does the ESOL program in cultural institutions reflect the needs of diverse communities? How does the ESOL program encourage immigrants to participate in society?

To answer these questions, I have conducted interviews to ESOL coordinators and teachers in two different cultural institutions in February, 2014. First interview group is one ESOL coordinator and three ESOL teachers in New York Public Library. Another interview was conducted to the founder of the Cultures and Literacies through Art for the 21st Century (CALTA21) which provides ESOL program in museums. These institutions, New York Public

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Library and CALTA21 were selected due to the two distinctive approaches to ESOL program. Analysis of the interview along with other researches will illustrate how the educational practices of the ESOL program have supported immigrants from diverse cultures in the American society.

2. Immigrants in New York City

Before discussing about the ESOL program provided at cultural institution, the distinctive characteristics of New York City should be addressed.

Unlike most cities in the United States, New York City does not have a large concentration of immigrants from one country. According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), it is reported that 36.9 percent of the population in New York City is foreign born and 48.7 percent speaks languages other than English at home. About 200 languages are spoken in New York City alone, and many have limited English proficiency. In 2011, it is reported that immigrants make up 44 percent of New York City's total workforce and this shows that immigrants play an essential role in New York City's economy.

In recent years, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs in New York City states that immigrants are important for the city to thrive (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2014, p.4). The city has provided services and resources regardless of immigrants' legal status and these welcoming attitudes are believed to help increase immigrants' civic participation, engagement and economic mobility (ibid., p.3).

In many cities, globalization has influenced demographic change. Foner (2005) states that what happens in New York has a potential to happen in other parts of the nation. Kasinitz et al. (2002) argues that New York's long history of immigrant inclusions may serve as a "positive model of creative multiculturalism and inclusion" (p.1036). Thus using cultural institutions in New York as an example, following sections will discuss educational approaches to adult immigrants.

3. Definition of Cultural Institutions

There are various definitions of cultural institution but I will place emphasis on the following two definitions in my research. Carr (2002) explains "...cultural institutions are places created to hold and preserve objects and texts, to expand the boundaries of public knowledge associated with those artifacts and words, and to open the possibilities of learning in the contexts of everyday life" (p. xiii). Taylor (2010) defines cultural institutions as "Although quite diverse in their holdings, these places are linked together as institutions that focus on collecting, preserving, and/or presenting a body of knowledge ... that is socially and culturally valued by particular community. They preserve the history that is passed on to future generations; provide public places for learning, social change, and recreation; offer educational resources for formal education; and encourage lifelong learning" (p. 5).

The educational program offered in cultural institutions can be considered as free-choice learning. According to Falk (2005) "...most people participate in free-choice learning to satisfy a personal sense of identity, to create a sense of value within the world and to fulfill personal intellectual and emotional needs" (p. 266). Thus it can be stated that ESOL program in cultural institutions is essential for adult immigrants not only to learn the language but also to satisfy personal and emotional needs.

4. ESOL Program in Library: The Case of New York Public Library

American public library has a long history of providing services to immigrants. As Cohen et al.(1980) states, "librarianship is closely related to ethnicity in that it intends to serve all the people in the community and so must find ways to reach people from all the ethnic groups in the library orbit, users and nonusers" (p.180). He highlights the needs for library to serve ethnic groups by expanding its collection and creating innovative programs. To create a successful program, librarians have to understand "factor of ethnicity in the heritage, behavior and lifestyles of the people in the local community" (ibid., p.180). Additionally, by making

use of library services for immigrants, ethnic minorities will be able to have control of information and improve their living in the United States (Stern, p.93). Offering education program to minorities is a way to provide immigrants with power to change their lives.

New York Public Library is consisted of 92 branches in Manhattan, Bronx and Staten Island. The ESOL program in New York Public Library is drastically expanding and the program is reaching its services to broader districts in New York City. In 2012, there were only 17 libraries providing ESOL programs but in 2013, the number has increased to 29 libraries, and libraries now can provide services up to 6000 people (New York Public Library Annual Report, 2014, p.7). In other words, libraries are becoming an important place of everyday life for immigrants to improve English skills.

The ESOL program is free for the public and classes are held twice a week for two hours to adults (16 or over). No legal documentation is needed to participate in the class. Once the program has started, attendance is required and students are not allowed to bring their children to the class, which suggests that adult immigrants will be able to focus on the class.

According to the Annual Report, 64 percent of ESOL students in New York Public Library have a family income less than \$25,000 (ibid., p.7). This illustrates that ESOL program in New York Public Library has been reaching its services to low income families. From this, it can be stated that New York Public Library is offering educational opportunities for adults who could not afford to attend other ESOL program which needs tuition.

