

**A Comparative Guide to Adult First-Generation Immigrants
Seeking English as a Second Language Programs at Educational Institutions**

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my father, Adib Jurdi, who saw this coming long before the idea of a doctoral degree crossed my mind. Dad, although you departed, your encouraging words are still ringing in my ear and echoing in my heart.

Father, the everlasting light that illuminates my way.

Mother, the ultimate compassion that taught me to be just and righteous.

You will always enlighten my path to help me know myself, ascend, and evolve for the betterment of our society.

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Special thanks to my parents who instilled in me a passion for culture and education, always prayed that I be surrounded by good people, and set me free.

Finally, I hope that the research I have embraced and cherished for three years will find listening ears and people will live in a democratic society where "there should be no inequalities in opportunities or freedoms."

Abstract

Background: First-generation immigrants aspire to learn English to satisfy an inherent need to fulfill their dreams and become valuable members of society. Learning English as a second language (ESL) is essential to the first-generation immigrants and the economy of the country that is witnessing dwindling numbers of laborers as baby boomers retire. Immigrants contribute significantly to the U.S. economy by being part of the workforce, paying taxes, and contributing to the advancement of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. However, ESL programs in the United States are varied, and adults enrolling in these programs may not know the benefits and deficits of each program. **Purpose:** First-generation immigrants must find a reliable source of information that will guide them to ESL programs that align with their objectives. They need to be proficient in English to communicate socially, continue their education, and get better employment. A comparative study of programs offered at local universities and colleges will clarify each program's characteristics and point out any existing gaps. This comparative study attempts to answer the following question: What are the differences, if any, in the ESL programs for first-generation immigrants provided in a large urban area? **Method:** This research is a qualitative review of the ESL programs at five public and private educational institutions (EIs) in the Houston metropolitan area. They were compared in terms of duration of each ESL level, the instructors' qualifications, technology provided, advising and career services available, and fees and financial aid. Data was accessed online and by contacting the educational institutions. First, this study evaluated the ESL programs in terms of the five variables. Second, it tried to find alignment between the five variables and the purpose behind learning ESL.

Results: Findings revealed discrepancies between the five EIs in the duration of ESL programs, instructors' qualifications, the services provided by advisors, and fees of programs. Data regarding the purpose of learning ESL at 4-year institutes was mainly academic with absence of career pathways or alignment with labor force. At 2-year institutes, more options are available for English learners who want to join the workforce or continue their education through partnerships between employers and educational programs.

Keywords: educational institution, English as a second language, first-generation immigrant, workforce

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	1
Rationale	5
Theory	6
Characteristics of the Sample	7
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Challenges Facing the FGIs	20
Variables	22
Research Question	22
Conclusion	23
II. Review of Literature.....	24
ESL as a Necessary Obstacle Course	24
Disconnect of Services Between ESL in Public Schools and Adult Education	26
Theory on Self-Determination	31
The Condition of FGIs	33
Variables	34
Conclusion	41
III. Method	42
Research Question	42
Sample	42
Sampling Method.....	44
Measures	46
Analysis	47
IV. Results.....	48
Rubric Review	48
Conclusion	57
V. Discussion	58
Timing and Duration.....	62
Instructors' Qualifications	65
Advisors/Counselors and Career Services	66
Technology	68
Fees and Financial Aid	69
Pathways	71
Using a Holistic Approach.....	73
Limitations	76
Future Directions	77
Conclusion	79

VI. Action Plan	81
Timing and Duration	82
Instructors' Qualifications	83
Advisors and Counselors	83
Technology	84
Fees and Financial Aid	85
A Holistic Approach as a Vehicle to Improvement Science	85
References	88
Appendix Houston Area ESL Programs at Educational Institutions	105

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. English Proficiency Rates: Foreign-Born vs. U.S.-Born Population: 2018.....	3
2. Educational Attainment of Foreign-Born and U.S-Born Population 16–64 Years of Age.....	4
3. Comparison of U.S. Population: Foreign-Born to U.S.-Born.....	8
4. Comparison of Services Offered for English Learners at Public Schools and Educational Institutions	29
5. Educational Institutions' Characteristics: Students in 2021	43
6. Sample Rubric of the Variables and the Five Educational Institutions	47
7. Center of ESL Programs at Educational Institutions	49
8. Comparison of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Guidelines and Research Variables	74
9. Location and Prerequisites of English as a Second Language Programs	75
10. Applicability of Improvement Science to ESL Programs at Educational Institutions	82

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1. Percentage of Job Distribution of Immigrants	10
2. Percentage of Foreign-Born Workers in Select Industry Groups	11
3. History of Adult Education in the United States	16
4. Comparison of Educational Attainment by Citizenship Status in Houston, Texas	19
5. English Proficiency of Houston Residents Age 5 and Over by Immigration Status, 2012–16.....	19

Chapter I

Introduction

The United States, since its inception, has been considered the melting pot of many immigrants around the world, with the most open immigration policy in the world since the 1800s (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.). The number of immigrants residing in the United States in 2019, based on the American Community Survey of 2019, amounted to 44.9 million, which is 13.7% of the country's total population (Batalova et al., 2021; Budiman, 2020).

Nowadays, the United States, like many nations, is witnessing a decline in birth rates. Baby boomers (children born between 1946 and 1964), who raised the population from 3.1 million in 1900 to 35 million in 2000, enter their senior years. With the baby boomers out of the workforce, the only alternative is the immigrant population (America Counts Staff, 2019). The need for skilled workers increases as the population gets older and birth rates decline. Besides being the backbone of the future workforce in the United States, immigrants have played a significant role in shaping the United States today. Many inventors who contributed to science and technology are of foreign origin. Alexander Graham Bell was from Scotland, Albert Einstein was from Germany, and Nikola Tesla was from Serbia. In a study on the relationship between immigrants and innovation in the United States, Akcigit et al. (2017) confirmed that immigrants played a significant role in economic growth. The immigrant inventors were more productive than the native-born inventors. With the U.S. Immigration Act of 1990, more immigrants flowed from Asian countries, bringing more growth in science and technology (Kerr, 2008), although their footprints were evident in the 1900s. Indian and Chinese

immigrants contributed remarkably to technology growth in the 1990s (Kerr & Lincoln, 2010). According to Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, (2010), “If immigrants increase patents per capita, they may increase output per capita and make natives better off” (p. 32).

Economic growth in the United States has always been fueled by immigration. Using patent records and U.S. Census Bureau data, Akcigit and colleagues (2010) found out that despite low wages compared to native citizens, the immigrant inventors who came to the U.S. between 1800 and 2000 were more productive than the native citizens. What was regarded as the melting pot, assimilating different cultures into one, changed in recent years to a salad bowl where all immigrant cultures integrated without losing their identities. From the immigrants’ perspective, the United States has always been viewed as the land of opportunities. Regardless of their educational attainment, language proficiency, or socioeconomic status, immigrants strive very hard to better their life. Leaving their land, family, and culture behind, they have one objective in mind: to have a decent job and live a respectable life in a nation where everybody has the chance to prosper and grow.

Given the move to the United States, immigrants should learn the most important means of communication: the English language. Studies have shown that most foreigners in the United States are not proficient in English. According to data gathered in 2018 from the Pew Research Center, 47.7% of the foreign-born population, 18 and older, speak English less than “very well” (Budiman, 2020) (see Table 1). Not only do immigrants need to be English proficient, but they should have the necessary postsecondary credentials that allow them to be part of the American fabric.

Table 1*English Proficiency Rates: Foreign-Born vs. U.S.-Born Population: 2018*

English proficiency	Foreign-Born	U.S.-Born
English proficiency (age 18 and older)	42,224,336	211,670,164
Speak only English	16.3%	90.73%
Speak English “very well”	36.0%	7.8%
Speak English less than “very well” (LEP)	47.7%	1.5%

Note. LEP = limited English proficient. Adapted from Budiman et al., 2020.
[\(https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants-current-data/\)](https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants-current-data/)

Immigrants need the appropriate educational services to transition to becoming more productive and language proficient individuals that cater to each student's needs and background.

Data from the data hub of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) show a diverse educational attainment level among immigrants ages 16 to 64. Twenty-six percent of the foreign-born adults did not have a high school diploma, while only 8.2% of the U.S.-born did not have a high school diploma. Furthermore, 18.7% of the foreign-born adults completed some college work compared to 30.7% of U.S.-born. Interestingly, 14.2% of the foreign-born have a graduate or professional degree, while 12.5% are U.S.-born (see Table 2).

The 14.2% of foreign-born with a graduate degree are in desperate need of English proficiency to have jobs that resonate with their academic and career potentials. In addition, this diversity in the educational attainment level reflects the complexity of English learners (ELs).

Table 2*Educational Attainment of Foreign-Born and U.S.-Born Population 16–64 Years of Age*

Education	Foreign-Born	U.S.-Born
Less than high school diploma	26%	8.2%
Completed college	18.7%	30.7%
Graduate/professional degree	14.2%	12.5%

Note. Adapted from *Data hub*, by Migration Policy Institute, n.d.
 (<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/US#>).

Having foreign-born students at both ends of the spectrum, either lacking school education or having a graduate degree, points to the importance of language proficiency to a diverse population that should not be treated as one. In a study about literacy among adults learning English as a second language (ESL), Wigley (2008) confirms that the immigrant adults' educational background reflects a broad spectrum of abilities and should not be treated as one entity. Adults who were not exposed to strong literacy skills have different needs than those already familiar with formal schooling. Immigrants in the United States share the same short-term goal of learning English. However, their long-term goals are diverse, from learning ESL for social communication to passing the citizenship test, joining the workforce, or getting a university degree.

The benefit of this study is twofold: not only would immigrants seeking to learn English for different purposes profit from the information gathered about the various programs offered at public institutions, but public EIs would also reap benefits. Immigrants, who have no proficiency or low English proficiency, get confused about which ESL program to choose. Providing them with all the needed information would

facilitate the choice. Universities, colleges, and other public institutions, on the other hand, might not be aware of the gaps they have in their ESL program. Many nonprofit community centers in Houston offer ESL classes to first-generation immigrants (FGIs), but the primary purpose of this research is to improve the ESL services at EIs. Comparing the different ESL programs would entice EIs to fill the gaps or update their programs.

Rationale

Much research has been done on K–12 ELs, their right to education, and their steps to transition to community college or 4-year institutions (Hanover, 2015; Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Schmitt, 2018). Evidence of such work is *A Meta-Analysis of Research on English Learners* by Hanover Research, which reviewed research-based studies of K–12 ELs in terms of effective interventions, pedagogies, and student outcomes. Similarly, the *Lau v. Nichols* case of 1974 held that students with limited English proficiency in public schools should receive opportunities and access to education similar to all students as dictated by Section 601 of the Civil Rights act of 1964. In addition, other acts covered by federal legislation supported K–12 ELs, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, mandating adequacy of instruction and disaggregation (Goldschmidt & Hakuta, 2017).

On the same note, adults with low literacy skills, primarily U.S. citizens, have their share of training to become part of the workforce. In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed mainly to support job seekers' education and training and match skilled workers with employers. Their main objective was to align and improve adult students' employment, training, and education programs. However, despite these attempts to facilitate the adult learners' transition to

postsecondary education, adult learners with low language proficiency had difficulty transitioning to postsecondary settings (Hector-Mason et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, FGIs fall outside these two categories: the K–12 English learners and U.S. adults who fall far short of language proficiency. Little attention is given to the FGIs who want to study ESL and pursue their education at educational institutions (EIs) such as community colleges. According to Batalova and Fix (2019), 35.2 million immigrant adults (out of 58 million) in the U.S. require English proficiency and education.

Furthermore, most of the research regarding first-generation immigrants (FGIs) focuses mainly on the workforce rather than on learning ESL for academic purposes. FGIs want to be proficient in English but do not have access to a pathway to obtaining the necessary English language skills or any other subject to join the workforce or continue with credit courses. Therefore, there is a need for ESL programs that consider the diversity of FGIs and their goals in acquiring English proficiency. FGIs, who become proficient in English and subsequently choose a suitable pathway for their future, can contribute to the workforce or any desired profession. Many nonprofit organizations provide pathways for FGIs that facilitate their access to ESL, but this research aims to highlight what the EIs offer and whether their services align with the needs of the FGIs.

