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A Phenomenology: Teachers Lived Experiences with Workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs

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A Phenomenology: Teachers Lived Experiences with Workplace
English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs

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by

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to understand in-depth teachers lived experiences with workplace ESL programs. This study provides strategies and recommendations to improve the overall logistics of workplace ESL programs which can benefit the employer, the students, the institution, and the teachers. Strengthening the partnership and communication of all the parties can strengthen the program as whole as well. Data collection of the methodological process included in-depth face-to-face interviews with seventeen teachers during the summer of 2019.The data was managed and analyzed through initial and axial coding from which main themes emerged. Six key findings emerged from themes as findings: the need of stronger partnerships, ESL initiatives as strengths, ESL program challenges, following State adult education programs, building a class environment that supports learners needs, and professional and personal growth. Hopefully, the findings of this study will provide insights about workplace ESL programs and add knowledge to the existing literature in the field.

Keywords: teachers lived experiences, workplace ESL programs, phenomenological study.

Acknowledgements

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."

Psalm 107:1

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my beloved sons Ethan Higuera-Mitre (4yrs) and Ian Higuera-Mitre (1yr) and my husband Guillermo Arturo Higuera, for their patience and inspiration to continue through the tough moments; also, my mother Reyna Marciaga, my father Adonio Mitre, my second mother Itzel De Gracia and my sister Rosaycela Mitre. In completing this dissertation, I have fulfilled our dream.

My sincere appreciation to my co-chair advisors and committee members, Dr. Christian Z. Goering and Dr. Jason L. Endacott, for their expertise, advice, and patient through this endeavor. This dissertation would have not been a reality without their guidance and support through every step of the way. I would also like to express my gratitude to my committee member, Freddie A. Bowles for her valuable comments.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

My Personal Journey

In March 2014, arriving in Arkansas, Memo, with a J-2 visa and a luggage full of dreams and goals. A month later, Memo filled out the USCIS form I-765, an application requesting an opportunity to work in the United States. After submitting and paying the application fee, aspirants should wait between three to six months for a response. As any individual arriving to a new environment, Memo started experiencing the symptoms of culture shock. Of course, Memo was at the euphoria stage where he wanted to explore, see, and compare all the charms of his new home. But he was quickly caught in a crossroads situation that compromised his comfort zone.

Memo understood the importance of learning English for communication purposes, so he searched for local resources in his community. After taking a placement test, he enrolled in the beginner English as a Second Language (ESL) program at the Adult Education Center. As a student, he was very enthusiastic about ESL classes, American culture, and new friends. Through ESL classes, Memo learned basic survival skills that help him become more proactive in his community. One day, finally, memo received a positive answer from USCIS and a white card with his name in the mail box. In that happy moment, however, Memo was not aware that he would face a difficult reality in his search for a job.

When Memo went to the staffing agencies nearby, they asked three key questions: (1) Do you communicate in English fluently? (2) Do you have a reliable transportation?, and (3) Do you have a cell phone? Before offering a job, staffing agencies apply an entry level skills test for screening prospective employees. Memo tried three attempts but did not get the minimum score required on each section. As a short-term solution, he translated the safety data sheets to his first

language: Spanish; he devotedly studied for a month, and, finally, he was hired in the United States. Memo is one of the millions of immigrants who struggle to find a job in the U.S. due to language barriers. As Memo, when immigrants start working, they face a crossroads of decisions between maintaining a work-life-school balance commonly giving up the latter. Memo, as his co-workers kindly call him, is my spouse.

Significance of the Problem

The United States' population is rapidly growing more racially and ethnically diverse than ever before, and these shifts are projected to continue to rise in the coming decades. But what is shaping Americans' face? As Figure 1 illustrates, there are more than 44.5 million immigrants residing in the U.S. since 2017, the highest historical peak so far. Consider, one in seven U.S. inhabitants is foreign born, consistent with the American Community Survey (ACS) data (Zong et. al., 2019). Nonetheless, what brings immigrants and their families to the U.S. is the dream of a land of opportunity where every individual immigrant, legal or illegal, can overcome life's circumstances and pursuit better education, employment, and safety opportunities. Likewise, newcomers embrace cultural and linguistic differences which reshapes their identities allowing them to become more active members of U.S. society. The reality is that the U.S. will continue to absorb immigrants from across the globe, and it is important to keep a harmonious equilibrium which strengthen the country economy.
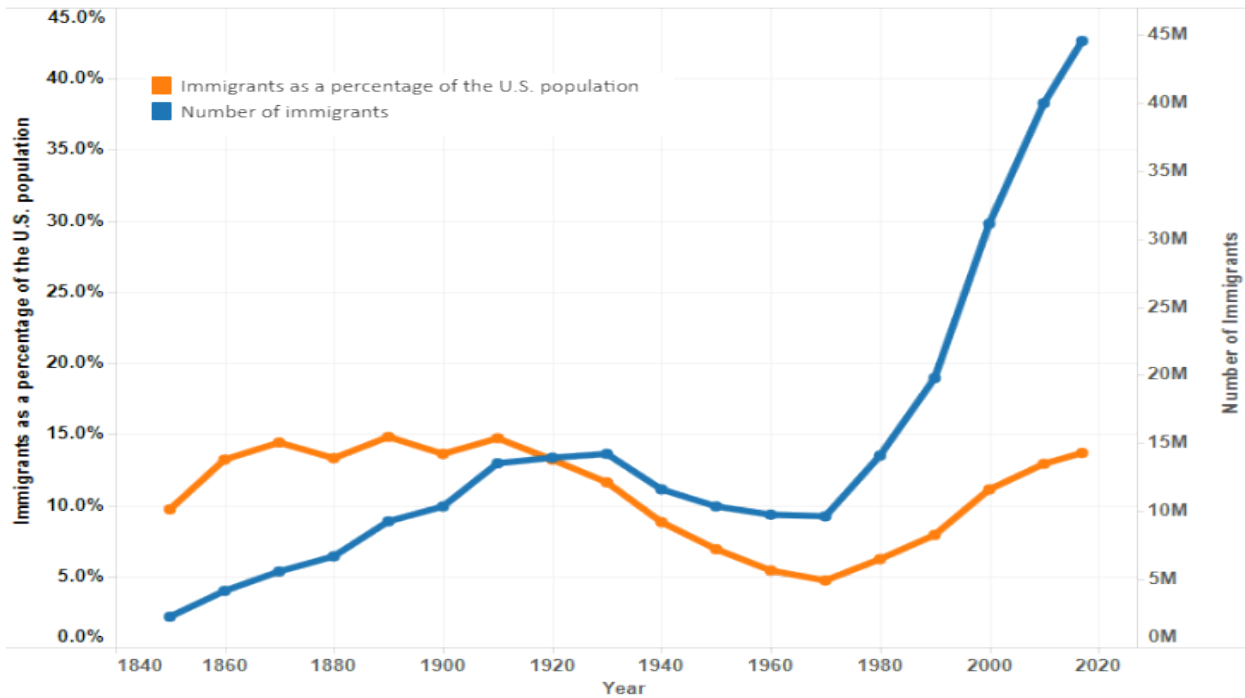
Figure 1. Size and share of foreign-born population in the United States from 1840-2017.
Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2017
American Community Surveys (ACS).

An important fact of the U.S. population is that approximately 78 percent (239.3 million)
individuals reported speaking only English at home. Whereas, the remaining 22 percent (66.5
million) indicated speaking a language different from English at home. The most common non-
English languages spoken in the U.S. in decreasing order are 62 percent Spanish, 7 percent
Chinese including both Mandarin and Cantonese, about 4 percent Vietnamese, nearly 3 percent
Korean and 2 percent Arabic, Russian, and Tagalog. From the foreign-born population
approximately 48 percent (25.1 million) were identified as Limited English Proficient, a question
that was included for the first time in the 1980 decennial Census (Zong & Batalova, 2015; Zong
et. al., 2019).

ELLs are not a new topic in the spotlight, but there are continuous efforts towards
successfully educating and integrating immigrants into U.S. society. As the largest sub-

3

population of adult students, ELLs experience numerous differences that might influence their

learning paths. Some characteristics of this particular sub-population are gender and age

differences, native language and levels of literacy (Table 1), diversity of written alphabetic

system, exposure to the target language, and motivations for learning (Burt, Peyton, & Schaetzel,

2008). More than 40 percent of ELLs are enrolled in English literacy federally funded programs,

and from these students approximately 78 percent are on working age between 25 and 60 (U.S.

Department of Education, 2015).

Table 1: *Types of native language (L1) and literacy of English language learners (Burt, Peyton, & Schaetzel, 2008, p. 3).*

Native Language Literacy	Description
"Preliterate"	"L1 has no written form or is in the process of developing a written form (e.g., many American indigenous, African, Australian, and Pacific languages)"
"Nonliterate"	"Learners have no access to literacy instruction"
"Semiliterate"	"Learners have limited access to literacy instruction"
"Nonalphabet literate"	"Learners are literate in a language written in a nonalphabetic script (e.g., Mandarin Chinese)"
"Non-Roman alphabet literate"	"Learners are literate in a language written in a non-Roman alphabet (e.g., Arabic, Greek, Korean, Russian, and Thai)"
"Roman alphabet literate"	"Learners are literate in a language written in a Roman alphabet script (e.g., French, German, and Spanish). They read from left to right and recognize letter shapes and fonts"

According to the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, from the U.S.

Department of Education (2015), an English language learner is defined as an individual "who

has limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language and

whose native language is a language other than English; or who lives in a family or community

environment where a language other than English is the dominant language" (p.1). It is important to highlight that this definition replaces the term individual of limited English proficiency. On the other hand, individuals who dominate the language under multiple domains or social circumstances are considered language proficient.

Despite English language constraints, LEP individuals actively participate in the labor force, at a slightly lower rate than their English proficient peers; 61 percent versus 64 percent. LEP men, for example, are more likely to be employed in construction, maintenance, material moving, and transportation occupations. Also, LEP woman are more likely to be engaged in production and service occupations when compared to English proficient counterparts. In addition, LEP individuals are more related to lack of a high school diploma (46 percent) and live in poverty more so than English proficient individuals (10 percent). Yet, the latest influx of immigrants is rapidly shifting these statistics because they are more college-educated than previous waves of individuals (Zong et. al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

As the United States experiences a notable period of economic expansion, the manufacturing industry faces a labor shortage that threatens to become much worse by 2028. Based on Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute (2018) estimates, manufacturers are projected to add about 4.6 million job positions from which 2.4 million may remain unfilled due to a skill gap. Additionally, the number of current open job positions exceeds the number of individuals looking for work in the U.S. labor market. But, what are U.S. employers doing to face the widening labor gap? Not surprisingly, many U.S. companies heavily rely on hiring immigrant workers to fill the job gap in diverse areas of the economy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), there were 28.2 million immigrants in the U.S. labor force accounting for

17.4 percent of the total; from which Hispanics accounted for 47.7 percent and Asians accounted for 25.1 percent of the foreign-born workforce.

From a different view, many potential immigrant-workers lack proficient English skills is a barrier for those individuals who seek a secure job position in U.S. companies. Thus, LEP workers also face the struggles of unemployment, low-wages, safety issues, and health problems in the workplace (Wrigley et al., 2003; Floyd, 2010; Madera & Yin-Lin, 2011). Many U.S. producers have transferred from ready-made production to more elastics systems that required literalness from employees because of global competitiveness (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011). Consequently, positions that required LEP workers have changed or vanished due to technology, automation, and outsourcing. The National Association of Manufacturers (2006) reported that 80 percent of their 11,000 members were experiencing a "shortage of qualified workers" who can read, write, communicate, and solve problems effectively (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011, p.210).

As of today, few U.S. companies hire LEP workers provide in-company English language and literacy programs to help improve employees' communication skills and thus more successfully integrate them into their duties. A survey from a conference board, reveals that 66 percent of the companies surveyed do not offer English language skills as part of their training although 80 percent recognized hiring workers who lack English proficiency (Woock, 2008). The Training Magazine also classified ESL 34th out of 34 categories of training commonly offered by companies (Galvin, 2002). Likewise, Burt (1997) explains that workplace partnerships are called to move beyond current practices and absorb more of the cost for providing ESL classes to such workers due to the loss of public funding.

How a nation responds to the increasing arrival of immigrants will determine the outcomes for both. From the standpoint of social responsibility, company's needs and workers needs can co-exist, creating opportunities for future economic prosperity as well as workers advancement in the labor market. So far, few educational programs have the necessary competencies to meet the needs of employees who are not fluent in English (Wrigley et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important that companies understand the needs of LEP workers and link job training with English skills. When U.S. company's investment in adult English programs, it does not only raise immigrants "productivity, earnings, and income tax payments" but also decreases unemployment rates, poverty rates, and social welfare payments (McHugh et al., 2007, pg.11-12). Of course, integrating non-English speaking foreign-born workers offers both opportunities and challenges. However, it is worth considering immigrant workers as a realistic and remedying solution to labor shortages which outweighs language barriers challenges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to (1) better understand the lived experiences of ESL teachers towards workplace language programs (2) describe how ESL teachers create, design, and organize their curricula (3) comprehend how the delivery of ESL programs influence students under such specific setting. Because this study relied on ESL teachers lived experiences, a qualitative research approach best suited this study to accomplish the above-mentioned goals.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are ESL teachers' experiences regarding workplace language programs?

RQ 2: How do teachers organize and implement their curriculum for workplace ESL programs?

RQ 3: What effect do workplace ESL programs have on the professional and personal lives of students?

Significance of the Study

The increasing demand for qualified workers in diverse occupations in the economy market with English skills justify the necessity to strengthen workplace ESL trainings. In contrast to many workplace researches, this study was not focus on the need for providing workplace English instruction but rather to examined how these programs are organized, implemented, and valued. For the reason that literature in the field of workplace ESL is commonly approached from the perspective of managers, executives, and supervisors (corporate perspective), this study sought to incorporate teachers' experiences.

ESL teachers are a unique and rich source of data because they directly interact with learners needs as well as company expectations. In addition, ESL teachers are a linking contact between all the parties involved in workplace programs. They experienced from firsthand the dynamics of these programs such as context, content, time release and job mobility. This study might benefit the education community as well as companies in general since the findings could inform them about strengths and challenges that workplace ESL programs face. Also, it may help all parties involved with such programs to understand the importance of working in a more systematic way. Finally, this research study hopes to assist future researchers and add contributions to the existing body of knowledge in the field of workplace ESL.