The ESOL program in New York Public Library is divided into four cycles. Each cycle has different curriculums and the topic studied in the class changes every month. As Table 1 shows, topics that directly relate to daily life such as civics, consumerism, family, weather, recreation, jobs, health, community services, housing and transportation are discussed. The class also introduces social and cultural events in New York City such as Hispanic Heritage Month in September, Black History Month in February, Women History Month in March, and Immigrant Heritage Week in April. These discussion topics and various events

reflect the unique characteristics of ESOL program in New York Public Library. The importance of diverse communities and cultures are emphasized through these educational opportunities.

The ESOL program in New York Public Library is taught by professional ESOL teachers and “student centered approach” is used as a teaching method. The student centered approach is a communicative style of teaching. In this teaching method, teachers become a facilitator of discussion which enables students to share their ideas with other students. As a result, every student in class has a chance to speak and they can learn the language more quickly. The opportunity to interact with others makes students feel more comfortable in a new environment.

4.1 Immigrants’ Needs

The program offered in New York Public Library has reflected the needs of diverse communities. The following findings are from interviews conducted to one ESOL coordinator and teachers.

First, the ESOL program reflects the immigrants’ needs to survive in the new community, since the program covers topics that are closely related to their lives. During the interview, the ESOL coordinator states that there are three basic needs of students. These needs are related to work, family and community. For example, if students have trouble communicating with their children’s teachers or parent’s doctors, they can learn the skills and knowledge that are offered in the ESOL program. Thus providing immigrants with English skills that are required in daily life is an essential role of the library’s ESOL program. The coordinator of ESOL program has explains that:

Survival may sound too dramatic, because of course you can survive even with not speaking English. But what I mean with that is, survival outside of your community... when you leave that community and want to participate and survive and find a job in the English speaking world, then you need English skills.

This illustrates that English is an essential tool when

immigrants want to participate in the American society. The ESOL coordinators and teachers have a good understanding of their needs and the current situation of immigrants.

Secondly, the ESOL program has responded to immigrants' needs to learn about their communities. For example, in the neighborhood of Harlem Library, the avenues are named after political and historical figures such as Malcom X, Fredrick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr., who have a strong relation to Harlem and the United States. By learning about American culture from the local neighborhood, students start to understand the community, the culture and the history of America. So this enables immigrants to feel connected not only to the local community but also to the American society.

Thirdly, immigrants have the needs to continue to learn. One of the distinctive characteristics of New York Public Library is that library has two different literacy programs, ESOL program and Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. The ESOL program is held for people who speak English as a second language, and for those who want to improve speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The ABE program is the class for people who can speak English but need help for reading and writing. So, students can transfer from one program to another, and this helps adults to continue to learn in library. This is also related to the mission of New York Public Library. The mission is to inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen the community (NYPL's Mission Statement, 2013).

The English program has provided immigrants with opportunities that support immigrants learning in their life. Thus from the interview, it can be concluded that ESOL program has reflected immigrants' needs to learn to live in their community.

4.2 Immigrants' Participation in Society

The ESOL program in New York Public Library has encouraged immigrants to participate in the society. In the interview, the coordinator and teachers of ESOL states that ESOL teachers have tried to lighten the burden of the students' anxiety and hesitation to speak in public. The purpose of ESOL program is to teach English so that students can become more confident in their abilities and

achieve their goals.

In the following interview, Teacher A points out that the ESOL program not only gives an opportunity for language learning but offers the space for socialization.

We definitely learn from each other. I encourage people to learn each other's names and communicate with each other in class and out of class to become friends. Because a lot of people come here and they are alone, so the ESOL class is not just a class but it's also socialization for them.

Additionally, Teacher A states that the class helps students feel less isolated from the society. In the class, students have the opportunity to speak to others who are from diverse cultures. Through communication, students learn to develop understanding of cultures and society. Fisher also holds a similar view. Fisher (2004) indicates that "immigrants achieve greater understanding of their social context as they engage in social networks, develop new relationships, maintain connections to their native culture, learn about foreign cultures, and begin to understand their new American culture" (p. 761). This suggests that the experience in ESOL program is important for immigrants since students learn from mutual interaction. This interaction contributes to the furtherance of students' understanding of diverse cultures and communities.