Theory

FGIs aspire to learn English to satisfy an inherent need to fulfill their dreams and become valuable members of society. This resonates with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a combination of human motivation and personality, developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in 1985 (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to self-determination theory,

people need competence, connectedness, and autonomy to achieve psychological growth. These three needs are powered by intrinsic motivation, a desire to act out of an inherent satisfaction. Ryan and Deci (2000) believe that if people are ‘wholeheartedly’ involved in what they are doing, they can accomplish their goals.

Projecting this theory on educational grounds demands that educators encourage their students to be intrinsically motivated. Educators should cultivate a desire to learn by enhancing their curiosity in their students. The stress should support the students’ autonomy rather than controlling their behavior (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). To this end, FGIs should be allowed to fulfill their goals, which are unique to each individual. Thus, the one-size-fits-all strategy, where students of different educational backgrounds and various aspirations are in the same class, discourages self-determination and deprives FGIs of their ambitions. The variables studied in this research, such as the instructor’s qualification and advisors’ or counselors’ presence, play a significant role in the FGIs’ competence, connectedness, and autonomy.

For this reason, a study about the ESL programs offered at institutions of higher education should clarify the needs of students and hence facilitate their search for an ESL program. Likewise, the comparative study of different ESL programs should benefit the public institutions offering such programs. It would prompt them to fill any gaps and update their information about new findings in this field.

Characteristics of the Sample

This study's population of interest is the FGIs born outside the United States. In some studies, the FGIs in the United States, named foreign-born adults, amounted to 13.7% of the United States population in 2019. The rate at which the foreign-born

population (44.4%) has increased from 2000 to 2019 is much higher than American citizens (13.2%) (Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, n.d.). The EIs are either 2-year or 4-year institutions. For this study, public and private EIs are considered (see Table 3).

Table 3

Comparison of U.S. Population: Foreign-Born to U.S.-Born

Demographics	Foreign-Born	U.S. Born
Number	44,932,901	283,306,622
Foreign-Born	13.7%	0
Population change over time		
Change 1990–2000	57.4%	9.3%
Change 2000–2019	44.4%	13.2%

Note. Adapted from Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, n.d.
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/US>).

Statement of the Problem

FGIs must find a reliable source of information that will guide them to ESL programs that align with their objectives. Programs offering ESL in the United States are varied, and adults enrolling in these programs do not always know what is provided and which programs will meet their needs. When language is a barrier, it is almost impossible for FGIs to gather information from many sources and determine if the program fits. An FGI needs a clear one-stop shop where they can get all the required information and decide accordingly. While many programs are available, the focus is contained to the EIs community. Hence, a comparative study of each program will clarify each program's characteristics and point out to any gap that an EIs may have.

Learning ESL is essential to the FGI, as well as to the economy of the country. First, the importance that self-determinism has on immigrant adults should be considered. The United States has always been the land of dreams, and the number of immigrant inventors that have thrived in this land should never be ignored. Thus, it is essential to understand the criteria needed to fulfill their dreams, whether learning ESL for academic purposes, joining the workforce, or social communication.

Second, the country's current economic situation is weakened by a prevalent deficiency in the labor force despite many immigrant workers. The aging of baby boomers and the low fertility rate has diminished the number of native-born workers. Therefore, the government should incorporate immigrants into the workforce to save the country's economy, which promises bulging numbers of future jobs but a dwindling number of workers. Furthermore, the government should provide them with the necessary education (starting with ESL) and training through a structured pathway program to achieve this objective.

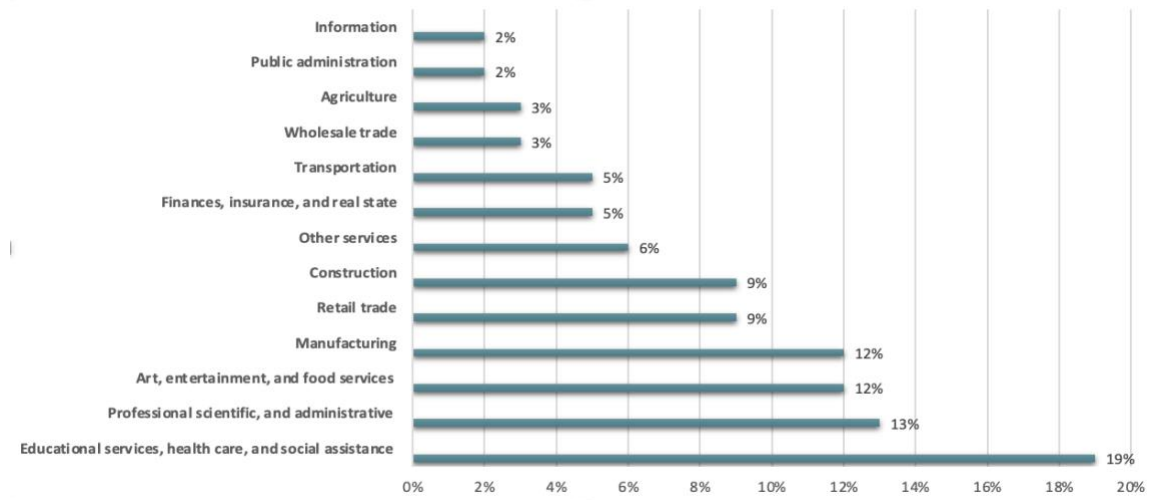
Immigrants as Assets

With the baby-boomer population growing older in the United States and the plummeting birth rates, the demand arises for skilled workers. The only source that can compensate for the decline in native-born workers is the immigrants. Between the years 2000 and 2019, as stated by MPI (n.d.), FGI adults' rate growth (44.4%) was much more significant than that of the native-born (13.2%). Therefore, the national government and educational agencies should prepare and involve FGI adults in the labor market experiencing rapid growth (Batalova & Fix, 2019; Migration Policy Institute, n.d.).

Immigrants contribute largely to the U.S. economy, although they are only 17% of the labor force. Using the U.S. Census Bureau data, Kosten (2018) showed how jobs are distributed among immigrants (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Percentage of Job Distribution of Immigrants



Note. Occupations of immigrants by proportion in sectors of the American economy. Adapted from the *American Community Survey Database*, by U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., (<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=0100000US&tid=ACST5Y2019.S0501&q=ACST1Y2016.S0501>).

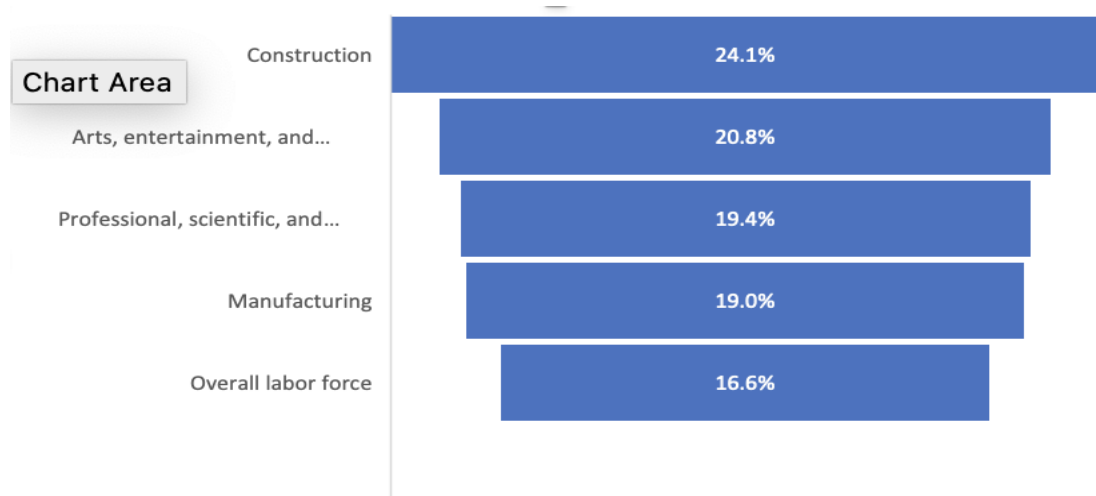
Nineteen percent are in educational services, health care, and social assistance, 13% are in the professional, scientific and administrative fields, 12% are in the art, entertainment, and food services, and 12% are in manufacturing. The other 46% are dispersed between retail trade, construction, finances, transportation, wholesale trade, agriculture, public administration, and information, (Kosten, 2018).

Looking at each job sector, Kosten (2018) found that immigrants play a significant role. For example, although 9% of the immigrants work in construction, they make up 24% of the construction workforce. Similarly, for the arts, entertainment, and

recreation, where 12% of immigrants work in this field, they constitute 20.8%. This shows that U.S. industries rely on immigrant labor (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Percentage of Foreign-Born Workers in Select Industry Groups



Note. Occupations of immigrants in the United States working in specific industries. Adapted from the *American Community Survey Database*, by U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., (<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=0100000US&tid=ACST5Y2019.S0501&q=ACST1Y2016.S0501>).

On that note, Sherman et al. (2019) stressed the significance of the immigrants' contribution to the U.S. economy where, in some industries, they make up a third of the workforce. In addition, their geographic mobility responds to worker shortages in some areas as they do not have ties to a community and therefore, can be quicker than native-born to respond to work shortages. Immigrants also compensate for the dwindling number of native-born retirees, which helps in supporting the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. Finally, an additional booster to the U.S. economy is the rising number of children born to immigrant families (Sherman et al., 2019).

Upon projecting U.S. employment from 2014 to 2024, it was found that 9.8 million jobs are expected to rise, with some old job categories declining while others are increasing. Eight of the fifteen jobs that will increase to reach 2,032,000 opportunities between 2014 and 2024 do not need college credentials. With U.S. citizens acquiring more education by 2024, they would not be interested in such jobs that need to be filled (Kosten, 2018). In addition, labor force participation is expected to decrease in the next decade due to the aging of baby boomers. If the decrease in the labor force is not compromised, economic growth will be hindered (Hogan & Roberts, 2015).

Another evidence of the indispensability of the immigrant force is their willingness to work on the front line during the COVID-19 crisis. As U.S. Representative Don Beyer from Virginia commented in a press release about his report concerning the vitality of the immigrant population (Joint Economic Committee Democrats, 2021):

It is not enough for us to recover from the health and economic effects of the coronavirus, we must fully recover, and that means leaving no community behind—immigrants included, who are diverse in terms of country of origin, race and ethnicity, education and occupation. As a result of their work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit and spending power, immigrants play a vital role in making the United States one of the most prosperous nations in the world. Therefore, when it comes to relief and recovery efforts, we must support immigrants like they have supported the nation—our economic recovery and future economic growth depend on it (para. 5).

We cannot ignore the contributions of immigrant-led families in taxes. Every year, immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes. In 2019, immigrant-led households paid

\$492.4 billion in taxes: \$330.7 billion in federal taxes and \$161.7 in state and local taxes. Even the undocumented immigrants pay directly through tax identification numbers or indirectly when deducted from their paychecks. The contribution of undocumented immigrants amounted to \$18.9 billion in federal taxes and \$11.7 billion in state and local taxes. As for the spending power of immigrants, it amounted to \$1.3 trillion (American Immigration Council, 2020).

A further asset that immigration brings about is their contribution to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Twenty-six percent of U.S. Nobel prize recipients from 1990 to 2000 were immigrants (Peri, 2016). The U.S. Immigration Act of 1990, which allowed more immigrants into the United States, resulted in more inventions and advancements in those four fields. For example, the universal serial bus (USB) was invented by Ajay Bhatt, an immigrant from India. The YouTube channel was produced by teamwork between Steven Chen of Taiwanese origin, Jawed Karim of Bangladeshi-German origin, and U.S. native Chad Hurley (Yuko, 2021).