Limitations of the Study

This study had an acceptable number of participants, but the limited access to interviews with the participants was a limitation. The researcher started the data collection phase in May, but it extended until July because there are fewer language educators working during the summer

months. Another limitation of the study may be the homogeneous sampling, the results are limited to participants and the phenomena of interest in the study. Finally, the length of the study and unknown factors to the researcher might be other limitations of the study.

Delimitations of the Study

As most studies, this study could have had several delimitations which affected its research design and findings. This study only included participants with teaching experience in workplace ESL programs. While it was possible to conduct in-depth examined participant experiences, this is only one angle of the phenomena of interest. The study excluded other demographics (as company angle) and a larger pool due to time and access limitations. Finally, while the purpose of this study was to understand how language programs at work function, it was difficult for participants to detach their experiences from the learners and the companies.

Assumptions

This study assumed that all participants honestly responded to the questionnaire that was administered during the face-to-face interviews. The researcher also assumed that the sample criteria was appropriate and presumed that all participants were under a same or similar phenomenon of interest; and all participants voluntarily shared their experiences in the study without any type of pressures or hidden motives.

Definition of Terms

English language learner (ELL) – an individual (national, origin, minority) who cannot speak fluently in English. This term is more favored than LEP as it advocates achievements instead of deficits (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

English as a Second Language (ESL) – the use of appropriate methods and approaches for teaching English aptitudes under a setting that English is the official language. The English

structure consists of reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as vocabulary and cultural assimilation. ESL instruction is typically in English with little or no exposure to the native language (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Foreign born – term used to define individuals who live in the United States and who were born in a different country from parents not U.S. citizens (BLS, 2013).

Hispanic – is used to denote Hispanic or Latino individuals from Mexico, Central or South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, or Spanish or not classifiable origins (BLS, 2013).

Native born – term used to define individuals who were born in the United States and who were born in a different country with at least one parent being U.S. citizen (BLS, 2013).

Shortage (as in shortage of workers) – describes a market economy condition where there are insufficient qualified, available or eager workers for certain occupations (BLS, 2016).

Summary

In chapter one, the researcher justifies the importance and need for the study by outlining the purpose, significance, and focus of the three main research questions. The researcher wanted to understand in-depth the lived experiences of teachers with workplace ESL programs. How ESL programs are organized, implemented, and valued. Due to few research articles in the field, there was a need for a phenomenological qualitative study.

Organization of the Dissertation Study

The remainder of this dissertation includes the following: Chapter Two is a review of the literature that describes the composition of the U.S. workforce (recent statistics and immigrants in the workforce), information about workplace ESL programs, and critical pedagogy for ESL learners. Chapter Three describes the qualitative research design and the phenomenological study, participants, data collection, interviews, data analysis, first cycle of coding, second cycle of coding,

validity, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four explains in detail the analysis of the data and the six key findings with subsections of this research study. Chapter Five includes the researcher discussion along with the findings, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Literature in the field, commonly address workplace ESL programs from a corporate perspective. Therefore, this study sought to explore and examine teachers lived experiences with English language programs in the workplace. In this section, the literature review briefly describes the composition of the United States workforce including the immigrant population and provides a general description of the dynamics of workplace ESL programs to help the reader gain insights about related topics.

The Composition of the United States Workforce

Since 1892, the United States has opened its doors in welcoming millions of immigrants who leave their home countries in search of better jobs, education, and quality of life. But in recent years, this situation has been prominent different at the U.S.-Mexico border where thousands of migrants arrive hoping to apply for an asylum status. According to the American Immigration Council (2018), Asylum is a "protection granted to foreign nationals already in the United States or at the border who meet the international definition of a refugee" (p.1); beneficiaries with this status have the immediate legal right to live and work in the country. This is an example of why the number of immigrant's is rapidly growing in the United States.

An important fact of the U.S. population is that more than 44.5 million immigrants are residing in the United States since 2017, the highest historical peak so far. Thus, one in seven U.S. inhabitants is foreign born according to data from the ACS. Furthermore, approximately 78 percent (239.3 million) individuals reported speaking only English at home. Whereas, the remaining 22 percent (66.5 million) indicated speaking a language different from English at home. Figure 2 explains the most common non-English languages spoken in the U.S. which are

62 percent Spanish, 7 percent Chinese including Mandarin and Cantonese, about 4 percent

Vietnamese, nearly 3 percent Korean and 2 percent Arabic, Russian, and Tagalog (Zong &

Batalova, 2015; Zong et. al., 2019).
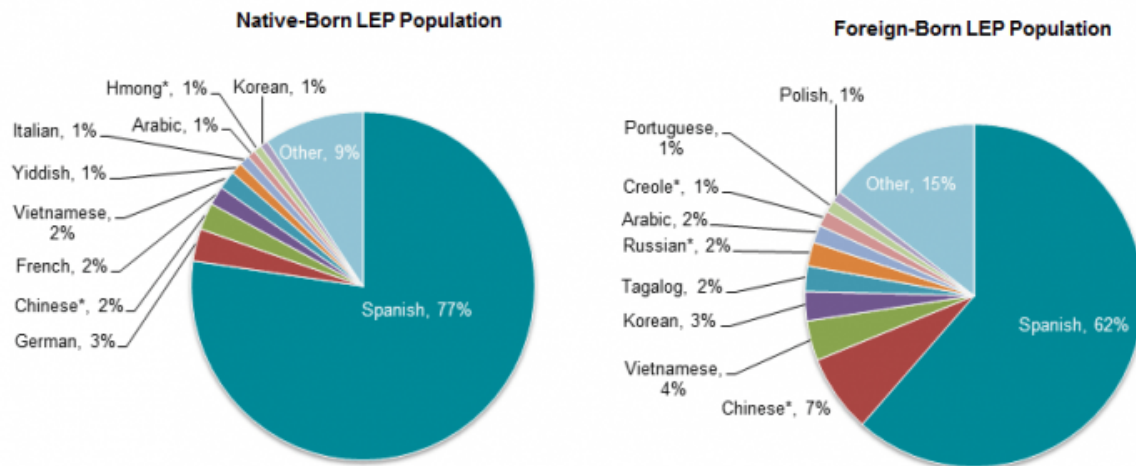
Figure 2: Top ten languages spoken by native-born and foreign-born LEP populations, 2013.
Note: Chinese includes Chinese, Mandarin, and Cantonese; Creole includes French and Haitian
Creole; and Hmong includes Miao-Yao, Mien, and Miao. Source: MPI tabulation of data from
the U.S. Census Bureau 2013 ACS.

From the foreign-born population, approximately 48 percent (Figure 3) were identified as

LEP, a question that was included for the first time in the 1980 decennial Census (Zong &

Batalova, 2015; Zong et. al., 2019). According to the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult

Education from the U.S. Department of Education (2015), an English language learner is defined

as an individual "who has limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding of the

English language, and whose native language is a language other than English; or who lives in a

family or community environment where a language other than English is the dominant

language" (p.1). It is worth mentioning that this definition replaces the term individual of limited

English proficiency. On the other hand, individuals who dominate the language under multiple

domains or social circumstances are considered language proficient.
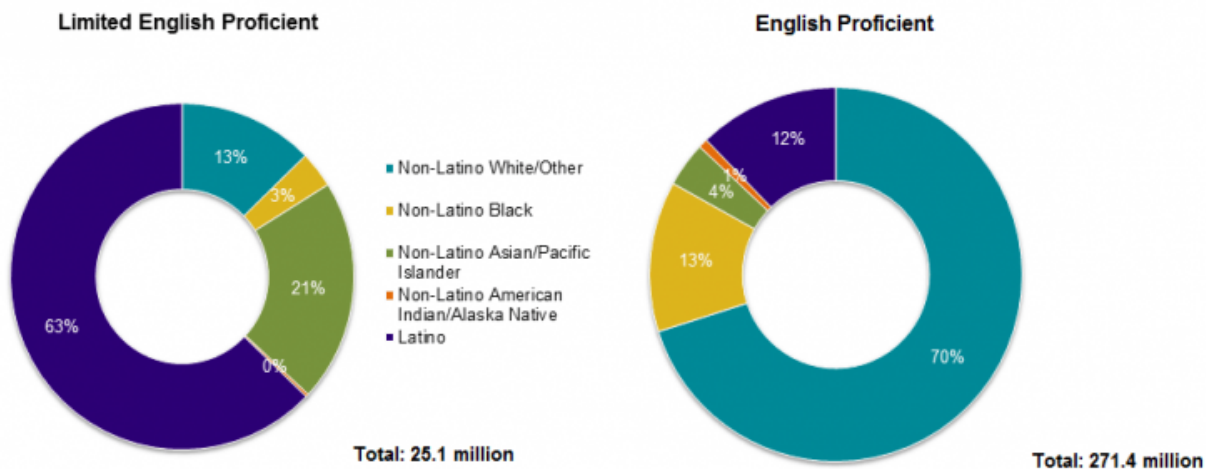
Figure 3: Race and Ethnicity of LEP and English Proficient Populations. There are
approximately 48 percent (25.1 million) LEP individuals in U.S. Source: MPI tabulation of data
from the U.S. Census Bureau 2013 ACS.

      ELLs are not a new topic in the spotlight, but there are continuous efforts towards

successfully educating and integrating immigrants into U.S. society. As the largest sub-

population of adult students, ELLs experience numerous differences that might influence their

learning paths. Some characteristics of this sub-population are gender and age differences, native

language and levels of literacy, diversity of written alphabetic system, exposure to the target

language, and motivations for learning (Burt, Peyton, and Schaetzel, 2008). More than 40

percent of ELLs are enrolled in English literacy federally funded programs, and from these

students approximately 78 percent are on working age between 25 and 60 (U.S. Department of

Education, 2015).

      The upward trend in the U.S. workforce reflects that this generation is growing older and

more ethnical, cultural, and linguistic diverse. Factors such as the retirement of the generation of

baby boomer generation, immigration, and diversity in subgroups birth rates are significantly

changing future U.S. demographic statistics (Floyd, 2010). A review of the population trends indicates that there are 28.2 million immigrants in the U.S. labor force accounting for 17.4 percent of the total, from which there is going to be a substantial population growth in two cultural groups, Hispanics and Asians by the middle of next century – 2050. The report also reveals that foreign-born workers are distributed in the U.S. as 49 percent Hispanics, 22 percent Asians, and 20 percent Non-Hispanics Whites. In addition, immigrant workers regional distribution patterns are 24.4 percent West, 20.1 percent Northeast, 16.2 percent South, and 9.4 percent Midwest (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016, 2018).

An interesting fact indicates that LEP individuals actively participate in the labor force at a slightly lower rate than their English proficient peers; 61 percent versus 64 percent. LEP men, for example, are more likely to be employed in construction, natural resources, maintenance, material moving, and transportation occupations. Also, LEP woman are more likely to be engaged in production and service occupations when compared to English proficient counterparts (Figure 4). Native-born workers are more likely to be employed in management, business, science, arts, sales, and office occupations. Income comparisons also revealed that foreign-born workers only make 75 percent of what native-born workers get paid per week (Bureau of Labor, 2019; Zong & Batalova, 2015; Zong et. al., 2019).

Foreign-Born Workers

- Management, Business, Science, and Arts
- Service
- Sales and Office
- Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance
- Production, Transportation, and Material Moving

Foreign-Born Workers: 33%, 23%, 16%, 13%, 15%

U.S.-Born Workers: 39%, 17%, 24%, 8%, 12%
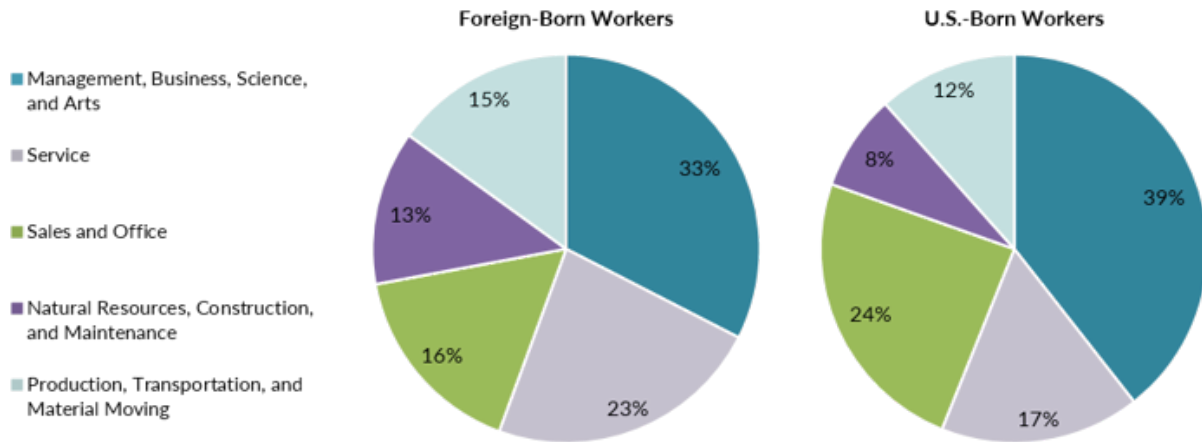
Figure 4: Employed workers in the civilian labor force (ages 16 and older), by nativity and occupation, 2017.

From a broader scope, many companies rely on hiring foreign-born workers to fill their vacant positions in the United States. The label of LEP is a burden for those individuals who seek a job in those companies. According to Zong et al., (2019), a LEP individual is also more related to lack of a high school diploma (46 percent) and live in poverty than English proficient individuals (10 percent). Research also remarks that LEP workers face the struggles of unemployment, low-wages, safety issues, and health problems in the workplace (Sum, Fogg & Harrington, 2002; Floyd, 2010; Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011; Madera & Yin-Lin, 2011). Immigrants are a key pillar of the U.S. economy and reshape the composition of American workforce.

Workplace ESL Programs Characteristics

Across the United States, many areas are encountering a growing foreign-born population in need of basic skills and English language proficiency. Research shows that a current misalignment exists between U.S. manufacturers' needs and available qualified workers to fill low-wage job positions (McHugh et. al., 2007; Brooks, 2009). A report from the National Association of Manufacturers (2006) explains that 80 percent of their 11,000 members were

16

experiencing a "shortage of qualified workers" (p.210) who can read, write, communicate and solve problems successfully (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011). Today many U.S. producers are shifting from ready-made production to more elastics systems which demand increased literacy skills from workers due to global competitiveness. Consequently, due to outsourcing, positions that required LEP workers have vanished.