Other research suggests that the function of library is to ensure learning through discussion. Schull (2004) states that library functions as "community center," where people gather to discuss issues in society. Kranich (2010) also suggests, "as a pivotal community institution, the public library promotes access to a diversity of ideas and provides access to government, community and other useful information that keeps citizens well informed" (p.20). These references suggest that the library offers opportunity for immigrants to discuss and understand the community. In the class discussion, students compare their own native culture with other students' cultures. The experience of thinking by themselves and sharing their ideas with the class makes students be able to understand American

culture and the community surrounding them. Being able to communicate with others and exchanging ideas is a key factor for immigrants to participate in the society.

It can be said that ESOL program at New York Public Library shows a cooperative attitude towards maintaining immigrants' cultural identity. Both accepting new culture and holding on to their cultural tradition are important for immigrants to participate in the society. So, this current needs of immigrants is reflected in the ESOL program of New York Public Library.

5. ESOL Program in Museum: The Case of Cultures and Literacies through Art for the 21st Century (CALTA21)

In recent years, not only libraries but museums are becoming more involved in immigrant services that provide important resources to diverse communities. Today, museum has to serve the changing demographic population in the community, since each museum has an important civic role and responsibility to contribute to the community. In order to provide services to the multicultural population, the development of programs such as the ESOL program is necessary.

The Cultures and Literacies through Art for the 21st Century (CALTA21) intends to strengthen voices of immigrants by improving literacy skills through the use of visuals in ESOL program. CALTA 21 is led by Queensborough Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY). It is funded by National Leadership grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and it aims to build partnership between immigrant communities and museums. Currently, CALTA21 partners with museums such as El Museo del Barrio, Rubin Museum of Art, Godwin-Ternbach Museum at Queens College and Katonah Museum of Art.

The CALTA21 curriculum emphasizes the theme of identity while the ESOL program in library more focuses on daily life and surviving in New York City. The ESOL program of CALTA21 has ten units, each taught in three hour sessions. Except for unit 6 and unit 10 which are instructed by museum

educators and docents in the museum, other units are taught by ESOL teachers in the classroom. At the first visit to the museum (unit 6), the students look for a piece of art about which they want to present at the second museum visit (unit 10). As table 2 shows, the curriculum of the ESOL program emphasizes themes that are closely related to immigrants' personal identity.

The CALTA21 develops a curriculum, provides a guideline for museums and community college wishing to establish partnership, and design a model that would be effective not only in New York but would be eventually applied to all over the nation. Examining the CALTA21's approach in ESOL program will contribute to find effective models that support adult immigrants' learning in the local museums.

5.1 Immigrants' Needs

In the CALTA21's ESOL program, the needs of immigrants is reflected in the curriculum. The curriculum is designed to give an opportunity for students to enhance their understanding of identity in the new culture and society. The program initiated by CALTA21 is more personal since various themes of identity related to growing up, community, biculturalism and relationships with others are discussed in the course of study.

Many immigrants experience identity crisis when coming to a new country and trying to adapt to a new environment. The CALTA21 curriculum gives an opportunity for students to contemplate their immigrant experience. In the class, the students discuss and write about various themes that are connected to their heritage and identity. Using art work such as portraits, the students discuss about themes such as where they come from, what it means to belong to multiple cultures, and how this experience has influenced their identity. Other questions such as what makes them who they are today, and what they are trying to achieve in the future are discussed. The attempt to effectively improve critical thinking skills using arts is based on the Visual Thinking Strategies.

The Visual Thinking Strategies has been used in the ESOL program of CALTA 21. Three questions such as what is going on in this picture, what makes

you say that, and what more we can find, are used in the visual thinking strategies. This questioning technique is effective to facilitate a discussion through art. By acquiring these techniques, students learn ways to look at art and also think about themselves.

The method of Visual Thinking Strategies is useful for students to look back and to think about their past, present and future in different countries and cultures. By expressing their thoughts about their experience in the new county, the students examine how their identity has been formed in various cultures.

5.2 Immigrants' Participation in Society

The ESOL program of CALTA21 especially focuses on improving speaking and writing skills of immigrants. To think and speak about the issues of identity is most important for immigrants to participate in the new community. These exercises to communicate with other students in the class of ESOL program provide the necessary skills to participate in the society.

CALTA21's ESOL program helps students participate in society by preparing students to become leaders. The following is the founder of CALTA21's words.

The idea behind CALTA21 is to strengthen your voice since when you are in a new place, or if you were not born in that place, then it feels harder to say things, to have an opinion.

This illustrates that the CALTA21's ESOL program stresses the importance of students' ability to express their opinions in public. In CALTA21's ESOL program of museum, the students become a facilitator of a discussion. As facilitators, the students have to engage other students in the conversation. Such experiences make students gain confidence in their speaking and prepare to become leaders.