ESL for Different Purposes

FGIs seeking an ESL program have different objectives to be fulfilled. They are mainly divided into three categories, (a) social communication, (b) ability to continue their education, and (c) employment. FGIs, whose ultimate objective is confined to social communication, make up a group who want to learn what to say when seeing a doctor, talking on the phone, shopping for food or clothes, or attending school meetings. Continuation of education is essential to the second subgroup of FGIs. They need to learn English to pursue certification for employment in the United States and to use their background experiences and education they achieved in their homeland. Finally, the FGIs

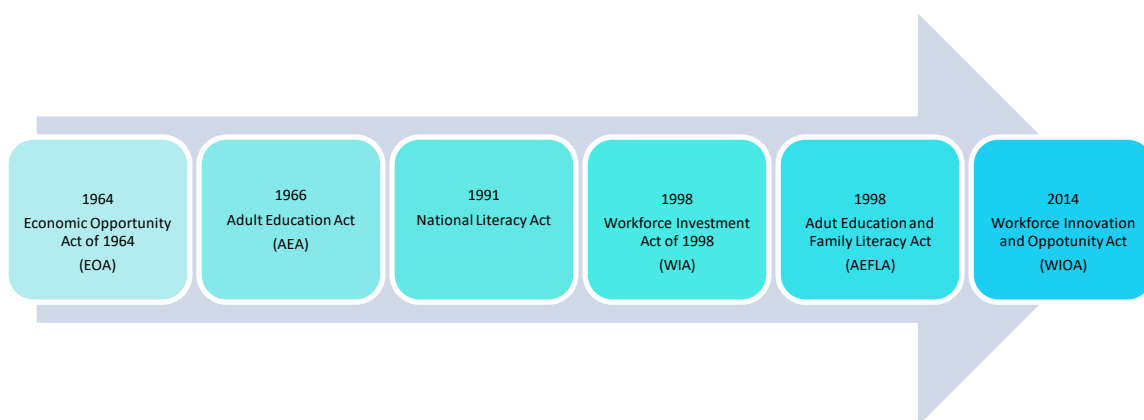
interested in employment may be skilled laborers who require specific skills and a command of the English language but do not require a four-year degree.

National Context

Although immigration to the United States started in the 19th century, efforts to assimilate adult immigrants into the American culture did not surface until the U.S. Federal Government began evening classes in 1964 with the Economic Opportunity Act, which addressed adult literacy in the United States (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2013b; Center for Adult English Language Acquisition, 2010). English competency became a necessity as part of the naturalization and citizenship procedure. The Economic Opportunity Act, whose primary purpose was to end poverty by funding the program, started the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. It targeted persons 18 years and older who could not read and write the English language, which impacted their employment prospects. The ABE served the native and nonnative adults who did not have a high school diploma. Upon the enactment of the Adult Education Act in 1966, the Adult Education Program was removed from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the U.S. Office of Education, which later became a subset of the U.S. Department of Vocational and Adult Education and the federal Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Then out of the ABE branched the Adult Education for English Learners program. The enactment of the Workforce Investment Act in 1998 strengthened America's job-training system by providing employment services, job training, and education programs (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2013; Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2013a, 2013b). Combining the Workforce Investment Act with adult education resulted in Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act

(AEFLA), whose primary purpose is to help immigrants and English language learners (Uvin, 2016). The National Reporting System was initiated to monitor the Workforce Investment Act's accountability, which later developed into WIOA in 2014. The National Reporting System developed assessment mechanisms for adults and professional development programs for instructors (National Reporting System for Adult Education, n.d.).

The Office of Vocational and Adult Education, which later changed its name to the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), provides funding and technical assistance to the career pathways, making it the leader in technical and adult education. In supporting educating the workforce, Adult Education became part of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, which later became OCTAE. The primary mission of OCTAE is for students to complete secondary and postsecondary studies and help them choose a college pathway. OCTAE has worked on accomplishing this achievement by administering and coordinating programs related to adult education and literacy, career and technical education, and community colleges (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2013a, 2013b) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3*History of Adult Education in the United States*

The idea of linking learning and work through a career pathway has started to capture educators' attention (Taylor & Haras, 2020) though not explicitly directed to ESL learners. Despite the significant role that the federal government has been playing in supporting adult education ESL courses, funding has decreased in recent years, reflecting negatively on the FGI and the U.S. (Foster & McLendon, 2012). The adult education revenue is divided into 44% federal, 45% state, 10% local, and 1% tuition. According to Foster and McLendon (2012), 64% of the job market in 2018 demands a postsecondary credential. As a result, states adopt different approaches that cater to students' interests and needs and the job market to meet this demand.

In Texas, state funding contributes 25% or less to adult education's total budget (Foster & McLendon, 2012). Despite the efforts of WIOA, Schmitt (2018) asserts that adult English learners, who should have the same equal educational opportunity, “experience a lesser set of provisions in federally-funded free public education programs” (p. 7), whereas English learners cannot have access to academic subject-area courses before they finish the ESL levels, a task that might extend to 4 years.

State Context

Relied on the U.S. Census 2010 and 2019 ACS and 2000 Decennial Census, Texas is considered the second highest in foreign-born (5 million) after California (10.6 million) and followed by Florida (4.5 million), New York (4.4 million), and New Jersey (2.1 million) (Batalova et al., 2021). The role of immigrants in Texas oscillates between a wide range of jobs in education, health care, and social services on one end and job creators, business owners, and entrepreneurs on the other end (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2017). Moreover, immigrants in Texas contribute to taxes and spending power. In 2018, immigrant-led households in Texas paid \$26.3 billion in federal taxes and \$12.3 billion in state and local taxes. Undocumented immigrants paid \$2.6 billion in federal taxes and \$1.6 billion in state and local taxes. The spending power of Texas resident immigrants amounted to \$112.8 billion (American Immigration Council, 2020).

Thanks to the Texas Dream Act, undocumented immigrants in Texas, comprising 1.7 million, 6% of the Texas population, could have financial aid, making higher education an attainable dream. However, out of \$524 million granted to 135,505 students at Texas colleges and universities in 2016, only \$12 million was given to 2,819 Texas Dream Act students. Despite the significance of this grant to immigrants, the amount of tuition paid by students, \$63.6 million, outweighs the amount granted, \$12 million (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2019).

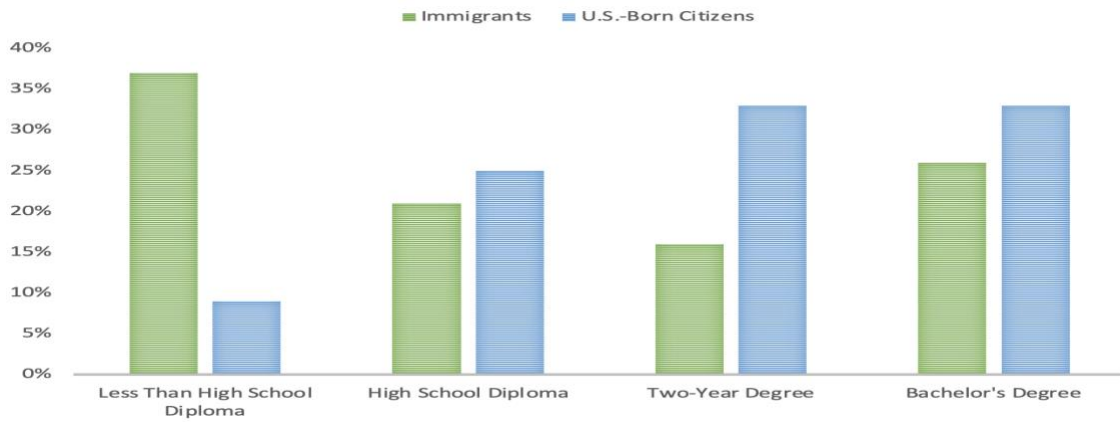
In Texas, the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program works under the Texas Workforce Commission umbrella, which has constructed Standard 2.0: Texas Adult Education and Literacy Content Standards 2.0 (Texas Workforce Commission, 2005). The main objective of the Texas Workforce Commission is to align adult

education and literacy with the network of the workforce. The funding of the AEL is provided by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), which was \$73,981,732 for the 2015-2016 program year. In addition to AEFLA funding, 35 grant recipients work to fund AEL (Texas Workforce Commission, 2005). The structure of Standard 2.0 is more detailed and comprehensive than the previous one because its objective goes beyond learning ESL. In addition to learning language skills, the program directs English language learners towards postsecondary education, training programs, or the workplace.

Houston, the biggest city in Texas and one of the most rapidly growing populations in the United States, is home to 1.6 million immigrants (Capps & Ruiz, 2018). Immigrants played a vital role in Houston's rebuilding after Hurricane Harvey, which hit the area in 2017. However, on average, the educational attainment of immigrants in Houston is lower than that of U.S. native citizens. Thirty-seven percent of the legal permanent residents, another term for FGIs, have less than a high school diploma. Around 21% of FGIs had a high school degree, and 16% had some college education, whereas 26% had a bachelor's degree (see Figure 4). These data do not include the graduate level (Capps & Ruiz, 2018).

Figure 4

Comparison of Educational Attainment by Citizenship Status in Houston, Texas

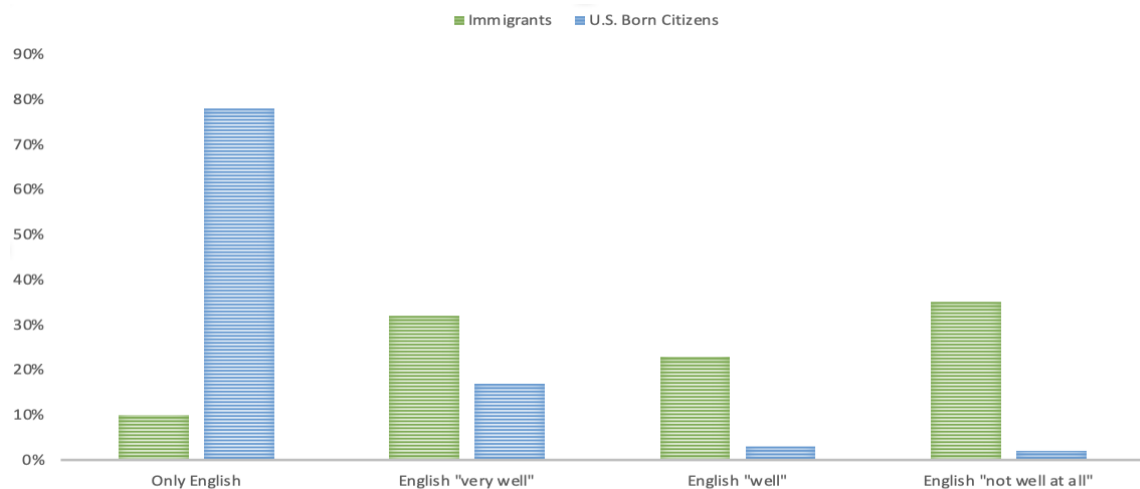


College-degree attainment cannot be possible without English language proficiency. Thirty-five percent of the legal permanent residents did not speak English well, or as roughly described by the U.S. Census Bureau, were "limited English proficient" (LEP). Because FGIs boost Houston's economy substantially, more consideration should be geared to their need (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

English Proficiency of Houston Residents Age 5 and Over by Immigration Status, 2012–

16



Challenges Facing the FGIs

FGIs face many challenges that should be acknowledged and taken into consideration. Many face difficult financial circumstances they try to overcome by working long hours, which prevents them from committing to English lessons. Another challenge FGIs face is labeling. Schmitt (2018) stressed that the adult English learner's population had been ignored, starting with the different labels attributed, resulting in data inconsistency. Some of these labels are language/Linguistic Minority, Limited English Proficient, English Language Learners, and English Learners (Núñez et al., 2016). Also, Vecchiarelli (2019) points to time constraints. Because of the many responsibilities that a FGI is bound to, finding an ESL course and committing to it is almost impossible. Sometimes, it means giving up on many duties for attendance. In a study about immigrants learning English, Olsen (2000) pointed out the lack of support that FGIs studying ESL are suffering prevents them from moving forward. The FGIs need academic and psychological help, mainly due to the culture shock they are facing or trauma they have undergone (Close et al., 2016), which needs to be addressed. As far as academic support is required, Wrigley (2008) explains how a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in teaching ESL. FGIs come from diverse educational backgrounds, which influence the rate of progress that an adult student makes

Solutions

Wrigley (2008) suggests that literacy backgrounds and students' needs should be prioritized when developing ESL programs. Most FGIs, who had proper schooling in their native country, need to study more academic or advanced classes than others who barely had formal education before coming to the United States. Moreover, FGIs are

diverse in their educational and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, programs have to be adjusted to fit each student, depending on his/her needs, abilities, and future aspirations. Most often, FGIs start ESL classes, not knowing where it would lead nor how much time it requires. A clear pathway for ESL programs that aligns with his/her needs and ambitions would facilitate learning and ensure continuity to credit education or workforce.