Several studies have concluded that few companies are working toward an organized and practical approach to training immigrant workers for English language and literacy skills. Companies are reluctant to invest in ESL programs due to lack of information about the need for programs and cost of instruction. Representatives of different businesses in Illinois, for example, acknowledge their awareness of workers deficits in literacy and language skills, but it was not seen as an unbearable condition for providing instructional intervention. The Illinois businesses representatives explained that any type of training program is considered costly and senior management was not willing to interrupt work schedules for such matters (Burt, 1995, 1997). As another example, the Training Magazine (Galvin, 2002) classified ESL 34th out of 34 kinds of training commonly offered by companies.

In a similar way, some literature has proliferated the misconception that LEP workers are deficient when compared to native speaking peers. Consequently, this misinterpretation of non-native speakers' abilities and skills might have provoked the companies' lack of motivation to invest in ESL programs. A large study with front-line supervisors revealed that LEP workers were perceived to exceed English-speaking workers in the categories of dependability and productivity, but they underperform on the remaining eight job performance categories. Besides, interviewed executives avowed that LEP workers are valuable assets that contribute to the survival and success of their businesses (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011). Too often

17

companies increase wages as an effort to attract and retain more qualified workers, but this is not a long-term solution. This strategy widens the gap between skilled and unskilled workers. A training manager, for instance, explained that they started raising employees' salary to address disparities with the local market, but that caused morale problems (Levenson, 2001).

From a different viewpoint, human resources managers and adult ESL educators have conflicts regarding training content, goals, and expected outcomes. Brooks (2009) states that human resources managers believe that training should develop specific skills, change undesired behaviors, and promote the ability to perform well in a position. Company goals are often based on return on investment (ROI), what the company gains from the investment. Despite these issues, investments in ESL workplace initiatives are praiseworthy for companies. Such concerns should not be limited to immigrants from a single country, single language, or single ethnic group. Workplace ESL programs are a work in progress; although "they have had limited success" (Floyd, 2010, p.33).

Embracing the multiple challenges of the working world is not an easy path. But as most meaningful endeavors, it is worthwhile exploring the value of workplace ESL programs. Due to the loss of public funding, workplace partners are being called to move beyond current practices and absorb more of the cost for providing language education and training to LEP demographics. Research also suggest that organizations should prioritize these education initiatives because some benefits outweigh possible misleading outcomes. Employers who sponsor adult education have the potential to become a widespread solution to meeting the needs of companies, workers, and society as well as filling the gap. Hopefully, the push of reforms in adult English education and literacy programs will help settle and transform immigrants lives in the coming years. Since a substantial portion of the U.S. workforce has little education and faces language barriers which

directly impact the future success of local and global competitiveness. (Burt, 1997; Levenson, 2001; Gallo, 2004; McHugh et al., 2007; Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011).

The Benefits of Workplace ESL Interventions

Meeting the educational needs of immigrant workers is a complex topic nationwide. The cuts in funding for adult literacy and ESL classes complicates even more LEP individuals' social, economic, and identity integration. So, it is uncertain who is responsible for immigrant workers' education to successfully advance in the workplace. The harsh truth is that companies are concern about business and competitiveness, and the burden of education might be seen as someone's else responsibility. Thus, many companies have fated this type of initiatives due to cost related issues. However, the cut of public funding seizes an opportunity for companies to ease some restrictions and gain autonomy (Gallo, 2004). Companies can take advantage of this autonomy and promote new cross-cultural programs to prepare both native and nonnative workers. Furthermore, research shows that ESL workplace programs can provide a myriad of strengths and positive outcomes.

Workplace ESL programs provide numerous direct and indirect benefits for the company and the workers. Employers might experience improvement in workers' dependability, productivity, (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011) quality and safety. Furthermore, companies can increase profitability, tax write offs, customer satisfaction, retention or promotion eligibility, and better success with future trainings. Other secondary benefits given for implementing ESL classes include higher: employ loyalty, self-esteem, commitment, performance, morale, and public relations as well as a decrease in absenteeism and turnover. In this multifaceted learning environment, educators also have the opportunity to encourage discussions about equality and

19

cultural differences. These programs, for instance, can provide a safe space to address sensitive topics related to race, ethnicity, or work issues (Burt, 1997; Levenson, 2001; Gallo, 2004).

Creating learning opportunities only for certain percentage of workers might rise ethic and morale issues within the company. For example, native speaking workers may perceive unfairness and exclusion at work. To address these issues, native speaking (NS) workers can be matched with nonnative speaking (NNS) workers as peer mentors or conversation partners-a rich individual resource in the long-term. From these new interactions and collaborations, NS and NNS workers strengthen teamwork, sense of community, confidence, and more efficient work practices. Thus, NS workers could also learn new Spanish skills as well (Gerdes & Wilberschied,2003; Brooks, 2009).

As technology advances, it reshapes the nature of the working world faster than ever. Today, many companies operate around the clock in multiple shifts which reduces workers available time to engage in other activities. For instance, LEP employees might work long shifts, overtime, and more than one job per week to provide financial stability for their families. Therefore, workplace ESL programs might help low-wage workers' schedule and location challenges because of time restrictions to attend classes outside work. Another positive aspect may be the inclusion of vulnerable or marginalized individuals who have been denied educational opportunities due to socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. For example, female immigrant workers who manage their time between work-family responsibilities as mothers or wives (Gallo, 2004; Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

Adult ESL education should not be approached as teaching pieces for solely purposes but as a whole. Felix (2005) states that it is important to "address the needs and interests of students, engaging them in authentic, real-life tasks, allowing them ownership of the curriculum" (p.88).

Additionally, authenticity provides learners a broader scope to develop cognition, problem solving, critical thinking, language, and purposeful communication (Rilling & Dantas-Whitney, 2009). Jacobson et. al. (2003), found favorable results when authentic materials were implemented in workplace instruction for adults. For instance, ESL adult learners need to have meaningful experiences to recall and transfer knowledge to daily life activities such as job performance. Gallo (2004) also indicates that the workplace is the optimum place for ESL classes to occur because learners have firsthand access to and practice with accident report forms, safety poster, reading contracts, customers' requests, industry-specific vocabulary, and lively negotiations with supervisors and co-workers. As a result, the workplace becomes a more positive work environment and efficient work practices (Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

From a social responsibility viewpoint, workplace ESL programs also provide additional positive outcomes towards society as a whole; although its impact cannot be simply measured. Parents who improve their overall English skills can follow up and help their children succeed in school as well as actively participate in school meetings and activities. Communities that have a higher percentage of educated workers can also experience lower rates of unemployment, poverty, crime, and social welfare payments. An educated citizenry can better understand multiplicity of ideas, perspectives, and approaches when voting for candidates or solutions to issues of common concern. All of these persuasive arguments suggest that workplace ESL initiatives can be a practical solution for employers and workers needs as well as additional rewards for society (Thorn, 2001; Gallo, 2004).

Best Practices for Integrating ESL Programs and Workplace

Funding workplace ESL programs is just an avenue to help fill the gap in U.S. companies which hire ever-growing culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Therefore, it is

important to offer ESL employees ample opportunities to build, use, and integrate their new knowledge for an occupational position even long after the training or program is over. According to Brooks (2009), "best practices suggests that learning occurs within the community of work" (p.72). When facing the challenges of workplace ESL programs, Burt (1995,1997); Levenson (2001); McHugh et.al. (2007), and Brooks (2009) make the following recommendations to integrate language and literacy learning in the workplace.

For practitioners:

- Create a full-time position for a workplace project manager. This position should be solely focused on the workplace and not carry additional responsibilities or projects.

- Employ and educate English language and culture mentors for the worksite.

- Reenvision ESL classes as "reflective communities" were the teacher serves as a "reflective resource" (Brooks, 2009, p.71).

- Educational providers can sell their products in different ways. Propose for example short learning opportunities as multicultural or vocational courses looking forward to attaining realistic goals such as accent reduction, teamwork skills, and low-level English skills.

- Consider learning opportunities were non-native and native speakers can benefit as well.

For companies:

- Allocate time to promote participation in the program. A half-half, with attendance 50 percent on the company's time, and the other 50 percent on employees' own time is a good incentive.

- Many states have local workforce literacy offices which may offer start-up grants or technical assistance to develop programs.

- Improve bilingual written resources such as instructions and signs onsite.

- Hire bilingual/multilingual managers and supervisors to communicate more clearly and effectively with Spanish-speaking employees or other nationalities.

- All stakeholders as managers, executives, supervisors, and human resource department need to be informed in the topic.

- Create awareness of the extent of time needed to attain proficiency in a L2.

For policy makers:

- Public policies should strengthen the delivering of ESL education for adults as an effort to help them move in the socioeconomic ladder.

- Provide some funds to cover initiation costs for workplace literacy and ESL programs as an inducement.

- Reduce grant conditions because companies are liable to refuse them. Companies implicit costs may be much higher than out-of-pocket costs.

- Do not only target adult educators to be program practitioners, adult professionals with specialized expertise in certain areas might be beneficial as well.

Empowering ESL Learners through Critical Pedagogy

What is Critical Pedagogy?

Critical pedagogy (CP) is a concept conceived in the philosophy and pedagogical practice of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist philosopher and politician who also arose from the Frankfurt School. However, CP became completely recognized and evolved to how we know it today in the seminal writings of the noticeable Brazilian educator Paulo Freire through his famous book titled *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, Freire's interest was on capitalistic oppressors (feudal landowners) and tried to empower peasants who were working for landowners (the oppressed).

Auerbach (1995) discusses that the oppressor and the oppressed will always exist due to unequal and unfair prevailing power distribution in society which is predominated by certain dominant classes. As an example, Giroux (2001) argues that educational institutions can be seen as a place that evidence and reiterate societal power imbalance due to unequal distribution of power, political influence, and lack of neutrality; schools are indeed a part of all societies. Therefore, traditional methods of teaching assume the role of teachers as merely agents of knowledge who produce and transfer specific content, and students are labeled as knowledge consumers. Considering this, the educational philosophy of Freire proposes a more dynamic relationship between teachers and students where learning is a reciprocal process which promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and taking action. In this regard, learners need to understand the political, cultural, and social practices that compose their reality before "connecting the word with the world" (Akbari, 2008, p.277). Thus, classes are not expected to reflect the banking model of education where individuals are passive learners and merely store information (Freire, 1993). Ira Shor (cited in Pennycook, 1999) defines critical pedagogy as:

> Habits of though, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media or discourse. (Empowering Education, p.129)

How does Language Teaching Connect to Critical Pedagogy?

Giroux (2001) states that, "educators need to develop a language of possibility for both raising critical questions about the aim of schooling and the purpose and meaning of what and how educators teach" (p.41). It is not easy to differentiate between critical pedagogy, active learning, and a learner-center approach. However, critical pedagogy encourages to reflect based on individuals' own culture and experiences; discovers individuals' own voices through world and

society lenses, which can be attained through social interactions; and renovates society equality through dynamic participation in democracy (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012). In language teaching, critical pedagogy can recognize language as an ideology, not just a system, giving the opportunity to extend the education curriculum to the social, cultural, and political dynamics of language use (Akbari, 2008). CP stimulates students to respond actively and consciously to texts as active members of society and not just as consumers.

In second language education, the notion of critical pedagogy has been around for almost two decades. ESL teachers have been aware of Freire's work since the late 1970s, but recently there has been a highlighted interest in its principles and practical implications for teaching. Critical pedagogy is a unique teaching and learning approach which encourages a different way of doing things or teaching with an attitude. Therefore, CP differentiates from other notions and ideas that are commonly addressed in ESL literature. Critical pedagogues explore avenues for social change through education including language instruction. (Pennycook, 2001; Akbari, 2008; Ortega, 2012).

The political implications of education and second language teaching may not be entirely evident to many professionals in the field. ESL is traditionally seen as the teaching of reading, writing, and syntax content with the ultimate goal of communication which does not have much political or critical significance. In real life situations, however, any language interconnects as a semiotic system. Where any form of words, signs, and behaviors make meaning from ideological, historical, and political symbols within society. (Pennycook, 2001).

Noroozisiam and Soozandehfar (2011) explain that language itself might be a suitable tool for empowering learners' in English as second language settings. Language is a concept that one accepts ideologically in one way or another; for this reason, ESL classrooms favorably go beyond

just linguistic knowledge, so language should not be solely tagged as a communication tool. Therefore, ESL learners' have the opportunity to challenge, negotiate, and participate on socio-cultural issues. In other words, it is a beneficial approach which engages learners in a fluid relationship between texts and society.

For critical language pedagogues, the goal of education should be based in the relationships among language learning and social transformations were teachers can also explore gender, ethnicity, religion, class, sexual orientation, and political inequalities. These topics are atypical and limitedly presented in regular classes. Advocates of Critical ESL pedagogy primarily implement the principles and practices of critical pedagogy into their curriculum and syllabus because ESL teachers commonly interact with racial and language minorities such as immigrants and foreign students (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012). According to Norton (2004), some ESL students lacking social, communicative, and linguistics competencies and habitually with damaged identities, face the struggles of living in a new country. That is why language teaching and learning must be connected to students' objectives and needs, so they can realize why things are the way they are and how they evolved to be that way.

Critical ESL pedagogy is "the pedagogy of hope" (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012, p.225). Furthermore, Noroozisiam & Soozandehfar (2011) explain that the dominant issues should not be totally put aside or avoided in language contexts. Instead, marginalize issues need to be discussed and solved as an alternative to acquiring voice. Tension, therefore, can be seen as a positive outcome and stimulus for learners' development (table 2). In addition, the authors advocate that deviation of mainstream teaching (traditional approaches) also activates learning.