When I ask about the significance of student's becoming the facilitator of a discussion, the following is the founder's answer.

Students are in charge, so they are the ones facilitating the dialogue. It's a public space,

so all of the sudden you are engaging people in the conversation. You gain confidence by doing that, giving opinions in public and facilitating and being a leader in public...So, it's exercising all those skills, developing a voice, and say what you think it is, and also it's always supporting what you have to say with evidence.

By experiencing the role of discussion facilitator, students understand to listen to other people's opinion more carefully. CALTA21's founder states that students can acquire the "skill for a functioning democracy" through the experience. This process assists students to learn not only about American society but about democracy. As it has been discussed in this paper, museum also has the important task of satisfying immigrants' needs and encouraging them to participate in the society. The library has served as a base for discussion from the past, but in recent years, this can also be said to the role of museum. So, it is important for both library and museum to encourage immigrants participate in society by providing places where immigrants can express their opinions and exchange ideas.

There is an urgent need to develop such an educational program that connects language, identity and community. In a global age, designing the program that considers ethnic context is necessary.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the interviews conducted to ESOL coordinators and teachers show that these innovative programs in cultural institutions have served as a bridge between immigrants and the American society. In general, language education such as English education to immigrants is thought as Americanization. However, the American Library Association (ALA) takes the position that "oppose any laws, legislation, and regulations which restrict the rights of citizens who speak and read languages other than English, and those language laws, legislation, and regulations which abridge pluralism and diversity in library collections and services" (American Library Association, 2006). This emphasis of accepting various cultures is reflected in the

library and museum ESOL program that supports the multicultural population. This attitude of supporting the diverse communities also can be seen through the interviews to coordinators and teachers. The ESOL program that accepts and respects cultural diversity in cultural institutions has encouraged immigrants to participate in American society.

As examined in the paper, in recent years, not only libraries but museums are actively involved in language education. The ESOL program in New York Public Library and CALTA21 have introduced two distinctive approaches to language instruction and both institutions have developed their program according to the needs of immigrants. In the ESOL program, topics that are necessary to survive in daily life are discussed in library, while in museum, how immigrants' identity has been shaped in a multicultural environment is focused.

The development of library and museum services that meets the needs of cultural and linguistic minorities is required. Although there are some approaches of ESOL programs in library and museum as examined, the number of program is still limited. These programs that are addressed to the multicultural population in cultural institutions will help immigrants to participate in society.

Follow up research will be necessary to grasp the changing services and programs in cultural institutions. In the future research, it is important to evaluate the outcome of ESOL program and its influence on students learning by looking into the curriculums, materials, professional development courses and the students' voices.

Notes

1. This paper is a part of the author's doctoral dissertation.
2. This paper was originally orally presented at The 73rd Annual Conference of Japanese Educational Research Association at Kyushu University, on August 22-24, 2014.
3. In this study, the author used the interview guide approach (Patton, 1980, p.206) to conduct the interviews to the ESOL coordinator and teachers in cultural institutions. In an outline form, topics and questions that were addressed to the interviewee were prepared in advance, and the author, who is the interviewer, selected the questions during the interview.

Table 1
New York Public Library's ESOL Curriculum: Topics Discussed in Class

Fall Cycle (10 weeks)	<u>September/October</u> Civic Hispanic Heritage Month	<u>November</u> Consumerism	<u>December</u> Family
Winter Cycle (10 weeks)	<u>January</u> Weather	<u>February</u> Recreation Black History Month	<u>March</u> Jobs Women's History Month
Spring Cycle (10 weeks)	<u>April</u> Health Immigrant Heritage Week	<u>May</u> Community Services	<u>June</u> Housing
Summer Cycle (4-6 weeks)	<u>August</u> Transportation		

(Note: Adapted from material provided by New York Public Library ESOL Coordinator, 2014)

Table 2
CALTA21's ESOL Curriculum: Topics Discussed in Class

Units	Theme
Unit 1	Portraiture and Photography: How Does a Portrait Show Who We Are?
Unit 2	Looking Back: Where We Come From
Unit 3	Being From Many Places, Belonging To Many Cultures and Speaking Many Languages
Unit 4	Double Take
Unit 5	Preparing for an Art Museum Experience
Unit 6	Experiencing an Art Museum
Unit 7	Looking Forward: Imagining our Future
Unit 8	Honoring Research and Presentation Skills
Unit 9	Getting Ready to be a Museum Guide
Unit 10	Experiencing the Museum with Your Family and Friends

(Note: Adapted from CALTA 21 Curriculum, Retrieved from <http://calta.org>, 2014)

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