There has been a lot of emphasis on "integration" when discussing teaching English to adult FGIs (McHugh & Doxsee, 2018). To facilitate adult students' transition to postsecondary opportunities, a study compared six states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio) in five categories: advising, GED-plus, ESL, career pathways, and college preparatory (Hector-Mason et al., 2017). Data used relied on interviews with adult education directors and the National Reporting System. It has been noticed that the norm is for policy efforts to address college readiness for the traditional pathway from school to college. However, their attention was rarely towards the low-skilled adult learners, which points again to the disparity between ELs from K–12 and adult ELs who have never been in U.S. schools. WIOA acknowledged "the need to align employment, education, training, and support for adult learners and hold programs accountable for reporting on post-program outcomes related to employment or postsecondary education, wages, credentials or credits, and skill gains" (Hector-Mason et al., 2017, p. 2). Adult English learners are a subset of this population that needs support in transitioning to postsecondary education. The usage of the six mentioned categories varied across the states; some apply them while others lack them. This study sheds light

on what adult students need to progress toward higher levels and what the states should provide to facilitate such transitions, which resonates with the needs of ELs in EIs.

Variables

Independent Variables

The variables to be compared in this study are

- type of institution (public vs. private), 2-year vs. 4-year
- size
- demographics (EI, population of students served within the ESL program)
- time to completion (class length, program length)
- qualifications of instructors
- counselors (placement, advising, follow-up services)
- technology
- cost of the program
- federal or state funding

Dependent Variables

The outcome of this study focuses on the attributes of the ESL programs provided at public and private EIs.

Research Question

This comparative study attempts to answer the following question:

What are the differences, if any, in the ESL programs provided in a large urban area?

Conclusion

The increasing need for professional and labor force, on one hand, and the obstacles that FGIs face in starting a new life, on the other hand, begs for an alignment between the needs of FGIs, starting with English proficiency and the ESL programs offered at EIs. Texas, being the second highest in the U.S. in foreign-born and facing shortages in professions and labor force, should take action. Five EIs in Houston Metropolitan Area are chosen in this study for a qualitative analysis of comparison and evaluation of the ESL programs. The EIs are Rice University, University of Houston, Houston Community College (HCC), Lone Star College, and Harris County Department of Education (HCDE).

The adult English learner neither belongs to the ESL in K–12 system that has many privileges, nor feels part of the adult U.S. citizen population that does not have a language problem but needs a postsecondary degree. Many FGIs with postsecondary degrees are unemployed or underemployed, an economic loss to the country and a disappointment to the FGIs who have the self-determination to succeed. Five variables are considered in this study to evaluate the ESL programs at EIs: the timing and duration of ESL courses, the instructors' qualifications, advisors and career services, technology, and fees and financial aid.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

With every wave of immigration comes a broad spectrum of cultural differences and beliefs, diverse educational backgrounds, and potentialities. Nevertheless, most research, though not enough, point to the indispensability of ESL classes among the FGIs population (Batalova & Fix, 2019; Larrotta, 2019; McHugh & Doxsee, 2018). This study focuses on the ESL programs provided to FGIs at EIs in the Houston Metropolitan area. Its efficacy is measured through different variables such as the duration and timing of each level, the instructors' qualifications, technology used by students, and academic advisors and counselors.

ESL as a Necessary Obstacle Course

The total number of foreign-born immigrants 18 years and older reached 42,224,336 in 2018, compared to 211,670,164 U.S. born (Budiman, 2020; Budiman et al., 2020). Of 42,224,336 foreign-born, 20,140,685 spoke less than very well English which is 47.7% of the 18 and older foreign-born population (Budiman, 2020). These figures indicate that more immigrants lack adequate language skills and need ESL. FGIs left their country looking for a better life in a land where everyone has the opportunity to prosper and grow, given the right tools that are mainly embodied in the acquisition of language proficiency. Without English language proficiency, the FGIs will fail to blend in. They will be trapped in the same socioeconomic level instead of attaining better jobs, participating in civic life, and becoming integral members of their community (Kallenbach et al., 2013).

The Houston metropolitan area was home to 7 million residents in 2017, 1.6 of whom were immigrants (Capps & Ruiz, 2018), making it the fifth-largest FGI population in the U.S. These immigrants vary in profession, from highly skilled professionals to working-class families. They also differ in educational attainment, where many are university degree holders while others have not attained a high school certificate. Despite their differences, immigrants share one thing in common: their lack of English language proficiency, without which progress is hindered. According to Kennedy and Walters (2013), immigrants “are trapped in generational linguistic isolation” (p. 3). Their motivation to learn English is not encouraged by the adult ESL language system, which has failed to advance 60% of its participants. “Across the US, the number of enrolled students is dwarfed by the need. With 23 million LEP adults, the Department of Education program served only 913,000 or 4% of eligible adults, and only 1.7% of adult English Learners managed to improve proficiency under the government-run system” (p. 5). Adult ELs need to be tracked during and after taking the ESL classes. This is not the case in ESL classes.

Lack of English proficiency stands in the way of immigrants who aspire to get citizenship, according to Capps et al. (2015). Three reasons prevent Latino immigrants in Houston from having U.S. citizenship: low income, low levels of formal education, and limited English proficiency (Capps et al., 2015). Other immigrants need ESL simply to blend in the U.S. community, while many need to be language proficient to join the workforce. Just as important is a group of immigrants who dream of pursuing their education at 2-year or 4-year universities. To all clusters of immigrants, learning ESL is an urgency, without which they are debilitated.

One initiative attempting to address this problem is the Networks for Integrating New Americans, sponsored by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2016) of the U.S. Department of Education. A diverse group of networks convened to discuss the best practices to be adopted to facilitate the linguistic, civic, and economic integration of immigrants into acquiring U.S. citizenship and supporting their career development and education. They worked on an initiative that encourages the immigrants' civic, linguistic, and economic integration (Division of Adult Education and Literacy, 2013; Kallenbach et al., 2013). The objective of this initiative is to present an evidence-based theoretical framework “to strengthen adult education programs’ ability to

- improve immigrants’ access to effective and innovative English language programs,
- support immigrants on the path to citizenship, and
- support immigrants’ career development through training and education.

This initiative is based on the theory of change that summons the efforts of the immigrants’ communities and the receiving communities. The Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative confirmed the instrumental role of weaving language instruction with economic and civic integration in a holistic fashion to accomplish this goal.

Disconnect of Services Between ESL in Public Schools and Adult Education

Another reason why ESL classes should be a priority for adult FGIs because this group of immigrants has been ignored and overlooked for a long time (Crandall et al., 2010; Mathews-Aydlini, 2008; Millard, 2015; Raufman et al., 2019; Schmitt, 2018; Suh, 2017). Much research points to the younger generation of immigrants in K–12 that is

monitored and supported by the government, a privilege not seen in the adult FGIs. The services given to ELs at public schools outweigh those in adult education, specifically at EIs. Some ESL students who used to be monitored, guided, and assisted at school will be shocked when transferred to postsecondary education, where he/she is left to swim or sink. Suppose as a high school graduate, an EL student, who has already gotten accustomed to the country's culture and values, finds it difficult to adapt to this milieu. What can be said about the FGIs who are already overtaken by confusion and inability to express themselves? The privileges that ELs in K–12 system have could not have been possible without the Supreme court rulings and state and federal policies that protected the rights of language minorities and provided them with free education regardless of their background or language proficiency.

Services Offered for English Learners in K–12

K–12 is supported and monitored by federal laws and protected by court cases, resulting in significant legislative changes in policy and law. Immigrants ages 3 to 21, whose limited English proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding may affect their participation in society, is supported by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. English learners (ELs) are tested annually for proficiency, including oral, comprehension, reading, and writing testing, during their first year. Nevertheless, their test results are not considered part of the state's accountability system. ESSA gave ELs better privileges than the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Villegas & Pompa, 2020). Significant changes were made in favor of the ELs, but these privileges do not affect the adult FGIs. Mathewson (2016) confirmed that “in the latest rewrite of the law, which turned No Child Left Behind into Every Student Succeeds, there are some key

provisions that shift the way schools will have to identify, serve, test and report information about students who do not speak English” (Mathewson, 2016, p. 1). Under the ESSA, ELs are given a time frame of 4 years to improve their language proficiency. Furthermore, ELs are monitored continuously, and their results are reported. To encourage schools in their effort, they are given incentives for the success of the ELs (Mathewson, 2016; Villegas & Pompa, 2020).

As for the teachers’ credentials in the K–12 system, based on Texas Administrative Code 89.1210, the commissioner of education clearly stated that a schoolteacher assigned an ESL program must hold an ESL certification issued by the State Board for Educator Certification (Commissioner's Rules, 2019). This law applies to school districts.

Services Offered for Adult English Learners at ELs

Adult English as a Second Language is directed and monitored by the WIOA II. The WIOA is the primary federal workforce development legislation developed in 2014. Title II of WIOA—AEFLA—is concerned with providing English language services to ELs or individuals finding difficulty in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension. Besides teaching English, the main objective of WIOA is to integrate ELs and U.S. citizens into the workforce (TESOL International Association, 2017) (See Table 4). Although ELs are offered ESL classes after which they can choose work training, ABE or GED, or postsecondary education (Mathews-Aydlini, 2006), finding such an opportunity for FGIs is like looking for a needle in a haystack. This information is valuable to the FGIs but almost impossible for them to understand without help from a professional.

Table 4

Comparison of Services Offered for English Learners at Public Schools and Educational Institutions

Level	State and Federal Policy	Funding	Teacher's Certification
K–12	Civil Rights Act (1964)	ESSA authorizes	Texas Education
ESL	No Child Left Behind (2002) ESSA (2015)	federal funding (11% of primary and secondary education) State funding (formula, categorical, or reimbursement)	Agency requires “highly qualified teacher status.” * Teachers should meet the state standards.
Adult	AEFLA (2014)	Federal: AEFLA	Bachelor's degree
ESL		State: Texas Workforce Commission	ESL certification

Note. ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act; ESL = English as a second language; AEFLA = Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.

* Texas Education Agency, (2022)

Title III, the Adult Education Act of 1966, embraced adults with limited English proficiency, but the immigrant population was not mentioned. Postsecondary institutions do not see the state and federal effort to classify the K–12 ELs, measure and monitor their progress. Instead, only demographic data about the adult ELs are collected without follow-up on their progress or matriculation (Kanno & Harklau, 2012).

Conversely, U.S.-born adults who are either illiterate or did not get a high school degree and would like to continue their education can get all the necessary help through

the GED program. They receive instruction in the English language, reading, writing, and math. In addition to that, they can get an industry-related certificate to advance their careers. Such assistance is evidenced in the 60×30TX, a higher education strategic plan, where WIOA addressed a higher-skilled, diverse, innovative, and dynamic workforce (Division of College Readiness and Success, 2016). After adopting the 15-year higher education strategic plan, Closing the Gaps by 2015, where more than 540,000 students were enrolled at Texas EIs, another plan is addressed to build on the success of the previous one. Another 15-year Strategic plan was adopted (60×30TX). A chain of partnerships formed with K-12 districts, EIs, local workforce boards, adult education providers, and employers must be established to accomplish these goals. This plan targets the students who could not continue high school by providing a no-cost or low-cost academic remediation. In addition, federal financial aid was granted to them to further support the ‘unprepared students’ without a high school diploma. 60×30TX has a wealth of information and resources targeting AEL students who could not continue high school. As for the adult ESL program, which became known as the English Literacy Acquisition program, services hover over without giving the FGIs the support they need, such as having a plan for the future, financial assistance, or partnership with employers.

If we were to imagine an immigrant family coming to the U.S., the first thing they would do is to secure a school for their young children. Regardless of their family status, their children’s English- language proficiency, income, race, or color, they can enroll in any school and benefit from its services. K-12 students are eligible for free mandatory education, besides being able to learn ESL and be monitored for four years or until they

are ready to be transferred to regular English classes. In addition, students are not held accountable by the state for the first year of English testing results.

Shifting to older siblings or parents who might like to study ESL at higher education institutes, the task may be more difficult. ESL programs for adults are not compulsory, so it is the job of the adult FGI to investigate them. The responsibility lies solely with the adult individual to seek out a program that meets his needs. This means that the adult ELs need to have a network to locate a program that meets their goals. In addition, they need a location near public transportation for those who do not drive. These, along with other factors, make it difficult for FGIs to join an ESL program. The adult FGI must have the self-determination to go out there and inquire about the ESL programs available, their costs, and where these programs lead.