Table 2: *Presents the banking concept of education and reflections on main ideas (Freire, 2002, p.73 cited in Noroozisiam & Soozandehfar, 2011, p.1242).*

Teacher-student relationship	Reflections
"The teacher teaches and the students are taught";	"We should not go to the opposite extreme. Teachers can teach and learn, but teachers Cannot teach. Balance must be found"
"The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing";	"Teachers know more about certain things, but not everything. Freire (2002) also thought "the teacher must be expert and knowledgeable to be a responsible critical-democratic educator" (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 13)"
"The teacher thinks and the students are thought about";	"Who is in charge? Don't students as human beings have the innate ability to think and challenge?"
"The teacher talks and the students listen meekly";	"This is not true in the real world. No teacher wants to talk too much and the students cannot do so either"
"The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined";	"Students at least need self-disciplines; and teachers can help arrange the agreeable mechanism"
"The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply";	"Both parties can contribute. Yet, the goals must be firm, and teachers can have an agenda while students can learn to read the worlds"
"The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher";	"This depends on what kind of actions and the given roles and situations"
"The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it";	"Teachers as authority of knowledge that is not ill-structured need to set up the program. However, flexibility and space can still be embedded and negotiation can exist"
"The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students";	"The freedom of the students can be constrained by many factors, linguistic needs, background experiences, etc. and the teacher usually can help to provide guidance"
"The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects";	"Where is the line? How far can the students be in taking care of their learning? "The ground may vary in different cultures, fields of study and profession"
"Learners are regarded as adaptable, manageable beings";	"Do we not want the students to be adaptable and manageable"

From a similar standpoint, Akbari (2008) suggests that CP should be introduced into English language teaching as a transformative learning concept. Educators, for example, can renovate their classes into more critical approaches as a discourse of liberation since CP interrogates the validity of accepted truth, power, relations, and identifies the necessity of moving forward from arbitrary social constraints. Furthermore, nurtureing a discourse of hope because it provides marginalized groups a new opportunity for changing status quo thinking and reshaping social conditions. Today's teaching content is commonly based on Anglo-American culture from the United States or the United Kingdom. Promoting critical awareness, offers English language learners' opportunities to reflect on positive or negative issues from their own realities and cultures. Hence, Learners' first language (L1) is a valuable resource which might minimize negative effects and create favorable conditions for second language (L2) acquisition. Through learners' identities and L1, teachers can encourage those first steps towards empowerment and positive social change.

Teachers are under accountability pressures and a wide range of responsibilities which thwarts any effort of curriculum planning and implementation on critical L2 pedagogy. Besides, the limited availability and diversity of critical L2 resources in the commercial market also becomes a challenge when teaching critical language awareness. As an alternative solution, ESL educators can discuss controversial topics through short courses and workshops. Technology resources also provide an opportunity to accumulate, save, and edit students' production of materials. For instance, a principle of critical pedagogy describes that "to a fair extent, students and teachers make or bring in the materials" (Crookes, 2010, p.341).

On the other hand, it could be difficult to find recognized publishers to produce resources of this orientation. Most of these materials introduce concerns of the middle and upper class,

creating a mismatch with learners' localness and learning needs. For example, ESL learners' might be dealing with situations such as how to find a job, change a visa status, request asylum, or apply for citizenship. However, commercial textbooks foster interactions with topics such as travel destinations and holidays. Currently, there is a necessity to develop and produce teaching resources in the field of critical L2 pedagogy. Crooks (2010) states that, "this whole area is rather under development" (p.341).

Summary

The review of the literature provided a synopsis and overall knowledge about the composition of the United States workforce. There are more than 44.5 million of immigrants living in the U.S. since 2017 from which approximately 48 percent were identified as LEP. Furthermore, it describes workplace ESL program characteristics, benefits of workplace ESL interventions, best practices for integrating ESL programs in the workplace, and how teachers can integrate critical pedagogy and ESL programs.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

Since the early stage when a research proposal is born and designed until its execution, the researcher starts and continues asking a myriad of inquiries about the topic. Curiosity and creativity are your first steps to accomplish the goal of walking towards your research of interest. In your path as a novice researcher you fall, stand up, reflect, and continue pushing forward all the research components that become what we call our original work – the dissertation study. Instead of creating a cause and effect or predicting relationship with my research topic, I wanted to unfold multiple layers of meaning about the phenomenon of interest.

As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p.6). While it might be possible to employ a quantitative methodology to quantify certain teachers' experiences with ESL programs in the workplace, such methodology does not suit well the purpose of this study. Considering the fact that I needed a complex and in-depth understanding of the ESL teachers' experiences. This interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants can only be established through a qualitative research study.

Creswell (2013) suggests that a qualitative study is more appropriate when the researcher is seeking to empower participants stories, hear their voices and balance the researcher power within the study. Methodologically, my rationale for choosing a qualitative approach was based on the need of a deeper exploration and explanation of ESL workplace programs. Important literature has been identified in chapter two; however, this type of exploration necessitated an in-

depth descriptive qualitative study. A study where teachers shared their lived experiences and rich information about language programs at work.

Of the various types of qualitative research approaches, I chose to adopt the phenomenological tradition. A phenomenological study reports the common lived experiences of a heterogenous group of individuals rather than categorizing, simplifying, and reducing a phenomenon. The basic characteristic of a phenomenological study is to describe the universal essence or essences of meanings mutually shared about a phenomenon. These underlying descriptions consists of what individuals experienced and how individuals experienced it – a composite description of the essence (Creswell, 2013; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). A phenomenology study aligned well as I explored the essence of being a teacher in a particular type of program. The topic of ESL programs in the workplace are relatively unexplored through the teachers' viewpoints, so a descriptive phenomenological study is most appropriate to add knowledge to the existing literature in the field. "The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that' (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.46)" (Creswell, 2013, p.82).

For a phenomenology approach, it is necessary that the researcher revise what is called their "*epoche*" before beginning a study. In the "*epoche*" also known as bracketing*,* the researcher suspends all judgements, personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p.79). The researcher does the exercise of putting aside all presuppositions about the phenomenon to have a fresh interpretation of participants' experiences and responses. The "*epoche*" is primarily important for the data collecting, analysis and writing the findings of the study. In chapter one through the section of my personal journey, I explored and narrated my personal experiences with English language programs. This bracketing does not

take me completely away from the study but demonstrates transparency towards the phenomenon and help reduce researcher bias. Bracketing from the phenomenon provides readers an opportunity to decide and criticize if the researcher has fusion prior experiences with participants experiences in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

In this study, I examined teachers' experiences with language programs in the workplace through the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are ESL teachers' experiences regarding workplace language programs?

RQ 2: How do teachers organize and implement their curriculum for workplace ESL programs?

RQ 3: What effect do workplace ESL programs have on the professional and personal lives of students?

The purpose of this dissertation study is to describe and develop a better understanding of ESL programs in the workplace, describe in-depth teachers lived experiences and details how data was collected, coded, and analyzed.

Research Design

Participants

The target population for this dissertation study is teachers with experience on at least one on-site ESL program during their career. During the summer of 2019, ESL teachers were invited to participate in this study until I conducted seventeen (17) volunteer individual face-to-face interviews. From the 17 ESL participant teachers, two were male and fifteen were females. At the time of this study, three teachers corroborated that they were actively teaching a workplace ESL program in the Northwest Arkansas area.

Every qualitative research is unique, but researchers usually are concerned about credibility. Rossman and Rallis (2003) answered the question how many participants are enough? They state that, "it depends on the conceptual framework, research questions, genre, data-gathering methods, time, and resources" (p.138). Mason (2010) explains that gathering abundant data does not necessarily lead to more information. The appearance of a piece of data or code is needed to become part of the analysis framework. As a justification of sample size, I considered 17 participants for interviews to be enough because they provided sufficient data to conduct a credible analysis to report my findings as well as theme saturation (Marshall et. al., 2013). For phenomenological studies, Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon of interest.

When choosing your participants for the study, individuals should be accessible, willing to share information and shed light on the specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Based on these specifications, I invited and interviewed a purposeful sampling of participants who accurately represented the purpose of this study. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.96). The results from the data collection phase provided a wide range of teacher responses towards language programs in the workplace. If I had randomly chosen teachers for the interviews, there is a possibility that I would have chosen participants without experience on the research topic.

Conclusively, I decided that 17 participants were sufficient, and I feel satisfied with the sample because I was able to achieve the goal of interviewing participants with the required qualifications for this study. I wanted teachers who, as a whole, represented their experiences with ESL programs in the workplace, and I also wanted teachers who would bring their own

unique voice and interpretation to their responses. This heterogenous sample of participants provided rich data resulting in similarities as well as differences in the data which allowed me to answer the three main research questions and gain further insights about the phenomenon.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

Through the guidance of my co-chair advisors, Dr. Christian Z. Goering and Dr. Jason L. Endacott, I submitted all the required documentation and requested permission to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas. Once the approval was received from the IRB, Protocol number 1903187211 (see Appendix A), I started conducting the research. For the interviews, I provided and explained ESL teachers with a Consent Form (see Appendix B) asking for permission to participate in the research study. To invite ESL teachers to participate in the study, I visited several educational centers in the Northwest Arkansas area and recruited participants. In addition, I contacted participants through e-mail to coordinate a date, time, and location which best suited their schedules for the face-to-face interviews.

Data Collection

In phenomenological studies, the researcher often relies on collecting data through in-depth and multiple interviews with the participants (Creswell, 2013). The primary source of data for this study was face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews as the data collecting method directly aligned with the purpose of gaining insights on teachers lived experiences with ESL programs in the workplace. Furthermore, I explain step by step the data collecting process that I followed.

Pilot interviews

For this study, I designed an interview protocol (see Appendix C) which consisted of fourteen questions. Through semi-structure questions, I engaged and stimulated participants to share their experiences at the beginning stage of interviews. Then, I moved forward to open-ended questions allowing for a more interactive interviewer and respondent discussion. This type of structure facilitated the transition from relatively neutral information to more in-depth descriptive data about the phenomenon. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, semi-structure interviews listen to what participants want to say, create better avenues of inquiry, and provide richer information.

Before initiating the formal phase of collecting data. First, I chose to conduct two pilot interviews to familiarize with the interview protocol and gain experience in the art of interviewing. I was also able to improve my data collecting method and received suggestions by respondents. Both interviews were audio-recoded with participants authorization and shared with my co-chair advisors Dr. Christian Z. Goering and Dr. Jason L. Endacott, who provided further feedback about the questions and pilot interviews.

Interviews

Teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study sent a confirmation e-mail to the researcher. An open communication was kept with teachers through emails to arrange and meet a date, time, and location that best suited their schedules. I met with 17 participants at a university, community college, literacy centers, several local cafes and one participant at her home for the interviews that were conducted. Before each interview, I explained to participants the purpose of the study, interview protocol, steps to protect their confidentiality, and reminded them that they could refuse to participate at any time during the study without any consequences.

During the summer of 2019, all the interviews were conducted in participants native language English. The face-to-face interviews ranged from forty-five to one hour with twenty minutes.

The researcher conducted interviews to discover things that cannot be directly observed. The researcher, for example, cannot observe feelings, opinions, and purposes. neither can the researcher observe behaviors or events that occur at certain point in the past. The researcher cannot observe how individuals organize their thinking and attach meanings to their worlds. (Patton, 2015). But the interview allows the researcher to enter into participants worlds, gain understanding on their experiences, and meanings of those worlds. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that researchers should not be concern about specific rules and the order in which questions are made during the interview. Through good interview questions, the researcher collects information even in the form of stories about the phenomenon being explored. Likewise, Van Manen (1990) explains that phenomenological interviews serve specific purposes as:

> (1) "it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience" (p.66).

For this study, the above-mentioned notions were true, I was able to build rapport and a trust relationship with participants through deep conversations. Through interviews, I was able to unfold the essence of teachers lived experiences when they narrated and described their stories about ESL programs in the workplace. The interviews proved to be a complete and appropriate collecting data method because I gathered historical information about participants; I had control over the line of questioning, and I went beyond superficial answers to descriptive ones. I gained a new understanding about ESL programs in the workplace instead of bringing my own meanings or literature meanings to the interviews (Creswell, 2013). The interviews also gave the

teachers an opportunity to contextualize their thinking and meanings which resulted in rich responses from the participants.

Other important steps in the research design is how the researcher saved and stored the collected data. I chose to audio record all the interviews in two different devices for security purposes. During the interviews, I audio recorded participants responses in a laptop and mobile phone. Both devices were secured with a password code. I also masked participants names by assigning a random number to their interviews.

At the time of this study, from the 17 participants only 3 teachers were actively engaged in an ESL program inside a company. Of course, I tried to observe these classrooms, but I could not gain access to the sites. Consequently, interviewing became the only mode of collecting data because most teachers had past experiences with the phenomenon and observations were not possible. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that in most qualitative approaches "occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews" (p.108).

Data Analysis

The overall structure of this study followed a phenomenological analysis approach suggested by Creswell (2013) as a guide, which is as follows:

1. Describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study.

2. Develop a list of significant statements. Find statements about how individuals are experiencing the topic, each statement has equal worth, and nonoverlapping statements.

3. Group significant statement into larger meaning units or themes.

4. Write a textural description of the experience and include verbatim examples.

5. Write a structural description and reflect on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.

6. Write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions.

The coding methods in this study are divided in two main sections: first cycle and second cycle of coding. I used the first cycle and second cycle of coding methods as a data management technique to effectively organize, engage, and follow up data.

First Cycle—Initial Coding

As a first step, I listened and transcribed all the audio recordings from the interviewees for data analysis purposes. Then, I heard what the data was saying, familiarized myself with the data, and gained an overall sense of the data. Using a color coding, I read the transcripts several times and highlighted words or texts that constantly appeared or stood out in the data. I also used the margins of the hard-copy data to write comments, reflexive thoughts, and insights that emerged while reading the transcripts. The color coding was used as follows:

- Pink – used for data that described content and methods

- Yellow – used for data that mentioned strengths and challenges

- Orange – used for data that indicated needed improvements

- Purple – used for data that remarked impacts on students

From the highlighted words, phrases, and sentences emerged the initial coding. I used teachers' exact words as the initial coding to better understand teacher's language, perspectives, and worldviews of the phenomenon. Saldaña (2009) states that initial coding "is not necessarily a specific formulaic method" (p.81). Initial coding provides the researcher an opportunity to consider all possible directions, reflect deeply, and take ownership of the data. Later through a parent-child code hierarchically, I initially organized the essence and meanings of the data that

teachers provided. This practical structure transformed the data in a more manageable form for further data analysis.

Second Cycle—Axial Coding

The second step of analysis consisted of moving forward from merely descriptive and in vivo labels to a more advance way of analyzing the data. In doing so, I used axial coding to strategically reorganize and reanalyze the data that was fractured during the initial coding. Saldaña (2009) explains that the relationship of the codes is like the "axis" of a wheel with rim, spokes, rubber, and axle discerned from the first cycle of codes (p.159). By examining the codes and re-reading my comments about the data, I was able to look for patterns, reduce the number of initial codes, and regroup data in meaningful units.