Theory on Self-Determination

A very prominent feature of learning is motivation. Researchers are interested in motivation because of its consequences; it leads to production (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT looked into the reasons behind motivation and found them external or internal. While extrinsic motivation refers to an outcome that is separable from the person himself, intrinsic motivation seeks an activity for the inherent satisfaction or joy of the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Differences between a person motivated out of interest or another motivated because of an external reason are significant (Deci et al., 1991). Behaviors that are internally motivated are sought for their inherent satisfaction. They stem from the self. Extrinsically motivated behaviors, on the other hand, are prompted, modeled, or valued by others, and their outcomes are separable from the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

To maintain intrinsic motivation, there should be a need for autonomy, willingness to act, and competence in meeting the challenges of a work (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). According to SDT, teachers can enhance the students' autonomy by minimizing evaluative pressure on the students, lessening coercion, and boosting their sense of worth by allowing them to have a voice in any activity and a choice (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Unfortunately, not all subjects are intrinsically satisfying to students. So, there has to be a way to internalize them. Extrinsic behavior, according to SDT, distinguishes between four different types of extrinsic behavior ranging from the least to the most autonomous:

- External regulation: Externally motivated by rewards and punishment; an external locus of control.
- Introjected regulation: Ego is involved. Satisfies internal contingencies; somewhat external.
- Identified regulation: Activity is associated with value or importance; somewhat internal.
- Integrated regulation: A synthesis of identification with other aspects of the self; internal.
- Identified and integrated regulations are considered to emanate from the self.

Self-determination motivation was found to influence learning ESL, where autonomy and competence predicted students' intrinsic motivation and led to success in learning a foreign language (Badagbo, 2018). Fear of speaking in a foreign language had a role in predicting the students' motivation and academic success. According to Deci et al. (1991), acquiring and retaining information is insufficient. Satisfying one's needs, such as performing an enjoyable activity, while feeling accepted in society leads to adjustment.

Satisfying one's needs is a form of intrinsic motivation nurtured by social contextual factors (Deci et al., 1991).

When the SDT is applied in education, instructors should promote in students an interest in learning, an appreciation for education, and confidence in their abilities (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 1991). The SDT believes that for individuals to internalize a concept, they have to understand its utility, not be subjected to any pressure, but rather have their efforts acknowledged and appreciated by instructors (Deci et al., 1991). The SDT sheds light on three innate needs: the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy or self-determination.

Students learning ESL need support and help from teachers, advisors, and counselors because their fears and lack of motivation might hinder their learning and result in truancy or dropping out of education. With professionals' psychological and academic support, FGIs can be motivated to learn English and plan a pathway that aligns with/her needs, ambitions, and potential.

The Condition of FGIs

Between the uprush and backwash waves of immigrants trying to blend into American life, a minority succeeds while many fail to reach the shore, receding to an unknown future. Those with language proficiency integrate into the U.S. culture, or at least they would be able to navigate their life's threatening depths and unfamiliar shallows. Young FGIs can benefit from the services offered at K-12 schools, which try to accommodate and integrate the immigrants into their schools. Adult FGIs with no language proficiency would not be able to manage life without assistance despite their academic college credentials. So, FGIs who lack language proficiency and postsecondary

experience are in dire need of assistance without which they could not reach the shore. As for FGIs who lack language proficiency but possess a postsecondary degree from their country, helping them is an asset to them and the country. Ignoring the latter group is known as ‘brain waste.’ According to MPI research, brain waste applies to two million college educated FGIs in the U.S. The prospects of skilled workers who are not proficient in English being ‘properly’ employed are five times less than their fully proficient counterparts (Batalova & Fix, 2018). There is a gap in learning English, but more importantly, the technical vocabulary needed in their profession to pass licensing examinations (McHugh & Morawski, 2017). The key factors contributing to brain waste among educated FGIs are race and ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, education, and legal status (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

Lack of English language proficiency hinders the advancement of a population of immigrants, which affects the progress of the hosting country. While a national issue, steps can be taken at the local level to assist the FGIs. When FGIs have proper ESL programs that assist them in networking for a career, local economies will improve. Using the EIs to help fill this gap can potentially place FGIs into employment opportunities that fit their skill set and language abilities.

Variables

Becoming language proficient is not the only obstacle facing FGIs, though it surfaces as the most important one. Other barriers stand in the way of FGIs’ access to postsecondary education (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kanno, 2018; Ryan, 2016), such as the “gap in knowledge” as Kanno & Varghese (2010) state:

Because barriers that lie between ESL students and college education are not just issues of language, a language policy narrowly focusing on remedying their “ESL problem” will have a limited impact on achieving equal college access and success for ESL students. We thus call for a more holistic educational policy that addresses the structural and economical, and linguistic factors that together inhibit ESL students’ college access and participation (p. 311).

In a study by Kanno (2018), college experience was tracked in an ethnographic investigation of high-performing performing ELs. One factor that inhibits the ELs' access to a 4-year college is the "underdeveloped college knowledge to effectively navigate college planning and application" (p. 1). Therefore, the author suggests a reexamination of the ELs linguistic and academic status, in addition to college guidance that is regular, frequent and accessible (Kanno, 2018).

The factors that contribute to the challenges FGIs face when trying to enroll at any EIs start with enrollment in an ESL program. The variables taken into consideration in this study are the timing and duration of ESL courses, teachers’ credentials, guidance and counseling provided, available technology, additional tuition fees, and financial assistance for FGIs.

Timing and Duration

Research on difficulties that ELs are facing in ESL programs at EIs is quite limited. Looking into the reasons for the ELs’ dropping out of ESL classes would help educators understand the barriers in the path of ELs from a different angle. Time management or lack of time is one of the contributing factors for ELs’ dropping out during the term (Amos, 2013; Evans & Tragant, 2020). *Off from lost: Generation 1*

Learners' Transition from Adult ESL to Developmental Education by Suh (2017) explains how lengthy ESL courses are one of the reasons why adult ELs dropout from college. Based on a study of EL elementary students, the average time for ELs to become language proficient is 3 to 5 years, and to be academically proficient, an EL may require from 4 to 7 years (Hakuta et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, adult ELs take more time to learn a second language, which is time-consuming. In addition, immigrants, especially women, often have responsibilities at home and financial obligations that make it difficult for them to commit to a fixed ESL schedule (Bergey et al., 2018). For these reasons, administrators and instructors should realize the importance of time from the FGIs' perspective. It is worth money, commitment to family, and work.

The majority of adult FGIs have jobs and cannot risk losing their jobs to take morning or afternoon ESL courses. Also, the idea of taking ESL courses for 5 or 6 years stifles the FGIs and stops them from joining the program. A clarification of the ESL levels, timing, and duration would make it easier for FGIs to search for the most suitable option.

Instructors' Qualifications

Another essential factor contributing to a quality ESL program is instructors' qualifications and readiness to teach students of broad diversity. As with other variables, more research has been done on K-12 ESL instructor certification requirements than at EIs (Bergey et al., 2018; Bunch et al., 2011; Gelb, 2001; Núñez et al., 2016). Regarding educational research, K-12 public education doubtlessly takes the lion's share. Although efforts on improving the ESL sector in schools are always needed, ESL programs at

schools are more defined than the ESL programs given to adult FGIs who have not been enrolled in schools. This study examines the ESL programs at EIs, which caters to all FGIs, those from K-12 backgrounds or FGIs who have not been exposed to any education in the United States. Despite the differences, EIs should encompass all ELs with all needs and hopes.

In Texas, ESL programs at schools and ELs are the responsibility of the Texas Education Agency. Under ESSA, the attainment of English proficiency with high levels of academic achievement in English is the goal of Title III, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As was mentioned previously, the State Board for Educator Certification requires that school ESL instructors obtain an ESL certification (Texas Classroom Teachers Association, n.d.). Once ELs graduate from school, they are under the custody of the primary federal workforce development legislation for Adult Education, the WIOA II, or AEFLA. AEFLA (1998) works on providing resources to enhance the quality of instruction and leaves the decision to each state to determine its teacher development system (Crandall et al., 2008). In Texas, the details of instructors' credentials in postsecondary education are not precise, but what is evident is the emphasis on the standards and benchmarks for ESL that added higher-order academic and career-readiness skills that can prepare ELs for college and the demands of work (Parrish, n.d.). To confirm that ESL learning is not sufficient for adult ELs with varying schooling and diverse language proficiency, Ewert (2013) suggests that there should be greater emphasis on content knowledge, critical thinking abilities, and excellent communication skills. This focus will help prepare ESL students to transition into academic or vocational studies (Ewert, 2013).

Professional development (PD) for instructors is one of the requirements in the WIA (1998), whose primary purpose is to improve and enhance adult education and literacy programs (Crandall et al., 2008). Studies of PD in adult education stress that teachers should receive the appropriate, coherent PD and update their knowledge with research and findings from the field of ESL (National Center for Education Research, 2018). In addition, a system of teacher credentialing and certification is needed for teachers working with adult ELs (Crandall et al., 2008). Finally, national, state and local contexts should support professional development since they are affected by immigration trends, legal requirements, and education policies and regulations (Crandall et al., 2008).

Advisors and Counselors

One common goal unites the ELs in one class: becoming English proficient, but ELs are different in almost all other ways. They are different in the languages they speak, their educational backgrounds, and their dreams about the future. From an advisor's point of view, educating teachers themselves about other cultures to connect with ESL students is essential. In addition, learning basic knowledge about immigration issues would help advisors understand ELs better (Núñez et al., 2016).

Getting psychological support, when needed, can never be emphasized enough. FGIs are continuously under pressure due to financial, cultural, and communication problems (National Center for Education Research, 2018). Many researchers have studied the effect of motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, on the learning of ESL (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). When ELs find support, their self-esteem will be boosted, and motivation will be directed towards an achievable goal. According to SDT, autonomy and competence assist an intrinsically motivated student

learn ESL (Badagbo, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000). To apply SDT in education, advisors and counselors play an essential role. This theory requires instructors to motivate students by making learning an intrinsic experience. Only then can learning become worthwhile and long-lasting. If instructors learn how to motivate students to internalize any concept and make it enjoyable rather than boring, learning will become more accessible, enjoyable, and everlasting.

Technology

Technology has become an essential means of teaching, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the world and confined students to their homes. What was known before as distance learning (online learning) has become the norm after the pandemic. Resorting to technology is the only means to adapt to a new situation. Ryan (2016) saw that distance learning was an advantage to many ELs, who needed flexible time and nearby places; nevertheless, distance learning was a threat to low-literacy ELs overwhelmed with the load of information they have to read (Ryan, 2016; Wrigley, 2008). Incorporating technology into teaching is not only the responsibility of the students. Instructors need to learn how to implement and integrate technology in their classrooms (Bergey et al., 2018; Dobransky, 2015; National Center for Education Research, 2018). McClanahan (2014) suggests that instructors explore rather than avoid technology.

To emphasize the importance of professional development for ESL instructors of adult students, Dobransky (2015) studied the use and integration of technology by ESL instructors at the community college level. Responses from the technology survey and one-on-one interview questions with instructors revealed that most instructors used

technology in class, which is different from integrating technology using innovative methods. One example of incorporated technology in English language programs is the ULTIA Rubric developed by Nekoobahr (2018) to enhance learning and support four primary language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Tuition Fees and Financial Assistance

FGIs face many challenges in the United States, such as the inability to communicate the most straightforward errands, starting with opening a bank account, communicating in parent-teacher meetings, or answering phone calls. Besides these challenges, a financial burden lays its weight on most FGIs. Therefore, financial circumstances play a significant role in the persistence in and completion of ESL classes. Regardless of their educational background, the FGIs' English proficiency is one of the basic survival needs in the United States. ESL programs are the route to acquiring the language. Most adult immigrants work full-time jobs to support their families. In 2019, immigrant households had a median income of \$63,550, compared to \$66,040 for native-born households (Batalova et al., 2021). Their low earnings prevent them from joining an ESL class, which affects their low income.

On the other hand, becoming fluent in English would increase the prospects of a decent job. According to the National Immigration Forum (2016), "People who are English proficient and have a high school diploma or some college see the greatest advantage: They earn 39% more on average than those who are not proficient in English but have the same level of education" (p. 3). All these variables contribute to the FGIs enrollment and persistence in the ESL program, without which they cannot improve their living standards.

Conclusion

Though compared separately for each EIs, all these variables are interrelated and cannot be seen as separate entities. The timing and duration of courses are intricately linked to students' fees and financial situation. The instructors' qualifications are germane to technology and advisors. So, a holistic approach to the variables should be adopted. On a similar note, the variables should align with the goals the FGIs set for learning English; otherwise, all ELs are considered one body of learners with the same educational background, linguistic abilities, and goals which is not the case.

Chapter III

Method

This comparative analysis aimed to compare the ESL programs offered at EIs. Each program was evaluated in the areas of time to completion, duration of each class, the instructors' qualifications, advisors and counselors available to students, technology, as well as fees and financial aid.

Research Question

What are the differences, if any, in the ESL programs provided in a large urban area?

Sample

Five public and private EIs are the subjects of this research. Most FGIs are not familiar with the various ESL programs offered at these institutes in the Houston metropolitan area. Therefore, an overview of the various ESL programs was presented in this study and the levels of ESL courses, their timing and duration, instructors' qualifications, advisors and counselors, associated technology, and fees and financial aid. The EIs that were compared in this research were Rice University, University of Houston, HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE (see Table 5).

Rice University

A private 4-year university, Rice University was founded in 1891 by William Marsh Rice as the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science, and Art. It was renamed Rice Institute in 1912 and became a university in 1960 (Rice University, n.d.). In Fall 2021, 8,212 students were enrolled at Rice University (Rice University, Fall 2021).

Table 5*Educational Institutions' Characteristics: Students in 2021*

Institution	Total population	ESL population
Rice University	8,212	
University of Houston	47,031	56
Houston Community College	53,613 ^a	
Lone Star College	85,241	1,275
Harris County Department of Education	30,000	9,121 ^b

Note. Enrollment of students for all five EIs in Fall 2021. ESL = English as a second language. ^a 2020. ^bAdult students.

The University of Houston

The university was founded in 1927. Its first building opened in 1939, and the University of Houston System, which represents 10 public universities in the Houston area, was created in 1977 (University of Houston, 2022b). In Fall 2021, 47,031 students were enrolled at the university (Institutional Research, 2021).

Houston Community College

In 1971, the Houston Independent School District founded HCC, and the district's campuses were used for teaching. In 1997, HCC started teaching on its campuses. The HCC System comprises community colleges in Houston, Missouri City, Greater Katy, and Stafford in Southeast Texas (Office of Institutional Research, n.d.). Total student enrollment for Fall 2020 was 53,613 (HCC, 2022c).

Lone Star College

Lone Star College is a public community college, which started classes in 1972 as North Harris County College and in 1972 as Lone Star College. It now comprises several

campuses located in the northern part of greater Houston (Lone Star College, 2022e). The total number of students in Fall 2021 comprised 85,241 students (Lone Star College, 2022a).

Harris County Department of Education

HCDE is located in the Houston metropolitan area and serves 14 school districts. Though it is not an EIs, it is a public educational entity in a county considered to be the most populous in Texas and the third most populous in the United States. Moreover, the services it provides to uniquely challenged children and adults make it worthy of consideration in this study. Thirty thousand students were enrolled in Fall 2021, with 466 in workforce programs (HCDE, 2022). The Adult Education division at HCDE has three branches: workforce development, high-school equivalency GED classes, and ESL classes. The ESL program is an adult-centered curriculum based on the Texas Adult Education Content Standards (HCDE, 2021b).

Sampling Method

Billups (2021) thinks that “qualitative research allows us to uncover the meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences, through close interactions, rich conversations, and multi-faceted interpretations” (p. 2). Contrary to quantitative research, which is numerical, chooses random samples, works in labs, and is deductive, qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting where participants are selected intentionally and not randomly. The data, which are interpretative, can be chosen from many sources. Moreover, in a qualitative design, there is no need to prove theories deductively but rather inductively, moving from the results to unlimited findings (Billups, 2021).

Based on characteristics of qualitative research espoused by Billups (2021), this study falls into this category. A chart (Figure 6) displays the 10 characteristics of qualitative research and the corresponding applications in this study.

Figure 6

Characteristics of Qualitative Research and Its Application in This Study

Natural setting	Setting for this research is the five EIs.
Purposeful sampling	Sampling is specific and not random.
Multiple data sources	Data can be accessed from three sources: interviews, observations, and documents.
Interpretive experiences	Results lend themselves to further interpretations.
Unique perspectives	Experiences are unique perspectives acknowledged and taken into consideration.
Holistic	All variables work together as a whole.
Emergent design	Design adapts to new ideas and not only confirms or refutes a set hypothesis.
Frameworks	Self-Determinism Theory is used in this research.
Inductive exploration	From specific samples, general conclusions can be drawn.
Researcher as instrument	Researcher is involved in the study, collecting data from websites and making calls.

Measures

A review of the publicly available information on each program was evaluated using the websites of the five EIs. Three kinds of data collection are used in qualitative data: interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Owen (2013) used document analysis in his analysis of background check policies in higher education, where he contends that documents (and the act of documentation) are very important among universities. Prior (2003) describes a university's relationship to its documents:

A university (any university) is in its documents rather than its buildings. The charter, together with other documents names the university, provides a warrant to award degrees, legitimizes the university's officers, and so on. Naturally, a university has buildings and equipment and lecturers and students, but none of those things are sufficient for the award of university status. Only the charter can define the organization as a university and, in that sense provide the one necessary condition for its existence. (p. 60)

Accordingly, document analysis is a reliable source for investigating the variables mentioned in ESL programs at EIs and evaluating them in regard to the needs of adult ELs. In this study, the information available on the website was used as part of the document analysis. Program coordinators were contacted if any information was not available on the websites. Although data about the general programs were available, details about ESL programs were not always accessible or apparent. When FGIs want to gather information about ESL programs, it requires more effort than some may expect to locate the information, especially when websites are not clear and straightforward.

Table 6*Sample Rubric of the Variables and the Five Educational Institutions*

Variables	RU	UH	HCC	LSC	HCDE
Duration of levels					
Instructors' qualifications					
Advisors and career services					
Technology					
Fees and financial aid					

Note. RU = Rice University; UH = University of Houston; HCC = Houston Community College; LSC = Lone Star College; HCDE = Harris County Department of Education.

Other kinds of data collection used in this research were a follow-up document distributed via email to the EIs and phone calls to them that resolved any further inquiries. The questions in the document intended to investigate the relationship between the variables and the needs of the ELs. The variables were the duration and timing of ESL courses, qualifications of teachers, advising and career services, and technology as well as fees and financial aid. The needs of the students that should align with the mentioned variables are embodied in their purpose for learning ESL, which comprises passing the citizenship, social communication, getting a university degree, joining the workforce, or advancing in their careers. So, the questions revolved around the programs' consideration of the students' needs.

Analysis

A rubric (see sample in Table 6) was constructed to conduct a comparative analysis of the program elements. It was used to determine what differences, if any, there were in the programs being evaluated.

Chapter IV

Results

The ESL programs at five EIs in the Houston metropolitan area were evaluated. The variables used to evaluate the programs were time to completion and duration of each class, instructors' qualifications, advisors, and services available to students, technology, as well as fees, and financial aid. Most of the information was public data gathered from the websites about the institutions and their programs. The institutes were contacted to collect information that was not clear or not found online. Information about the different variables of each institution was listed. A rubric was created for the variables at the five EIs. The department or program for which each ESL programs are housed are provided in Table 7.

Rubric Review

The completed rubric is in the Appendix. The description of each offer by each educational institution follows.

Rice University

ESL is taught in the Intensive English Program at the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies. This program is open to nonnative speakers, of English who want to improve their language skills. Students from more than 125 countries have joined this program in the past in addition to Houston residents. This program has an integrated-skills approach based on listening, speaking, reading, writing, and learning grammar (Rice University, 2022).

Total Number of Students. The total number of students enrolled at Rice University in Fall 2021 was 8,212 (Rice University, Fall 2021).

The number of students enrolled in the ESL program is not available on the website.

Table 7

Center of ESL Programs at Educational Institutions

Educational institutions	English as a second language Program type
Rice University	Intensive English Program
University of Houston	Language and Culture Center
Houston Community College	Adult Education and Literacy
Lone Star College	Adult Education and Literacy
Harris County Department of Education	Adult Education

Note. ESL = English as a second language.

Timing and Duration. Students must have graduated from secondary school to be admitted into this program. According to Rice University (2022), Students enrolled in the Intensive English Program go through a six-level-core program in one year. Classes are offered in the morning from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. or in the afternoon from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Each level is a 7-week course, taken five days a week, with 4 hours of English lessons each day. So, students would take 140 hours of English for each level.

After finishing the six levels, proficient students enroll in the Advanced level, which focuses on vocabulary expansion through discussions of current issues and cultural concerns. It also stresses public speaking, pronunciation, advanced reading and writing, and business writing. TOEFL and IELTS are taken at this level.

ELs who want to improve their communication skills can enroll in the noncredit ESL Communication Skills Program at an intermediate or advanced level of proficiency.

Classes are offered two times per week in the evening from 5:45–7:15 p.m. or 7:30–9:00 p.m.

Other noncredit programs, the Online English and Academic Preparation and the Online English Success in the Workplace are offered to students at the high intermediate to advanced levels of English. Students are offered a certificate upon the completion of either course.

Instructors' Qualifications. Teachers in the Intensive English Program are experienced with advanced degrees, as mentioned on their website.

Advisors/Counselors and Career Services. Academic advising is accessible to students. In addition, being enrolled in the Intensive English Program, the students have IDs that allow access to campus activities (Rice University, 2022).

Technology. The only online classes available are the certificate programs: Online English Success in the Workplace and Online English and Academic Preparation. ELs can take these programs at the intermediate, high intermediate, or advanced levels (Rice University, 2022).

Fees and Financial Aid. Based on Rice University (2022), the program tuition for each level is \$2,500, and a testing and registration nonrefundable fee of \$100. A deposit fee of \$500 is paid once accepted. Books are purchased from the university and amount to \$175 per level. A partial and limited number of scholarships are available for enrolling.

University of Houston

The ESL program, available to domestic and international students, is taught in the Intensive English Program in the Language and Culture Center at the University of

Houston. In addition, it serves as a pathway into the University of Houston or any other university. ESL is taught at the main campus only.

Total Number of Students. The total number of students enrolled at the University of Houston in 2021 was 47,031 on all campuses. Fifty-six students were enrolled in the Intensive English Program and Culture Center at the university.

Timing and Duration. The ESL Program comprises six levels offered in fall, spring, summer I, or summer II (students can take either summer I or summer II). The fall term is 14 weeks, spring term is 14 weeks, summer I term is 13 weeks, and summer II is seven weeks. Students take 20 hours per week. Courses are offered every day for four hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., either in the morning or afternoon. Upon finishing level 5, students get a Certificate of Successful Completion, and after level 6, they receive a Certificate of Graduation. After completing the six levels, students who plan to continue their education at the University of Houston or any other University are exempted from TOEFL or IELTS testing (University of Houston, 2022a).

Instructors' Qualifications. According to University of Houston (2022a), instructors are holders of master's and doctorate degrees.

Advisors/ Counselors and Career Services. All students have access to the Counseling and Psychological Services program.

Technology. The University of Houston provides online classes to international students.

Fees and Financial Aid. The total tuition fee for the fall term is \$4,633, the same amount for the spring, \$4,473 for Summer I, and \$2,404 for Summer II. Four scholarships are offered to students enrolled in the Language and Cultural Center: the

Joyce Valdes Scholarship, the Joseph Davidson Scholarship, the Brad Powell Scholarship, and the Joy Tesh Scholarship (University of Houston, 2022a).

Houston Community College

ELs have two options depending on the purpose of learning English and what the advisor recommends based on the placement results. First, those who want to learn basic English can enroll in the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs, where students take reading, listening, speaking, and writing and prepare for high school equivalency (HSE), jobs readiness or workforce training. Some classes might be offered at an employer's worksite, such as the Workplace Literacy Program.

The second option is the continuing education (CE) Intensive English Program, designed for students who aspire to pursue a college education. It consists of three levels, after which they can transition to Level 3 in ESOL. Courses at the CE Intensive English Program are not free of charge (HCC, 2022c).

Total Number of Students. The total number of students enrolled at the college in Fall 2020 is 53,613. Unfortunately, data was not available online for Fall 2021, neither was it available for the number of ESL students.

Timing and Duration. ELs who want to learn basic English or join the workforce can enroll in the AEL program of three levels, each level consisting of six weeks where three classes are given per week. Each class is for three hours.