From the second cycle of coding, emerged the employer axial coding, teacher axial coding, and student axial coding. Then, I created three different word documents and rearranged the data according to its axial coding for further refined analysis and writing of the results. During the initial coding, some texts received multiple codes representing different topics. After the emergent themes materialized, I was able to sort all the overlapping data into the best fit theme. Creswell (2013) states that re-coding of data after the initial cycle of coding also helps the researcher improve reliability. Foremost, the ultimate goal of axial coding "along with continued qualitative data-gathering and analysis is to achieve saturation" (Saldaña, 2009, p.161).

The last step of the analysis process consisted in making meaning of the data and writing the findings in a narrative way. After the second cycle of coding, I consolidated, reduced, and interpreted what the data was saying. To the best of my knowledge, I explicated the essence and meanings of the teachers' lived experiences with workplace ESL programs. When reporting my findings, I identified and included segments that were responsive to the main three research

questions of this study. Furthermore, I used thick and rich descriptions and other strategies when reporting the results for strengthening the validity of the research design. As part of the findings, I included quotes which represented teachers voices and lived experiences with ESL workplace programs.

In the next chapter, I included a code mapping (tables 3-4) which shows how the first cycle of coding and the second cycle of coding emerged and ultimately the narrative writing of the results. This study revealed a unique rotating relationship between the three-axial coding. In figure 5, I explain how the findings emerged from the internal IMETI code (coordination of employer-teacher-institution) and ultimately resulted into the external ISAA code (autonomy and agency). Several authors discuss the importance of including a visual illustration on how categories interact and relate to one another (Anfara et. al., 2002; Creswell, 2013; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Mittenfelner-Carl, 2016).

Validity

When a researcher assumes a naturalistic research, unique questions and concerns a rise about the validity of their findings. First of all, it is important to keep in mind that naturalistic inquiry cannot be carried out as a positivist inquiry. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe that, "one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured as in quantitative research" (p. 242). Some researchers and philosophers argue about the limitations and discrepancies when evaluating validity in qualitative research. Creswell (2013) explains that validation emphasizes a process which "attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants" (p.249) rather than a verification. In doing so, several authors (Creswell, 2013;

Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Mittenfelner-Carl, 2016) suggest validation strategies to document the accuracy of the findings in qualitative research. I use the following strategies in this study:

Thick Description

As in any qualitative study, "there is always an interpreter or translator" of participants experiences and worldviews (Anfara et. al., 2002, p.33). For this reason, researchers should not present their findings to the audience as magical incantations where no one understands where they came from. Keeping my readers in mind, one of the strategies that I employed was thick and rich descriptions when reporting the results. In the findings chapter, I included teachers quotes so that the readers of this study can make their own meanings and possible conclusions regarding transferability.

Peer Review

First, I want to explain that both of my advisors acted as peer-reviewers of this study. We continuously scheduled peer debriefing meetings throughout the research process. The peer reviewers asked difficult questions, provided feedback and kept the researcher honest regarding methods, meanings, and interpretations of data. Through my advisors experienced voices, I was able to remain open and see other possibilities in the data. We also pre-coded one interview transcript simultaneously and discussed the codes that emerged as part of this external check of the research process.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

As I have previously explained, I am the wife of a LEP individual who has worked for several companies in the United States. My husband struggles with English and work duties raised my curiosity regarding ESL programs in the workplace. Creswell (2013) explains that

discussing personal experiences connected to the phenomenon of interest does not completely detach the researcher from the study. However, this discussion provides the researcher an opportunity to reflect on possible biases as well as the readers can judge the reported results. Throughout this study, I have discussed my personal experiences with the phenomenon being examined and how I bracket myself aside when the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted to increase the validity of this dissertation study.

In addition to the above-mentioned specific strategies, I included in chapter four a code mapping to clarify to my audience step by step the study results. It is important to make public disclosure on how the researcher collected data, coding emerged, and conclusions were made until the writing phase. In Merriam and Tisdell (2016) words, "the qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion make sense" (p. 238). This study does not make any claims of generalization. However, the code mapping can be understood as a degree of reliability for the study as well as another way of improving validity and trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, I followed and completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules and regulations from the University of Arkansas, receiving IRB approval number 1903187211 (see Appendix A). I further explained to the participants' the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures and requested their signatures of consent (see Appendix B). Participants' names remained anonymous and interview transcripts were assigned a random number as well as secured in my personal laptop with a password. I did not engage in deception about the nature of the study. Nor did I share my personal experiences with participants during the face-to-face

interviews. Creswell (2013) emphasizes that sharing personal experiences with the participants in a phenomenological study "minimizes the bracketing" (p.175).

Summary

For this study, the researcher followed a phenomenological approach to unfold the multiple layers of meanings that teachers held and experienced with workplace ESL programs. I collected data through face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed data through initial and axial codes. From the codes emerged themes which answered the three research questions of this study. I also used thick descriptions, peer review, clarifying researcher bias, and code mapping as validity strategies. All the required steps and requirements were followed to respect participants confidentiality.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative phenomenological research study. The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of ESL teachers towards workplace language programs, how ESL teachers create, design, and organize their curriculum, and how the delivery of ESL programs influence students under such specific setting.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research is far from being a uniform approach. For this reason, there does not exist a standardized way of making sense of your data during the different phases of data analysis. Since the beginning of the research design, researchers have divergent purposes, goals, and methods. Therefore, data analysis is an eclectic process which is not random but serves the needs of each unique study (Anfara et. al., 2002).

The overall structure of this chapter follows a phenomenological analysis approach suggested by Creswell (2013) as a guide. In this chapter, I clarify the step by step of the data analysis process, and I write the results of this study in a narrative form. As a data management technique, I used first cycle of coding and second cycle of coding to effectively organize, engage, follow up, and analyze the data.

First Cycle—Initial Coding

As a first step of the data analysis, I read and re-read the interview transcripts to gain an overall insight of the data. Then, using a color-coding technique, I highlighted words, phrases, and sentences that constantly appeared or stand out from the data. I also used the margins of the hard-copy data to write reflexive comments and insights which resulted from reading the data. The color coding that was used is as follows:

- Pink – used for data that described content and methods

- Yellow – used for data that mentioned strengths and challenges

- Orange – used for data that indicated needed improvements

- Purple – used for data that remarked impacts on students

From the highlighted texts emerged the initial coding which consisted of descriptive and in vivo labels. I used the teachers' words as the initial coding to better understand their language, lived experiences, and views of ESL workplace programs. Through the initial coding, I considered multiple directions, reflected deeply, and took ownership of my data. I used a parent-child code hierarchically (table 3), to organize the initial essence and meaning of the data that teachers provided. Saldaña (2009) states that initial coding "is not necessarily a specific formulaic method" (p.81).

Table 3: *First (1ˢᵗ) cycle of coding – initial coding analysis of data.*

CONTENT & METHOD (CM)	IMPROVEMENTS (IM)
CMR Requirements • State • Learner • Texts **CMTP Teacher's Philosophy** • Empathy • Experience as a guide • Negotiate syllabus • Methodologies & strategies • Liberation (Freire) **CMSN Students Needs** • Student driven	**IMT Teaching** • Multiple levels in class • Stand-alone lessons **IMES Employer Support** • Classroom • Learning materials • Resources • Compensation for employees **IMETI Coordination** • Employer-Teacher-Institution • 3-way stronger partnership • Goals and objectives • Communication

Table 3: *First (1ˢᵗ) cycle of coding – initial coding analysis of data.*

STRENGTH & CHALLENGES(SC) Can be both	IMPACTS ON STUDENTS (IS)
SCL1 L1 Proficiency • Lack of first language competence **SCS Support** • Setting-onsite • Affective domain **SCF Funds** • Decisions on funding and testing **SCTECH Technology** • No computers or laptops **SCT Time** • Participation before or after long-shifts • Pressure **SCSM Students Motivation** • Intrinsic • Extrinsic • L2 awareness	**ISE Expectations** • Skills for specific jobs **ISJM Job Mobility** • Promotion within company • Earnings **ISA Assimilation** • Make life easier in society • Integration into work and community **ISAA Autonomy Agency** • Make own decisions • Gain independence • Empower

Second Cycle—Axial Coding

In a more semantic and systematic way, I used axial coding to strategically reassemble and reanalyze the data that was fractured during the initial coding phase. Saldaña (2009) explains that the relationship of the codes is like the "axis" of the rim of a wheel, spokes, rubber, and axle discerned from the first cycle of codes (p.159). By re-examining the codes and re-reading my comments about the data, I was able to look for patterns, reduce the number of initial codes and regroup data in meaningful units. This practical coding transformed the data in a more manageable form for further data analysis.

From the second cycle of coding (table 4), emerged the employer axial coding, teacher axial coding, and student axial coding. I created three different word documents and regrouped the data according to its axial coding for further analysis and writing of the results. During the initial coding, some texts received multiple codes representing different topics. When the themes

materialized, I sorted all the overlapping data into the best fit theme. Creswell (2013) indicates

that re-coding of data after the initial cycle of coding helps the researcher improve reliability.

Foremost, the goal of axial coding "along with continued qualitative data-gathering and analysis

is to achieve saturation" (Saldaña, 2009, p.161).

Table 4: *Second (2nd) cycle of coding – re-analysis and re-grouping of data into three axial coding which emerged from the 1st cycle of coding.*

1. EMPLOYER AXIAL CODING
IMETI   Coordination of Employer-Teacher-Institution • 3-way stronger partnership • Goals and objectives • Communication **SCS   Support** • Setting-onsite • Affective domain **SCT   Time** • Participation before or after long-shifts • Pressure **IMES   Employer Support** • Classroom • Learning materials • Resources • Compensation for employees

Table 4: *Second (2nd) cycle of coding – re-analysis and re-grouping of data into three axial coding which emerged from the 1st cycle of coding.*

2. TEACHER AXIAL CODING
CMR   Requirements • State • Learner • Texts **CMTP   Teacher's Philosophy** • Empathy • Experience as a guide • Negotiate syllabus • Methodologies & strategies • Liberation (Freire) **CMSN   Students Needs** • Student driven **IMT   Teaching** • Multiple levels in class • Stand-alone lessons
3. STUDENT AXIAL CODING
ISE   Expectations • Skills for specific jobs **ISJM   Job Mobility** • Promotion within company Earnings **ISA   Assimilation** • Make life easier in society • Integration into work and community **ISAA   Autonomy Agency** • Make own decisions • Gain independence • Empower

After the second cycle of coding, I consolidated, reduced, and interpreted the data. For a better understanding, the findings of my study emerged from the internal IMETI code as they

ultimately resulted in the external ISAA code (Figure 5). There is a unique rotating relationship

between the three axial codes which transition to themes. To the best of my knowledge, I

explained the teachers' lived experiences with workplace ESL programs. When reporting the

findings, I included data that was responsive to the three main research questions of this study.

Throughout the findings, I also included the teachers' quotes to bring in their voices and

experiences in the narrative as well as evidence support of the findings (Cresweel, 2013; Padilla-

Diaz, 2015).
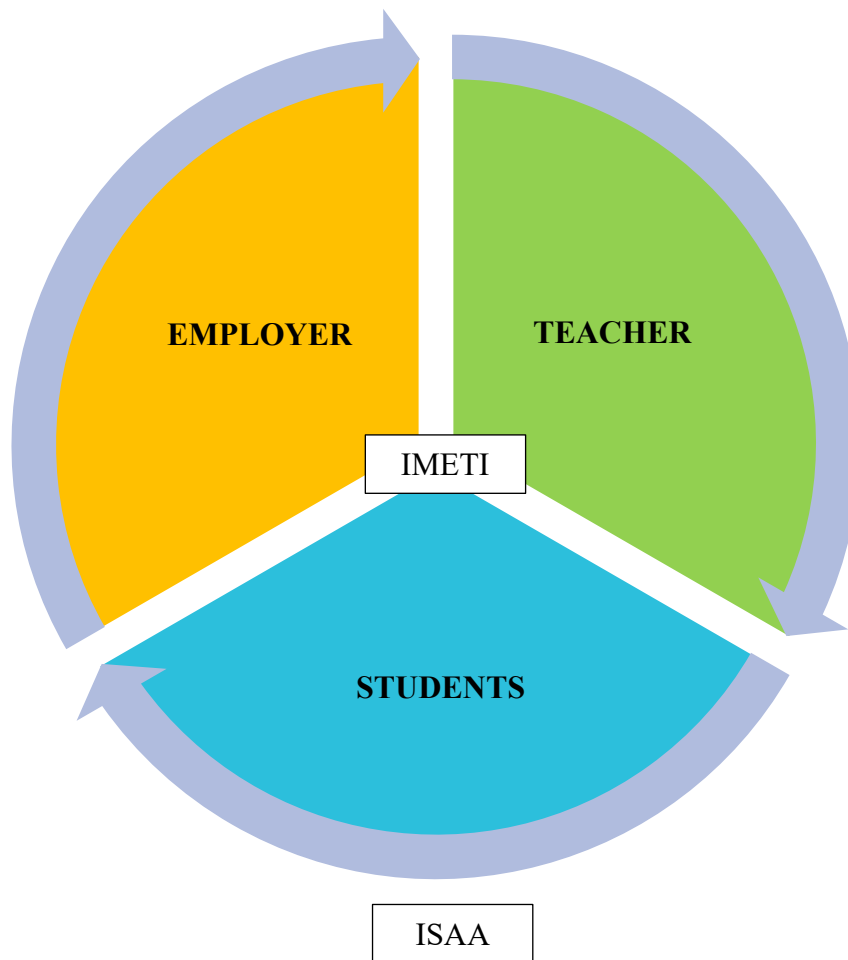
Figure 5: Rotating relationship between 3 axial coding which transition to themes and therefore the findings of this study.

Over a period of three months, seventeen semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with ESL teachers, from which two were male and fifteen were female. All the interviews were conducted in participants native language-English. Furthermore, the face-to-face interviews ranged between forty-five minutes and one hour and twenty minutes. The interviews also took place at different locations, such as participants' home, work, and coffee shops. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants authorization and later transcribed for analysis purposes. The seventeen participants confirmed that they had taught at least one on-site ESL program during their career. At the time of the study, three teachers corroborated that they were actively teaching a workplace ESL program in the Northwest Arkansas area.