On the other hand, students who want to learn English for academic studies can join the CE Intensive English Program, catered for full-time or part-time students. Full-time students take three out of the five levels of the Intensive English Program: Introductory level, then level 1, then Level 2, after which they can transition to ESOL

Level 3. These three levels include grammar, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They study 18 to 20 hours per week for 12 to 16 weeks per level. Part-time students can have 8 to 9 hours of weekly classes and take two semesters to complete each level (HCC, 2022c).

Instructors' Qualifications. This information was not provided by HCC.

Advisors/ Counselors and Career Services. Advisors assist students at the beginning of term to find what programs align with their goals in learning English.

Technology. Students who completed 12 hours of face-to-face classes in the adult learning literacy program (AEL) can access web-based distance learning (DL). This helps students improve their English skills and prepare for high school equivalency testing (HCC, 2022b).

Fees and Financial Aid. ELs learning in the AEL program pay \$20 per class since it is funded by AEFLA, whereas those enrolled in the CE intensive program pay \$235 per class (HCC, 2022c).

Career Pathways. Five career pathways are offered at Career4U Academies at Adult Education and Literacy, regardless of the TSI test or a high school diploma. The careers are Healthcare, Business Technology, Information Technology, Transportation, and Construction. It takes between ten weeks to two years to complete each Level 1 certificate program. Students can get financial support until graduation (HCC, 2022a).

Lone Star College

The ESL program is offered through continuing education (CE) in the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program for adult students who would like to improve their language skills or get a high school certificate (TxCHSE). Based on Best Plus 2.0

placement test, ELs will be assigned the proper level. This program also offers students pathways to future workforce careers and training certificates, such as allied health careers, business and leadership careers, and trade careers. Courses are grant-funded for eligible students. In addition, Civics and Citizenship classes are offered to adult learners, native and nonnative. Lone Star College also gives options to FGIs who earned degrees from their country.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is intended for nonnative speakers who want to improve their proficiency to continue their college studies or vocational training, or to enter the workforce. Students are placed in ESL according to their scores obtained on the ACCUPLACER ESL (Reading-46, Language Use-46, and Listening-46). The location of the campus depends on the level of the student (Lone Star College, 2022c).

Total Enrollment of Students. The total number of students in fall 2021 was 85,243 and the total number of ESOL learners in 2021–2022 were 1275 students with basic, beginning, intermediate or advanced-level English.

Timing and Duration. English is taught in an integrated skills approach of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Classes are offered twice a week from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. or from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. They can be offered on Saturdays too. There are four levels of instructions, each lasting for 16 weeks (Lone Star College, 2022d).

Instructors' Qualifications. Lone Star College provides professional developments and training to its employees to improve teaching effectiveness, according to their website.

Academic Advisors and Counselors. The Academic Success Center is a tutoring center intended to help ESOL students with reading, writing, study skills, math, and other subject areas. This center also helps through the admission and registration process. In addition, they provide information about credit courses or continuing education classes. Students also can consult the Counseling Services Counseling and Advising Offices that assist all students from educational to academic counseling and career exploration and group counseling (Lone Star College, 2022b).

Technology. ESL classes can be offered online for students who prefer not to commute. In addition, ESOL students have access to the computer Language Labs

Fees and Financial Aid. All classes at the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program are offered to students at no cost (Lone Star College, 2022d).

Career Pathways. When students feel they are more proficient in English, they can enroll in the Fast-Track Workforce Education, which provides a quick entry into the workforce and takes 30 to 40 hours of classes per week for eight weeks. Three programs are funded in the Fast-Track Workforce Education: allied health careers, business and leadership careers, and trade careers. FGIs can get a certificate upon completion (Lone Star College, 2022c).

Citizenship Classes. These classes are offered on Saturdays, depending on the availability of students (Lone Star College, 2022c).

Harris County Department of Education

HCDE is a public entity bestowing Texas's most extensive adult education program, among other services for schools. HCDE was chosen in this study because of the myriad of services to adults at no cost. In addition, Harris County is the most

populous county in Texas and the third-most populous county in the United States. The adult education division at HCDE is a state and federally funded program. It has partnered with community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, school districts, and industry to create career opportunities for adult learners. Some of the services provided for adults are English Literacy, TxCHE, Workforce Certification Training, and Workforce Literacy (HCDE, 2021a).

Total Enrollment of Students. In 2019–2020 a total of 6,638 adult students were served at HCDE (HCDE, 2022). A sum of 5,452 adults were enrolled in ESL/HSE classes.

Timing and Duration. The ESL program consists of four levels. Each level is eight weeks. Each week ELs meet on Monday and Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. or 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. (HCDE, 2021).

Instructors' Qualifications. Qualified teachers and administrators have access to customized trainings and conferences through the Teaching and Learning Center.

Advisors and Counselors. Individualized career, vocational, and college counseling are available for enrolled students.

Technology. Only virtual classes are available for adult students.

Fees and Financial Aid. Classes, as well as textbooks, are offered for free.

Career Pathways. HCDE has partnered with community-based organizations, school districts and industry to create opportunities to adults. The Workforce Certification Training offered at HCDE are Certified Nursing Assistant, Customer Service Marketing Representative, Medical Assistant Prep, Heating Ventilation and Air

Conditioning, Business Office Technology, and Phlebotomy (Harris County Department of Education (HCDE, 2021).

Conclusion

After comparing the five EIs in the Houston Metropolitan area, differences between the ESL programs in terms of the five variables may be attributed to the objectives of the EIs which align with the FGIs' goals. ESL programs cater to FGIs, depending on their goals. Two-year EIs, such as HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE address FGIs with financial challenges and those who cannot commit to ESL courses that take a lot of time. They also cater to FGIs who did not earn a high school degree. Finally, 2-year EIs are a good destination for FGIs who want to improve their civic engagement or pass the citizenship test. Citizenship classes are available at Lone Star College and HCDE. Four-year universities, on the other hand, are more academic, serving ELs with an intermediate or advanced level of English proficiency who want to transition to university and who plan on earning a university degree. Career pathways that are available at HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE, transitioning FGIs from ESL to work opportunities, are not considered in the two 4-year EIs presented in this study. The role of advisors is more noticeable in 2-year EIs because many programs are available.

Chapter V

Discussion

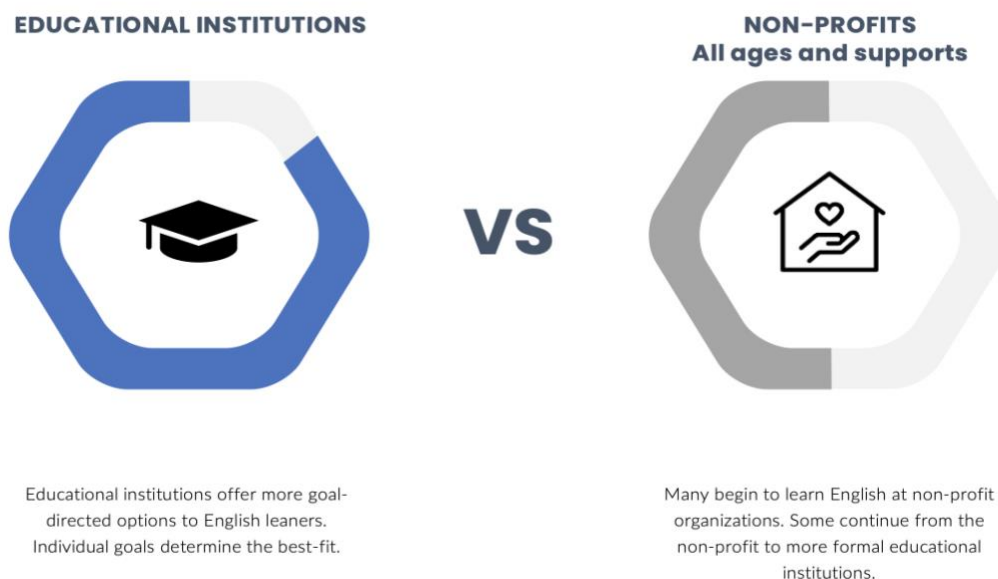
One of the objectives of this study was to raise awareness of the needs of the FGIs by comparing the ESL programs at EIs. Although there are two different types of entities offering ESL programs in the United States, EIs and nonprofit institutions, this study focuses on the first. EIs are goal directed, focusing on delivering classes that appeal to the ELs' interests and goals (see Figure 7).

Nonprofit organizations might be the choice of some English learners who want to save money and time before enrolling at 4-year EIs or those who need it for civic engagement but considering nonprofits' programs is not within the scope of this research. EIs presented in this study are Rice University, University of Houston, HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE.

The FGI population is desperate to become English proficient. However, the diversity of their languages and various educational and cultural backgrounds place them in different categories, and consequently, they cannot be considered one entity. Twenty-six percent of the immigrants or foreign-born aged between 16 and 64 years have less than a high school degree, while 14.2% have a graduate level (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). Both extremes should be considered: those who need a college degree and those who already have a graduate one. Ignoring the academic needs of the 14.2% of educated foreign-born who aspire to continue in the same academic or professional field would result in brain waste, a phenomenon shared by two million FGIs in the U.S. who have graduate degrees but work in low-skilled jobs (Batalova & Fix, 2018). What FGIs need is a road map to guide them to what ESL programs to choose and at which EI.

Figure 7

ESL Programs for Adult First-Generation Immigrants at Educational Institutions and Nonprofits



Note. ESL = English as a second language.

The details of each program is quite confusing for an FGI to understand without an advisors help. All EIs in this study provide ESL programs, yet it is confusing to FGIs to understand the differences between them without assistance from an advisor. Choosing a 4-year, 2-year EI or HCDE depends on the goals of FGIs. If an FGI wants to be proficient in English for civic purposes, to join the workforce or to get a certificate in a short period of time, then 2-year EIs should be his/her destination. FGIs can even study up to three ESL levels at 2-year EIs then transfer to 4-year EIs, specifically because 2-year EIs and HCDE have an open policy for acceptance, and they are affordable. On the other hand, 4-year EIs should be the choice of FGIs who are at an intermediate level of

proficiency and are supported financially. Studying at 4-year EI would definitely improve the prospects of finding a good job (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

A Road Map to Help First-Generation Immigrants Choose Between 2- and 4-Year Institutions



Note. Harris County Department of Education is considered a subset of 2-year educational institutions. ESL = English as a second language.

FGIs also differ in their aspirations and goals despite sharing English proficiency needs. Their goals can be for civic engagement, citizenship, joining the workforce, or continuing their education. With a different goal for learning English, FGIs would have a unique mindset oriented toward their dreams.

One of the FGIs' goals is learning English for civic engagement. These FGIs aspire to be involved in parents' meetings, be able to talk and understand phone calls, among other things. Due to the financial problems most FGIs are facing, it is advisable to

choose affordable and short ESL classes. HCC, Lone Star College and HCDE can provide the necessary fluency that is sufficient for civic engagement. These three EIs can also assist FGIs in attaining their high school equivalency. As for FGIs who would like to pass the citizenship, Lone Star College and HCDE teach citizenship courses.

Another goal for learning ESL is joining the workforce. Findings have shown partnerships between HCC, Lone Star College, as well as HCDE and many businesses and workforce to set a career pathway providing FGIs with ESL classes while preparing them for a desired career. There is no need for any high school certificate for this program. In Houston, these programs are grant funded by the Texas Workforce Commission. Five specialties are offered at the AEL program at HCC through the Career4U. These certificate programs are Healthcare, Business Technology, Information Technology, Transportation, and Construction. Each takes between ten weeks to two years to complete and FGIs are financially supported throughout. At Lone Star College, three funded Fast Track noncredit programs are available for FGIs who want to join the workforce: allied health careers, business and leadership careers, and trade careers. The duration of each program is eight week and is certified. At HCDE the career pathways available for FGIs are Certified Nursing Assistant, Customer Service Marketing Representative, Medical Assistant Prep, Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Business Office Technology, and Phlebotomy.