Findings

Research Question 1: What are ESL teachers' experiences regarding workplace language programs?

<u>***The Need of Stronger Partnerships***</u>

A common topic addressed by teachers in the study was their concerns about the poor communication between the parties involved in workplace ESL programs. Although the companies have had the initiative of implementing ESL classes on-site, most of the teachers held and described a poor communication with the contact person from the company who foresaw the logistics of such programs. As part of this poor communication, teachers also reported their lack of information regarding companies' background, business, expectations, objectives, and goals. Example of teachers' responses that indicate these concerns are:

> *"I think when the classes are first initiated it would be helpful if there is more foot work done, you know if the people who are in charge of ESL classes and the people who are in charge at the company collaborate more, there is always trouble because typically on the employer side there is no time."*

"There is usually some type of contact at the workplace with who I communicate about the schedule, the room and the calendar, you know we talk a little bit at the very beginning and then I am on my own."

"I had no idea of the background of that company and did not had idea of the goals for the students, I was not given much guidance as the intermediary as their teacher, it would have been nice to have a stronger partnership with the company, where were we going."

"Instructors need to be more aware with the environment that workers encounter, tour the place where people work, build a stronger relationship with the managers of the workers. There should be a better communication between the manager, teacher and school."
"I think there should be a strong partnership between the organization that is providing the language learning and the company that is giving the access to the setting."

The above responses demonstrate the need for building a stronger partnership between all the parties involved in the logistics of workplace ESL programs. Through more proactive alliances, teachers can improve the communication channels, collaborations, and teamwork with the company as well as the institutions. Strengthening the company, teacher, and institution relationship might also improve the overall logistics as well as outcomes of English language programs at the workplace.

Related to the above-mentioned finding. Companies that approve ESL initiatives on-site understand the importance of educating their workforce. In the same way, employees recognize the value of learning or improving English skills for work purposes. However, the issue relies on the mismatch of goals for ESL workplace programs. Most of the teachers described that they are juxtaposed between their companies' expectations for their employees and what students want to learn in such programs. Teachers shared the following responses:

"I think creating a curriculum in partnership…developing a curriculum that not only gives them the language for success in their workplace contacts but also gives them a language to survive outside the workplace…to be able to interact under other circumstances, be success at workplace and outside."

"In the end both want the same thing, companies want employees to learn English and workers know they need to be proficient in the second language. But, there needs to be more communication between what the company expects and how fast, and what the students want to learn and how they evolve during that learning process, you know they do not only need English for specific jobs but all these other life situations."

"The company also needs to foresee the employees' goals so it can be mutually beneficial and engaging."

"I think there should be a strategic plan of what they want the teaching to be and the students to be, articulate to both teachers and students, everyone needs to be part of that partnership, it is something that is negotiated."
"Our students have different goals and objectives for attending language classes, but the most common is that they want to be ready to communicate inside work and outside, English for other areas."

"You will think that because it is a workplace ESL class the goals would be specifically for workplace and I would say that workplace classes are more a tool because their goals are to be able to communicate with the people around them in this country."

"Students are driven by specific needs so they know and this is a huge potential for workplace classes, they know the language that they need, they are doing the same things over and over again."

Teachers responses revealed that there is necessity for developing a curriculum which foresees a company's goals as well as students' goals. A curriculum should not be solely emphasized on the specific goals of a company; rather, there needs to be a balance. As an alternative solution, the parties involved in workplace ESL programs can design a curriculum in partnership with mutually beneficial outcomes. Through a curriculum in partnership, teachers can integrate in class English skills for better job performance with functional skills that will help students participate in society.

ESL Initiatives as a Strength

According to the teachers' responses, it might be difficult for employees to participate in regular ESL classes in their communities. Teachers described that employees have many

responsibilities at once which complicates learning English. For example, employees have a second job, or they take care of their family. In the teachers' own words:

> *"The company got in touch with the Community College, the company had the initiative to start ESL classes onsite, they wanted to help their employees to learn English, employees were already there on their workday so it was useful to have the teacher come in, in oppose to them going out at night, employees have busy lives, work, have families, so it was easier this way."*

> *"Students are already there, they do not need to worry about transportation, so it is important like for the affective domain, like a lower anxiety area for the learner because they feel they are in a more supported community…it is easier in many ways for them, probably the biggest strength is the environment, onsite."*
> *"It is nice that the company invest in them because they are busy, working, taking care of their families, and they cannot attend ESL classes at other places even if they are willing to, they do not have enough time…some of them have two jobs."*

> *"Most of my students have two jobs, multiple family responsibilities and rarely sleep the adequate number of hours per day."*

> *"At workplace, students are more consistent because they are there, classes are better…and more successful."*

> *"They definitely took advantage of that environment that was provided for them the class."*

> *"An advantage is that you teach something, and they can immediately use it apply it in the workplace…they were with their peers you know they become a better community of learners."*

As any well-intended program, workplace ESL initiatives offers strengths as well. Delivering English language instruction on-site is advantageous because employees do not need to commute to a different place. In addition, the teachers mentioned that ESL classes on-site reduces learning anxiety because employees have the opportunity to create a unique classroom community. In this way, the setting (workplace) itself is a strength.

From the teachers' responses, it is important that companies help meet the language needs of workers whose native language is not English. Teachers mentioned that:

"The students that I had I think they felt more supported in their workplace because they were getting an opportunity to grow as individuals in language."

"Putting your money where your intentions are, pretty meaningful, for students can see the company is investing in me so that the person the language learner can become better."

"I think the program help my students gain more confidence because someone was supporting them, you know some of those students came every single week and were committed to their language learning…that motivate them as individual."

"They understand the usefulness imbedded in learning language when the company is investing in them. The company investing in the language program and employees is another strength."

When a company cares about the needs of their workforce, employees perceive a positive message from the employer. Likewise, employees understand the importance of learning English for working purposes. As the result of workplace ESL initiatives, employees feel more motivated, confident, valued, and supported because the training arose from the company side. Therefore, ESL programs in the workplace is another strength.

In the following sub-section, the teachers' experiences and responses are numerous.

ESL Program Challenges

Participants, at different points in time, indicated experiencing a low level of commitment from the company side regarding ESL programs. Teachers explained that regular basis work is constantly competing with English language classes inside the company. When asked about possible workplace ESL program challenges, teachers stated:

"English will never be as important as anything else so classes get booted, is not a priority compared to keeping up production, compare to make sure workers are available to work the shift, it is a challenge that English classes are always competing with job duties, it will never win out, that is hard."

"To my experience not all employers, the organizers who are in power within the company see this as a priority, few people see it as a priority and if there are people who are in position of power and do not see it as a priority that is a drawback."

54

"One of the things that can contribute is a three way to success…needs to be committed, and if there is not an equal level of commitment is not going to work as well as you think."

"A company needs to have a better understanding of why we want our workers to be better English speakers…I hope it is the ladder and if it is the ladder then you need to be fully committed, if you want results you need to support it 100 percent."

"I think the push by companies itself, if they offer ESL classes onsite…it is not push enough in the companies, if the companies want to see results, they need to push it more on their side, I had the opportunity to teach at… and they never prioritize that push for classes."

"Some changes might be that people who are helping with ESL need to understand that these people are working…and when are you going to fit language instruction in the company, the structure is important considering people lives."

"There is always trouble because typically on the employee side there is no time, need to be more connections between the people so they can prioritize to make it a success."

"The company should offer it at times that people can do it, release an hour for ESL classes, not before or after work, people are tired and tired people do not learn well, offer a way that people can do this, cooperate more."

It is important that companies prioritize the delivery of ESL classes inside the company as well. The teachers commented that the company's side needs to be completely committed and communicate regularly with the other parties for the success of the program. For workers to gain English competencies, ESL programs need to have equal worth as job duties in the company structure.

Location

Another issue experienced by respondents' is the lack of an adequate location for English language instruction. Teachers explained that they commonly use the cafeteria inside the company as their classroom. They also highlighted that the cafeteria is a common area with distractions, and it does not offer the minimum requirements of a classroom. Examples of teachers' responses included:

"My class was in the cafeteria, my class was in a section of the cafeteria, it was right after lunch was finished."

"There were distractions because the location was a cafeteria, noisy, no place to keep teaching things, no classroom, would have been nice to have shelves to keep materials, I was a traveling teacher with my materials."

"We do not have a classroom so I teach at the break room where everyone eats, where they hang out before their shifts."
"Another part that is very important for the program is that the company provide a specific location to teach as oppose to giving class in the cafeteria, is important to dedicate money to build a classroom, training center, where people can go to learn English, it is a necessity."

"We do not have a classroom, it would be nice to have a place where to keep class materials not inside my car trunk."

As a possible solution, the company can designate an adequate space with the minimum requirements for a classroom. Another suggestion is to build a classroom or training center useful for English language instruction as well as for other types of training. The above responses also indicated that it is important to supply the classroom or specific location with appropriate furniture such as bookshelves. Providing an adequate location can facilitate the delivery of teaching and learning objectives more effectively. For employees to thrive in their education, they need a positive learning environment.

Resources

From a similar viewpoint, teachers mentioned that ESL workplace programs are lacking necessary resources. First, there is a need of basic resources such as textbooks and workbooks for students. Some teachers explained that they do not have enough books and sometimes must request authorization to make photocopies. Second, there is also a necessity of technology resources such as computers and internet.

"I think that the textbooks that we use in the classroom are really important because how you teach or what you teach is how you learn. But the… does not have enough books to take to workplace classes."

"When we were having meetings to start classes onsite three years ago, I was asking questions and saying…if you want results we need resources, if we do not get these things you may not see the results that you are expecting…I am still asking for them."

"We do not have enough books, students need to share the book or sometimes we make authorized copies, but is difficult to teach content with such limitations."
"This is an initiative and the headquarters of the company are here, but there are plants outside Arkansas with computers…you would think that the State where the headquarters is would be the star, but is not like that."

"At…we do not have internet access, we do not have laptops or computers, they do not provide books."

"It would be nice to have a language lab with computers and internet where students can go and practice."

As I have mentioned earlier, it is important to build a stronger partnership between the parties involved in the logistics of ESL workplace programs. Learning materials are important because they help teachers organize their class content as well as students acquiring knowledge in the target language. For better workplace ESL program outcomes, teachers and students need adequate and enough resources for English language classes. Teachers also suggested that a computer laboratory can help learners explore and utilize a myriad of learning tools as well.

Time

The majority of the teachers described that employee's attendance is voluntary and outside of their regular working hours. Consequently, workers experience time constraints because it is difficult to balance work, family, and school responsibilities. Besides, many employees work shifts are longer than eight hours or includes overtime which lessens the like hood of a regular participation in ESL programs. Teachers shared the following responses:

"I think the hour when you take a class can really be a challenge, some students go into… at 5AM or late at night so you are not in your peak if you are too tired, so these

people are working certain amount of hours per week and then to do language on top of it, it is harder to learn."

"Most importantly I think it is that workers are tired and do not come in fresh, typically they attend after working a full day shift and sometimes they come in before the shift, the main difference is that they have more pressure on their time."

"There was a woman who worked 3rd shift an attended class with an incredible level of dedication for 1 year but then she was not able to keep it up and was not able to continue because she had a really demanding shift."
"Students attendance is completely voluntary, and attendance must be out of regular working hours, before or after their shift."

"The students have a rolling schedule which is a disadvantage because cancellation of work also means cancellation of class."

"It is a huge commitment to come before or after a 10-hour shift to learn English."

If workers have the opportunity to fully participate in English language classes, they can

attain short-term and long-term goals which benefits the company and the individual. As an

alternative solution, the company can reserve a time within the workers' shifts for attending

English language classes. If this solution is not possible, it would be helpful that the company

propose a viable solution that allows workers attend consistently ESL programs. Otherwise, the

ESL initiative would not be achieving the main objective of helping workers improve their

English skills.

Incentives

Not surprisingly, companies which implement workplace ESL programs apparently do

not have a concrete long-term plan with their workers. Most of the teachers described that

workers who attend ESL classes do not have enough or at all growing opportunities inside the

same company. Teachers mentioned that:

"If workers improve their English skills but there are no growing promotion opportunities in the same company they will leave to another company, if you put time and energy in educating your workforce, you need to put money on seeing more work

promotions as English increases and they do a better job, the company needs to have a bigger picture."

"After students get 40 hours and get retested they get a $50 gift card from… which is more than what they were doing on the past, I am the only teacher who has been able to keep students and get them retested."

"It will be nice if the company provides a paid incentive, like we would not measure achievement but by improvement, then provide increase in salary and position."
"They were not paying their students and they should offer a type of monetary compensation. If workers are willing to come in and stay after their shift they should be compensated."

"Students do not receive any type of monetary incentive for attending classes."

It is important that companies sync ELLs with a long-term plan. Companies can utilize a strategic plan for a before and after workplace ESL program. Before, the companies can offer motivational incentives for employees who attend and achieve established goals. Teachers commented that the company can provide any type of compensation such as a gift card. At the end, the employer can foster internal growth opportunities for ELLs. These strategies can help address the issue of absence of promotions as well as motivate workers to attend regularly to ESL class even more.

Research Question 2: How do teachers organize and implement their curriculum for workplace ESL programs?

Following State Adult Education Programs

Another finding revealed that teachers are required to utilize the State Adult Education Curriculum. The umbrella of the state curriculum standards includes basic skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and language proficiency. The teachers explained that curriculum objectives and goals are wide-ranging and not specifically connected to workplace ESL programs. When students master adult basic skills, they are encouraged to continue studies in the

59

General Educational Development (GED) program. In this matter, teachers commented that State

Adult Education Curriculum is more focused on career readiness rather than educational goals.

They consider that the state's curriculum is a solid and consistent document which serves as a

guideline, but it has limitations as well. The teachers' responses included:

> *"For my classes, I use the State adult curriculum as a guideline, the State distributes a curriculum layout to all Adult Tech Institutes and Literacy Councils in Arkansas."*

> *"Here for adult education we follow the State curriculum, you know the State has goals they want adult students to achieve, we may not agree with all but we must follow it."*

> *"What I do and have always done is go on with our State mandate curriculum which all education programs in all States have…but is not specific to workplace classes so I follow the guideline that they give me, is more for reading and writing skills and language competency…the basics."*

> *"Adult education is under workforce development so at a State level we have objectives, a curriculum and the State has goals that they want all students and adult Ed. to achieve not just ESL but students working under GED…for some adult basic classes on math or language so the pendulum is really swung on and it is more focus on career goals and less on educational goals to be honest."*

> *"We have to follow the same curriculum, I think it is important to have that same consistency, we have the curriculum which is a pretty solid document, it does not talk specifically about workplace but it offers some guidelines."*

> *"When I worked for workplace education, the center followed the State adult curriculum, I think the structure and consistency is positive but it is too broad…there are some things I do not agree but I do it."*

> *"Students may need something different but you must follow the State curriculum so we do not have the autonomy or flexibility to simply say that I am not teaching this part of the curriculum…unfortunately we do not have that freedom."*

> *"We do not have a lot of flexibility in changing the curriculum, it may change over the years because it is revised but is not something I can change on a daily basis."*

> *"Certain autonomy and flexibility for teachers is also important because teachers learn about their students and curriculum that is given to you…is just a guide book not a particular detriment but teachers know their English language learners."*

Teachers interact with their students on a daily basis; therefore, they understand the broad

and specific English language needs of each student. For this reason, it would be helpful for

teachers to have more flexibility and autonomy over the curriculum. Through certain autonomy

and flexibility, teachers can integrate hard skills with soft skills in class helping adult learners

grow as a whole.

Building a Classroom Environment that Supports Learners Needs

As I have discussed previously, the state's one size fits all curriculum does not always

meet the ELLs needs. Of course, employees attend ESL programs because they want to improve

English skills for specific job tasks. However, employees also bring in their voices and purposes

for learning the foreign language. Teachers mentioned that,

> *"My job now is to try to combine what we want them to learn from a language standpoint, mix what the State wants them to learn with what skills students want to develop that will help them at the workforce."*
>
> *"We have textbooks but I use them combine to teach my classes, certain topics and practices according to what students want to learn at that time."*
>
> *"Learners have different motivations for learning language, you also need to take into account the cognitive and developmental differences…adults bring different schema and life experiences to your classroom, so it is very important to differentiate lessons and plan lessons based on adult learning needs."*
>
> *"I follow a student center approach in class and avoid talking too much, my class is more focus on student's needs, I try my best to use hand on materials, different grouping configurations in class, engaging topics with my learners."*
>
> *"I work with students on how we are going to design this to help you, adults want to have meaning because they work, are busy, meaningful experiences why they are learning English."*
>
> *"At the beginning, we talk a little bit about what they have in mind, what they want to learn, what they think is most useful and meaningful to them, these conversations help me see the needs of my students and plan accordingly."*
>
> *"We do grammar, writing, reading lessons, we work on vocabulary, the students in their evaluation has asked for more conversation so we do a conversation piece, but it is really*

61

student driven, so I really believe classes should be student driven, what students want to learn, what do they need to learn so it is a combination."

"Students know that we are here for them…generally we provide a lot of orientation on how to survive and adapt to US culture in our English classes too."
"I like teaching students understand why American do what they do, workers need to survive and thrive here."

"I try to make it engaging, find out what they wanted to learn…some lessons on how to write out a check, basic life skills…how to go to the bank if you need a loan, how to go to the post office, functional life skills this is how I structure my lessons."

"I plan lessons around real-life needs, the scenario as well as the skills needed by students…in class discussions are the most useful."

One more interesting finding is that teachers put forth effort to integrate the state's mandated curriculum with the students' learning needs. Most teachers shared that they build engaging lesson plans which boost meaningful experiences in the classroom. While teaching grammar, reading, writing, and speaking lessons, teachers also try to develop a student-driven learning environment. Since the beginning of the program, teachers work closely with their students to understand learners' needs, goals and plan accordingly. By blending useful and meaningful experiences, teachers hope to help ELLs become successful, independent individuals inside and outside work.

Similar to the above theme, teachers explained that it is important to know and understand their students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For instance, who are they as individuals? which is their native language? are they literate or illiterate in their first language? what country are they from? and what are their interests and desires? Teachers stated the following:

"For me the key, the number one thing that makes a good teacher is the connection that they make with their students…I am empathetic to their needs and what they want and because of that they feel comfortable enough to ask questions to make mistakes, they are not afraid to be wrong."

"I like to hear and consider my student voices, opinions, and interests because that strengthens the teacher and student relationship."

"After teaching and presenting so much material in class you learn so much not only about teaching but the people how and why they learn…how students from different countries and cultures interact together inside the classroom, watching them interact that helps you with a lot of knowledge."

"Know the language of learners that will be in class, important to know participants and where they are coming from, interests and desires…if there are students with prior education and knowledge, they might have different motivations for learning English that would be a different curriculum than if I have students that might be illiterate in their L1…negotiate syllabus."

"When you work with adult English learners from different countries with different native languages is completely different, it is important to understand who they are and where they come from as a person so you can reach the student and help them move forward."

"I think English teachers need to be empathetic to their learners needs and try to understand their cultural and linguistic backgrounds for better teaching and learning outcomes, for example, many teachers learn basic Spanish or some common words to bridge to their learners."

"More than teaching specific workplace… I believe is important to have gone through the experience of learning another language, for understating the process…understating how language learning works, without going through the process it is very hard to understand…be empathetic."

The teachers' philosophies also disclosed that they build an empathetic learning environment for ESL students. Through empathy, teachers have developed positive and stronger relationships with culturally diverse students within the classroom – creating a community. Some teachers added that it is helpful to learn the basics of any language for creating a bridge between languages. For example, teachers can learn basic Spanish for promoting better English understanding in the classroom. Teachers, who gain understanding of a foreign language, can help students understand their individual learning processes.

Likewise, the teachers' philosophies revealed that professional development (PD) matters. Professional development has shaped teachers approaches to teaching and learning, they indicated:

> *"I have my master in adult Ed. and ESL endorsement and I have been to conferences every year, these experiences help me organize my teaching material including for workplace ESL."*

> *"All my experiences, conferences, PD, blend as a tool kit for lesson planning and delivery, I always build my lessons from scratch thinking about my student's needs, adult learners have unique needs and they respond different, that is why I plan strategically to those needs including workplace scenarios."*

> *"Our professional development has been helpful through the district; however, teacher collaboration and experience are the best teacher."*

> *"I have the experience so I know why I am doing that stuff automatically because I have been teaching for more than 20 years."*

> *"From a theory stand point, I apply Paulo Freire from Brazil…I ask myself if what I am doing is going to have an impact that will radically affect their lives and not only their lives but society as a whole…ultimately, I want to give my students language skills that will improve their lives…try to move our country to more progressive thinking."*

> *"Paulo Freire should be considered in workplace classes be aware of your rights and kind of advocate for them that is important."*

Blended professional development (PD) experiences influence the way teachers plan and deliver their lessons. Teachers prior teaching experiences plus PD has serve as a guide for creating, organizing, and implementing lessons for ELLs in the workplace. Blended PD has helped teachers become better and more effective in their teaching. Additionally, some teachers identified themselves with Paulo Freire's educational philosophy.

Workplace ESL programs typically have open enrollment, which means that students can join classes at any time and any day during the week. An open enrollment policy is a logical practice due to the workers' time limitations. However, it causes attendance and retention issues.

As an example, a teacher indicated that some students only attended for fifteen minutes of her

class. Other teachers also indicated that,

> *"I had probably 20 students in each one of my classes, 3 days a week, some students would come back some would not, it was an open enrollment anyone can come and go." "They set two days to study English but something keeps happening that do not allow them to come to classes so they sign up and start but they do not come frequently."*

> *"Students only need to sign when they were there… it would have been nice to know how many students will attend per day or per shift, if the company would have assigned a special time off for workers it could have been a richer experience for learners…my teaching could have been more effective."*

> *"I teach there but I have students who come and go, so I have students who stay for 1 hour and a half and others just stay for 15 minutes."*

Attendance is an important and necessary factor for the students' success. Regular

attendance to workplace ESL programs promotes English language skills achievement and

progress. Teachers shared that it would have been helpful to know beforehand how many

students would attend classes each shift and each day. As I explained in a previous section, it is

important to prioritize ESL programs within the company structure for better outcomes.

In a similar way, teaching different levels of ESL students all together is another issue.

Teachers described that they have mixed language learners ranging from no skills to some skills

with English in the same class. For this reason, they teach stand-alone lessons, which

complicates subsequent lessons. They mentioned that,

> *"I have different levels all together so I literally kind of walk in a circle because everybody is working in something different, I have low level students and students are sufficient to finish the package or lesson we are working in on time, but it is a challenge to have multiple levels in one classroom."*

> *"You have mixed language levels which breaks the organization of your lessons and activities, it is not the same to have a true beginner in level 0 than a high beginner who knows some English."*

"My group consists of a multi-level class, from level 1 until level 4, with a duration of 45 minutes per class."

"Classes had to be stand-alone lessons because I had different students all the time."

"I had to create this standing alone lesson because not everyone attends always. I tried to motivate them and get their attention to come back. But only day to day lessons worked in these circumstances."

There are reasons why it is important to accommodate ELLs according to their proficiency levels. Based on the students' levels, teachers can plan their lessons and activities in sequence for richer learning experiences. The teachers shared that stand-alone lessons complicate their organization, and it is difficult to recall students' previous knowledge. Therefore, it is important to re-group ELLs for instruction in the workplace. In this way, teachers can improve the management of their classes as well as teach more effectively.

RQ 3: What effect do workplace ESL programs have on the professional and personal lives of students?

Professional and Personal Growth
Workers without English language skills do not have the same growing opportunities as their peers with proficient English language skills within the company. Because these workers are disadvantaged; they cannot apply to new opening positions. Teachers described the following:

"When I talk to the management that oversees this upward academy, there are jobs that they have the skills for but they do not just have the language…there is an upward mobility within… for these students as their language improves."

"They understand that if they learn English there are better chances that their paid gets higher overtime, its higher for males and a little less for women but it still goes up, they understand the importance of learning language for getting job promotions and better earnings."

"Some students come to class because they want to get a better job, move up in that company or maybe another one."

66

"I think they attend classes so they can grow in the company, better compensation, get off the production line and go to maintenance or more technical areas."

"I think they are there so they can improve themselves economically because it is a huge commitment."

"Students want to apply for other positions or find better jobs, have happy careers, its impressive how they grow, they are so smart."

"If you have a good safe job then you can cover all the necessities for your family, when your English is limited you are only allowed this certain job…this are heavy in your mind and trying to make it through is hard to understand because you are looking at everything from a 3rd hand-translator."

Another finding revealed that students are self-aware of the importance of learning English for their professional growth and development within the workplace. As students' English language skills improve, their career opportunities may also increase in the company. Through job mobility, students also increase their earnings and stability in the workplace. For instance, the students' financial stability helps them to provide for their family stability as well.

Workers with limited English skills also face poor communication issues. Not being able to speak fluently English at work, might interfere with the overall job responsibilities. On this topic, teachers shared that,

"They want to gain skills and confidence in English to be able to understand their supervisors or leader instructions without using some else to translate them, workers who do not speak English fluently heavily rely on bilingual co-workers to communicate in the job."

"When I talk to the company supervisors, they have share that my students have improve their communication skills, follow more accurately instructions, and do their duties with more confidence in English."

"A couple work at…studied for several years at workplace ESL class and it was totally transformative, they were able to communicate in English…both ended the class being able to speak confidently in English."

"It is very important and useful that workers get involved in ESL classes and go beyond just there, they acquire knowledge that it is greater, and it is transfer to other areas."

"When people speak English in this country, they are able to interact with the community around and that includes situations in the workplace so in term of well-being I think it makes them happier students, makes them better community members."

"So, there is the outside of workplace and their pride for some assimilating into society is becoming bilingual."

The on-site ESL classes have helped students overcome their job-related issues. When workers conversation skills improve, they are able to communicate more effectively with supervisors and peers. In addition, workers gain confidence, and they can follow instructions more accurately. Furthermore, workplace ESL initiatives helps workers adjust to the workplace's cultural environment as well as assimilate into society.

On-site English language instruction cannot be solely emphasized on improving workers skills for specific job duties. When students attend English language classes in the workplace, they are also looking forward to accomplishing personal goals. Teachers detailed that students want to improve their English skills for personal growth as well. An ESL program on-site that only promotes the acquisition of certain specific skills is a limitation. Teachers responses in this topic were numerous:

"During class, they wanted to know about how to talk at school to teachers because they have kids, how is life in US, how to deposit their check, how to buy or rent something, they were trying to be functional outside of work too."

"On the classes, students want to know more for talking to my child's doctor, go to school talk to the teacher, go to the store and buy things, so we cover more day to day life activities than the very specific of workplace, but all of the language instruction will translate into more English which will help almost in any situation."

"I am sure there is some intrinsic motivation if they have kids you know we talk about that, the better you understand English the less you need to depend in translators, the better you can talk to your kids teachers 1-1, doctors' appointments."

"Whether you are buying a car, shopping at…or understanding what the supervisor wants, it helps everywhere, once workers grasp English they teach or help others, I know from fact that many of them use their kids as translators everywhere they go…they want to able to understand and respond by themselves."

"Through workplace programs, learners have the opportunity to reflect about their own problems and find their own solutions, improving their English gives them the opportunity to make their own decisions they might be right or wrong but it's part of the learning process, we are putting it more in them."

"I had a student who was working night shift and he will stay in the morning for class, he really   wanted to do this, he did not know how to read in Spanish but he wanted to learn to read in English, he had trouble with the language at first, he put a lot of effort into it, now he is reading   at a ¾ grade level but he is reading in English."

"He started attending classes because he wanted to write his own reports at work, short reports but he could not do it by his own, so he started the language classes in the company, after a couple of months and hard work he began writing simple sentences and basic numbers, his life completely changed, he became so independent."

"This student who comes to language classes was able to finish his GED and right now is enrolled in the Community College but when he started he was in level basic, he did not know anything of English so he got to this point that with perseverance you can reach your goals and he is taking university classes."

"Many students after improving their English, go to GED and citizenship classes, they continue their learning process in other areas."

One of the most interesting findings is that students want to gain autonomy and agency. Attending English classes helped workers think critically and find avenues for personal growth. When a company educates workers in ESL skills, they also provide an opportunity for personal growth and development within society. Students want to have their own voices and make their own life decisions. By gaining independence, they can actively participate in their communities without someone else translating for them. As teachers described, students want to be able to communicate with their children's teachers and doctors. The ultimate goal of students who participate in workplace ESL programs is to transfer the acquired knowledge to other contexts – autonomy and agency.

The above findings are also related to other sections in this chapter. I have explained the importance of having stronger partnerships between the parties involved in the logistics of workplace ESL programs. As a result of strengthening these relationships, the parties can consider the workers ultimate goals as well.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

Chapter 5 concludes my dissertation study work, and it is preceded by the review of the literature in chapter 2, the description of the methodology in chapter 3, and the data analysis in chapter 4. In this chapter, I include a discussion section where I presented information from chapter 2, and I used data analyzed from chapter 4 to answer the main three research questions which guided this study. It also offers a recommendation for future research, researcher experience and reflection, and conclusion section.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of ESL teachers towards workplace language programs. Additionally, it describes how ESL teachers create, design, and organize their curricula, and comprehend how the delivery of ESL programs influence students under such specific setting.

The results of this qualitative phenomenology study indicate that teachers have multifaceted lived experiences with workplace ESL programs.
Based upon the teacher responses, they did not uniquely describe their teaching experiences under such specific setting-workplace; they also described their experiences with the company, the students, and the institutions.

After analyzing the data, six main themes were identified: (a) the need of stronger partnerships; (b) ESL initiatives as a strength; (c) ESL program challenges; (d) following State adult education programs; (e) building a class environment that supports the learners needs; and (f) professional and personal growth. These themes addressed and reported the essence and meaning of being a teacher in a workplace ESL program which emerged from the in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher.

Discussion

Research question 1: What are ESL teachers' experiences regarding workplace language programs?

Burt (1995, 1997) explains that few companies are working toward a practical approach to training immigrants in English language skills due to lack of information about the needs of programs and cost of instruction. This study suggests that some employers are making an effort and implementing ESL programs in the company. However, the issue relies on the poor communication and logistics of ESL programs. Based on participant responses there is a need for building a stronger partnership between the company, the teacher, and the institution involved in the logistics of workplace ESL programs. Strengthening the three-way relationship can improve the organization and overall logistic of the program as a whole. Through a better communication and collaboration, the parties can address topics such as goals, adequate resources, enrollment and attendance, and long-term plans.

This study showed that there is a mismatch between the companies' goals and students' goals for workplace ESL programs. The program goals should not be solely emphasized on the companies' expectations; rather, there needs to be a balance. In this matter, participants suggested that designing a curriculum in a partnership that integrates job skills with functional skills might be a solution. In a similar way, Brooks (2009) found that human resource managers and adult ESL educators have conflicts regarding training content, goals, and expected outcomes.

The findings of this study reveal that both the setting (workplace) and ESL programs (training initiative) are strengths. Participants mentioned that delivering ESL classes on-site is an advantage because students do not need to commute to other places. Likewise, workers feel more valued, supported, and motivated because of the ESL program initiatives that arose from the

employer's side. In addition, participants explained that many students learned how to read, write, and communicate in English as a result of the workplace ESL classes. As detailed in the literature review, workplace ESL programs provide numerous benefits for the company and its workers. Some of these benefits have higher employees' loyalty, self-esteem, commitment, performance, and morale. Furthermore, workplace ESL programs can be a solution to the "shortage of qualified workers" (p.210) who can read, write, communicate, and solve problems successfully (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011).

Participants' lived experiences reveal that regular basis work is constantly competing with English language classes inside the company. Therefore, ESL classes need to have equal worth compared to their job duties within the company for better program outcomes. As other areas which need improvements, participants indicated that it is necessary to have a classroom or adequate space for English language instruction as oppose to the cafeteria. Likewise, students require adequate learning materials such as books, computers, and access to internet to foster a positive learning environment.

This study shows that the employees' experienced time constraints which complicated their participation in workplace ESL programs. Based on the teachers' responses, most of their students have two jobs, work long shifts, and overtime per week which lessens their attendance to classes. In addition, students have other responsibilities such as their families. The company can reserve a time within the workers' shifts to attend English language classes as one alternative solution. Similar research indicates that LEP employees work multiple shifts, overtime, and have more than one job which reduces the workers' time to attend ESL classes (Gallo, 2004; Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007). Upon my findings, companies also need to offer incentives for workers

73

who attend ESL classes. These incentives can be on the form of monetary compensation, gift cards, or internal growth opportunities.

Research question 2: How do teachers organize and implement their curriculum for workplace ESL programs?

The results of this study reveal that teachers organize and implement their workplace ESL curriculum based on State Adult Education Curriculum. Participants indicated that State Adult Education Curriculum is a solid and consistent document which helps as a guideline, but it has limitations. State curriculum objectives and goals are wide-ranging and do not specifically connect to ESL programs in the workplace. Due to these limitations, it would be helpful for teachers to have more flexibility and autonomy over their curriculums. In contrast to my literature review, none of the articles that I have read addressed the topic of what curriculum teachers must follow for workplace ESL programs.

In this study, the teachers' philosophies disclosed that they put forth effort in integrating the State Adult Education Curriculum with the students' learning needs and goals. For workplace ESL programs, teachers can try their best to build lessons plans which meet the company's goals as well as students' goals. By blending useful and meaningful experiences, many teachers hope to help ELLs become successful, independent individuals inside and outside work.

Another related finding is that, teachers are empathetic to ESL learners' needs. Through empathy, teachers have developed a sense of community in their classrooms. The teachers indicated that it is helpful to learn the basics of a language for creating a communication bridge between languages such as Spanish and English. Teachers can also help their students understand the step by step learning process for acquiring a foreign language based on experience. As detailed in the literature review, 66.5 million individuals reported speaking a language other than

English at home. The top three most common non-English languages spoken in the United States are Spanish (62%), Chinese (7%), and Vietnamese (4%) (Zong & Batalova, 2015; Zong et. al., 2019). Related to the teachers' philosophies, it is important to "address the needs and interests of students, engaging them in authentic, real-life tasks, allowing them ownership of the curriculum" (Felix, 2005, p.88).

Professional development (PD) to a certain degree has influence the way teachers organize and implement their teaching content for ESL programs. The teachers rely on prior experiences plus PD to create and follow their ESL lessons plans. Blended PD has helped teachers become better and more effective in their teaching. Besides, teachers have multi-level students ranging from no skills to some skills in the same class. Therefore, they plan and teach stand-alone lessons for workplace ESL programs. Having multi-level learners together, teachers can use stand-alone lessons due to the students' constraints. Compared to my literature review, none of the articles I read mention PD or stand-alone lessons.

RQ 3: What effect do workplace ESL programs have on the professional and personal lives of students?

Students are aware of the importance of acquiring English skills for their professional growth. As students improve their English skills, they have more opportunities for applying for new posting positions. Through professional growth, students can increase their earnings and stability in the workplace. A participant described a company that has an upward mobility plan for workers who improve their English language skills. Companies that sponsor adult education have the potential to become a widespread solution for meeting the needs of employers, workers, and society (Gallo, 2004).

Literature in the field has proliferated the misunderstanding that LEP workers are deficient when compared to their native speakers' peers. Duval-Couetil and Mikulecky (2011) found that LEP workers were perceived to exceed their native-speaking peers in the categories of dependability and productivity. Similarly, this study's findings reveal that ESL classes on-site help students overcome job related issues. Participants explained that students gained confidence in following instructions more accurately. Because the students' speaking English skills improved, they were able to communicate better with supervisors and peers. LEP workers just need the right opportunities to grow and assimilate into society.

The findings of this study show that students gained autonomy and agency through workplace ESL programs. Participants detailed that their students learned how to read and write in ESL classes. Similar research indicates that a benefit of workplace ESL interventions may be the inclusion of vulnerable or marginalized individuals who have been denied educational opportunities due to socio-cultural and socio-economic factors (Gallo, 2004; Burt & Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

This study also reveals that students want to have their own voices and make their own life decisions. Participants explained that students gained independence; they were able to communicate with their children's teachers and doctors using their own voices. In the same way, some tenants of critical pedagogy are to development the student's voice. Through critical pedagogy, individuals can reflect on their own world and renovate society through active participation in democracy (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012).

Advocates of CP ESL pedagogy mostly implement the principles of CP into their curriculum because teachers commonly interact with racial and language minorities such as immigrants (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012). Similar to previous studies, this study indicated that some

participants identified themselves similarly to Paulo Freire's educational philosophy. The ultimate goal of students who participate in workplace ESL programs is to transfer their acquired knowledge to other contexts – autonomy and agency as well as personal growth.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since this study inductively examines the lived experiences of teachers within workplace ESL programs; it yields findings that can be investigated in future research. Through the teachers' lived experiences, I gained a deeper understanding on how they act as an intermediary party between the companies, the students, and the intuitions. Additionally, I was able to collect good descriptive data related to the purpose of the study, and the three main research questions of this study. However, after the data was analyzed, themes materialized, and conclusions were drawn, and other questions emerged.

As I explained in chapter 1, research in the field of workplace ESL initiatives is commonly addressed from the corporate perspective (managers, executives, and supervisors), so I was not able to read or cite articles related to the teachers lived experiences considering workplace ESL programs. Therefore, one recommendation is to further explore workplace ESL programs from the teachers' perspectives and experiences. As I have articulated in this study, teachers proved to be me with a rich and knowledgeable source of data regarding workplace ESL programs.

In a similar way, further research can explore the students' (employees) voices regarding their experiences with ESL initiatives in the workplace. This study, sheds light on students' motivations and goals for participating in ESL classes on-site. Likewise, this study describes, the fact that it is difficult for students to balance work-family-ESL classes responsibilities. In this sense, a study based on students' experiences could also add interesting findings to the field of

workplace ESL initiates. As a variation of my study, a new study with students can be conducted as a longitudinal study.

Researcher Experience and Reflection

As I wrote in chapter 1, I believe it is important to reflect on our own professional and personal experiences which may impact the research. In this way, at the culmination of the study, we can compare our thoughts with the actual findings that resulted from the study. I also gained important experience from proposing, executing, writing, and defending my dissertation research study. From now on, I can rely on my own experiences in the future. From my research study, I learned that some things do not work as you thought they will would do; therefore, it is important to take decisions on time for not affecting the overall process of your research.

I am truly thankful to all the teachers who voluntarily participated in this study. I sincerely appreciate all the time, responses, and stories that these 17 anonymous teachers shared with me. From this research experience, I also was able to reflect to my own skills and how much more I still need to learn for the world of research.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research study is to unfold the essence of teachers' experiences in workplace ESL programs. A phenomenological qualitative approach is used to hear the teachers' voices, who shared their common experiences related to workplace ESL programs, and at the same time, they shared their individual unique experiences about the phenomenon. The six key findings with the subsections resulted from the in-depth face-to-face interviews with participants. Building a class environment that supports the learners' needs for professional and personal growth is needed for stronger partnerships, ESL initiatives as a strength, ESL program challenges, following the state adult education programs.

For further research, this study can be potentially divided into three different research studies (company perspectives, teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives) considering workplace ESL programs.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS.

To:	Odilia Lineth Mitre Marciaga
From:	Douglas James Adams, Chair IRB Committee
Date:	04/23/2019
Action:	**Exemption Granted**
Action Date:	04/23/2019
Protocol #:	1903187211
Study Title:	A Phenomenology of Adult English as a Second Language Teachers

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Christian Z Goering, Investigator
         Jason L Endacott, Investigator

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Principal Researcher: Odilia L. Mitre
Co-Investigator: Dr. Christian Z. Goering
Co-Investigator: Dr. Jason L. Endacott

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

You are invited to participate in a research study about teachers' experiences of workplace language instruction. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor with adult teaching experience. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?
Odilia L. Mitre
PhD Student, University of Arkansas
olmitre@uark.edu

Who is the Co-Investigator?
Dr. Christian Z. Goering
cgoering@uark.edu

Dr. Jason L. Endacott
jendacot@uark.edu

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to better understand the perspectives and experiences of teachers towards workplace language instruction. Further purposes of this work are to understand how teachers create/design/organize their curricula and students learning outcomes for such setting.

Who will participate in this study?
Participants will be 15 ESL teachers plus 2 piloting interviews.

What am I being asked to do?
Your participation will require the following: You will be asked to answer, at length, questions about your experiences as an ESL teacher.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
There are no anticipated risks to participating.

87

What are the possible benefits of this study?
There are no anticipated benefits to participating.

How long will the study last?
The study will be conducted during May-June 2019.
Face to face interviews=approximately 1 hour per session.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?
There will be no compensation for time and inconvenience.

Will I have to pay for anything?
No, there will be no cost associated with your participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?
If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. Your job, your relationship with the University, etc. will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Data storage will be on a password-protected computer. Research subject anonymity will be masked by assigned pseudonyms for both names and places. Also, original interview data will be kept in locked storage for five years and properly destroy afterwards.

Will I know the results of the study?

At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. A goal of the study is to use the insights gained from this process to add to the existing literature knowledge on workplace ESL through teachers' experiences. For this reason, there may be an opportunity to publish the findings in an academic journal or conference presentation. You may contact the Principal Researcher, Odilia Mitre, olmitre@uark.edu, or Co-Investigators, Dr. Christian Z. Goering, cgoering@uark.edu, and Dr. Jason L. Endacott, jendacot@uark.edu. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?
You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Co-Investigators as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Odilia L. Mitre
PhD Student, University of Arkansas
olmitre@uark.edu

Dr. Christian Z. Goering
cgoering@uark.edu

Dr. Jason L. Endacott
jendacot@uark.edu

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
109 MLKG Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2208
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

_____   _____

Name   Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocol Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself?

2. How did you get into language teaching?

3. How many years of experience/approximately number of students do you have/have you worked with?

4. Tell me about a typical day of workplace language instruction.

5. How do you design curricula/lesson plans for your courses?

6. If you have experience teaching language courses outside of a company, how do they compare with one another?

7. Tell me about some strengths of workplace language instruction?

8. Can you tell me about any challenges of workplace language instruction?

9. Based on your experience, what changes can be done to contribute to the success of workplace ESL programs?

10. Could you talk to me about books, articles, or other professional experience that you feel have been important to your development/confidence as a teacher.

11. How do workplace ESL programs influence the wellbeing of your students?

12. What goals/objectives do students seek to achieve from participating in workplace ESL programs?

13. Could you please share an inspiring or motivational story from a student?

14. Can you relate a story that was disappointing or upsetting regarding one of your students?