Lastly, some FGIs aim at continuing education at a 4-year university. FGIs who have graduate degrees from their countries need this option, in addition to FGIs who have not explored any educational degrees before but would like to continue their education. FGIs have *to* heed that studying at Rice and the University of Houston is not free of

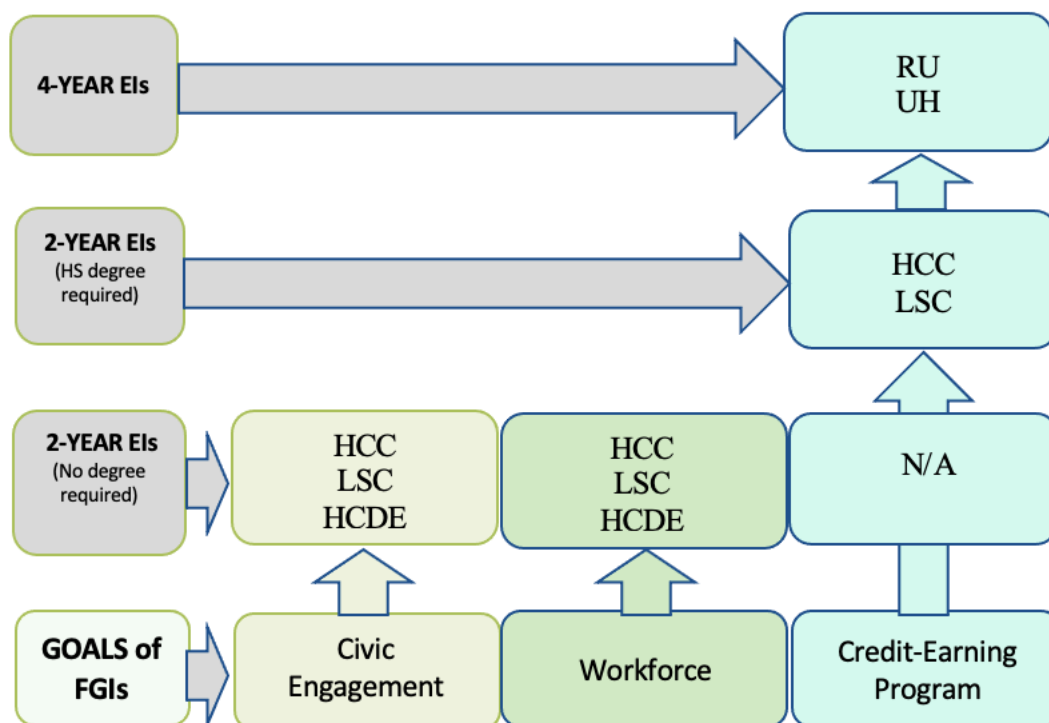
charge as is the case with HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE. To bridge over the financial burden and time consumption of ESL programs at 4-year EIs that may take 2 years, FGIs can start learning English at 2-year EIs, attain high school equivalency diploma (HSED) or GED (the abbreviation formerly stood for general educational development) and then transfer to a 4-year EI. HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE accept ELs with no high school degree and are free or very affordable since they are federally funded by WIOA. Advisors at 2-year EIs play a very significant role in clarifying the choices FGIs have and in assisting them to get into the program that is right for them and fits their aspirations and needs (see Figure 9). The variables in this study related to ESL programs at EIs should synchronize with the FGIs' purpose for learning English.

Timing and Duration

It is one of the barriers that thwarts the FGIs' enrollment in ESL programs. The lengthy ESL programs that, in some cases, extend from 4 to 7 years, in addition to financial burdens (Hakuta et al., 2000), curb FGIs' efforts to commit to ESL classes. The five EIs in Houston metropolitan area differed in the duration of the ESL programs. Comparing Rice University with the University of Houston made it evident that finishing the ESL levels at Rice took half the time required at the University of Houston. The difference is that at Rice completing each ESL level takes 7 weeks, whereas at the University of Houston, completing each level takes 14 weeks. For this reason, it is advisable that FGIs enroll at a 4-year EI after becoming proficient in English at 2-year EIs where costs in time and money are lower.

Figure 9

First-Generation Immigrants' Choice of Education Institution Based on Their Goals



Note. EIs = educational institutions; RU = Rice University; UH = University of Houston; HS = high school; HCC = Houston Community College; LSC = Lone Star College; HCDE = Harris County Department of Education; N/A = not applicable; FGIs = first-generation immigrants.

English learners enrolled at the AEL program at HCC need 162 hours of ESL classes, which might be sufficient for civic engagement. Afterward, ELs who want to join the workforce can enroll in the Fast Track Program. ELs who would like to pursue a bachelor's degree can transfer to a 4-year EI after getting a high school certificate or GED. The other option is to enroll in the continuing education (CE) Intensive English Program as full-time students, taking 18 to 20 hours per week or as a part-time student, studying 8 to 9 hours per week, especially if they aim to get an associate degree.

The levels offered through the CE Intensive Program (Level Intro, Level 1, and Level 2) are more intensive than those at AEL, but they are not for free, as is the case in the AEL program. Therefore, depending on the financial situation and time availability, an EL can choose one program over the other.

English classes at the AEL program at Lone Star College offer four levels, each for 16 weeks. ELs study twice per week, each time for three hours. It takes an EL four semesters to finish the required courses. Afterward, students can enroll in citizenship workshops. They might continue their pathways in the workforce or might want to transfer to a 4-year EI for a university degree.

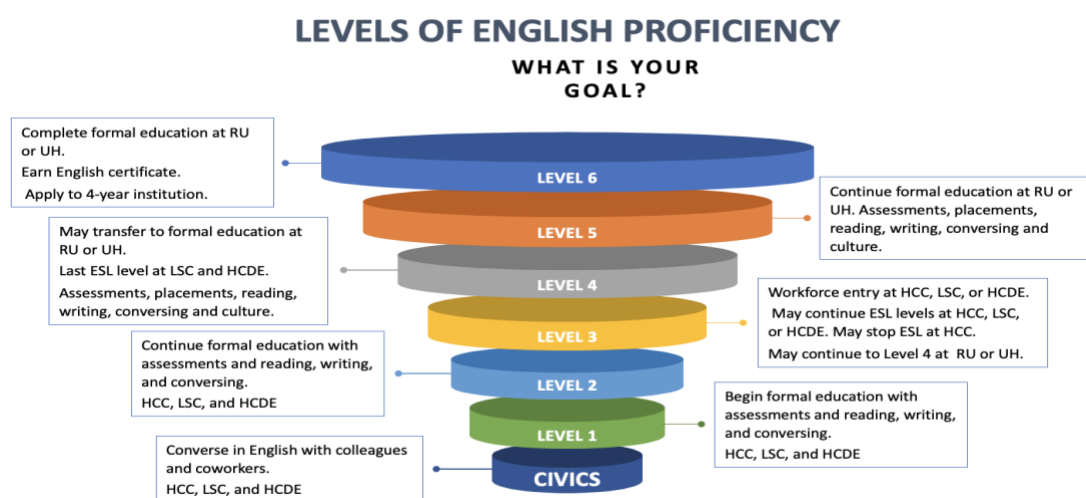
The last institute for learning ESL is HCDE. The hours are stated clearly on the website: on Monday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. or from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Four levels of English are offered, and each level lasts for six weeks. Though ESL classes are not given daily, this schedule gives students who need financial support the opportunity to study and work. A unique feature of this website is the availability of a translator option for any desired language, which facilitates inquiries of FGIs at low proficiency levels. Similar to HCC and Lone Star College, HCDE offers English learners the opportunity to enroll in the workforce or transfer to a 4-year EI to continue their education.

The presented ESL programs at EIs show that 4-year institutes are the destination of FGIs who are more proficient in English, those who have already been exposed to ESL but want to further their education and get an academic degree. FGIs who need ESL to join the workforce can get assistance from the 2-year EIs, specifically, HCC, Lone Star College, and HCDE, that work in tandem with business entities and stakeholders, as

instructed by WIOA, to align education with careers (Goldman et al., 2015). A road map clarifying the requirements for each ESL level and the goals of FGIs can facilitate the process of choosing an EI for English proficiency (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Choosing the Educational Institution that Aligns with the First-Generation Immigrants' Goals



Note. RU = Rice University; UH = University of Houston; ESL = English as second language; HCC = Houston Community College; LSC = Lone Star College; HCDE = Harris County Department of Education.

Instructors' Qualifications

The credentials of ESL instructors teaching adult students are not as well defined as those of instructors in K–12 public education. AEFLA provides resources to improve the quality of instruction but leaves the decision to each state to decide on the instructors' credentials. This is reflected in this research about ESL programs at EIs, where the credentials of adult ESL instructors, though not transparent on the institutes' websites, differ from one institute to the other. For example, the Intensive English Program instructors at Rice have advanced degrees. On the other hand, HCC, Lone Star College,

and HCDE describe their instructors' as "highly qualified" with no reference to the same credentials. Only the University of Houston states that instructors teaching ESL courses possess master's or doctoral degrees. Other qualifications are found on the websites, such as using the most recent advances in second language methodology as well as incorporating current articles and multimedia as supplementary materials (Rice), having professional experience (University of Houston), and employing culturally sensitive staff and faculty ready to meet the needs of language learners by offering programs designed to improve oral and written communication skills for work, academic, and community (HCC). To be highly qualified, instructors do not only need the necessary certificates but should acknowledge and be prepared to support and meet the distinct needs of the FGIs.

On the other hand, instructors must acquaint themselves with the students' cultures, acknowledge the differences and embrace their diversity. In this regard, PD cultivates awareness in instructors and administrators to view immigrants from a different lens. PD is one of the requirements in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to improve and enhance adult education and literacy programs (Crandall et al., 2008). PD can also be helpful in training instructors on integrating technology in their lessons (Dobransky, 2015), a task not undertaken by many instructors.

Advisors/Counselors and Career Services

The FGIs' diversity, in addition to acculturation and linguistic and financial challenges, widens the gap between the needs and aspirations of FGIs on one side and becoming English proficient on the other, making it almost impossible to achieve language goals without professional assistance from advisors and counselors at EIs. Academically, students need to know about their future pathways when taking ESL

courses and whether they align with their goals and aspirations. Advisors should clarify to students what pathways they can choose to accomplish their dreams. Another role advisors, as well as counselors, can play in the advancement of FGIs is to be a liaison between instructors and students, guiding them on elements that could enhance learning, such as motivation, precisely intrinsic motivation, which is directly related to ESL learning (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). According to SDT, ELs can become intrinsically motivated when they enjoy learning English. Therefore, advisors and counselors should guide ESL instructors on how to motivate students intrinsically (Badagbo, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000) to free them from their anxieties and fears that act as barriers to learning a new language.

The services offered at Rice consist of program orientation and access to campus activities, the recreation center, immigration counseling, and academic advising. As for the University of Houston, ELs enrolled at the Language and Culture Center, just like any student enrolled at the university, can access Counseling and Psychological Services, which specifically target students suffering from psychological problems. What FGIs need is psychological support in addition to academic advising to ease any misunderstanding or apprehension they have and to motivate them to reach their goals. At HCC, advising is available for international students. However, it is unclear whether all ELs are eligible for this service. ELs at Lone Star College AEL Program can have access to an advisor or counselor. Sometimes, ELs just do not know what the problem is and whether they need academic advising or counseling. Having both options is a relief to ELs. HCDE offers individualized career, vocational, and college counseling to students in the Adult Education Program.

Coordination with support services, such as childcare, mental health services, and career planning that are thought to facilitate the EL's learning, is one of the considerations of AEFLA for the funding of EIs (TESOL International Association, 2017). In this study, the services provided by advisors at the five EIs are trivial. Instead, they should monitor the progress of ELs in all domains: academic, social, psychological, physical, and financial. The ESL classes might be the only connection ELs have with their community. They do not know how to go around to ask for assistance. If AEFLA, which provides the federal funding for ELs in Adult Education and Literacy, acknowledges the significance of such services, EIs must consider advising and counseling as a necessary tool for survival.

Technology

The meaning of the word *literacy* has evolved throughout the years to encompass digital literacy. However, the limited language proficiency of FGIs, access to technology, and age range can decelerate digital literacy acquisition. Nevertheless, these aspects provide a means to learn English, obtain and maintain a job, participate in community life, and follow up with social media (Harris, n.d.).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted community lockdowns in 2020, distance education became necessary in every educational sector. Being tech savvy became the norm for students as well as instructors. Students benefited from using technology in class and at home. Instructors were encouraged to integrate technology using innovative methods (Dobrinsky, 2015).

PD about the latest research and workshops can be a platform for instructors to learn and integrate technology in their ESL classrooms. The availability and frequency of

PD and workshops are not usually documented on the institutes' websites, but it is a significant contributor to an institution's growth. PDs assisted EIs, specifically instructors, to update their information and be up to par with new pedagogies. Although WIOA acknowledges the importance of digital literacy in adult education, it is solely restricted to task-based learning or scoring students' tests (McHugh & Doxsee, 2018).

Technology at EIs is mainly restricted to online classes, especially after COVID-19. At Rice, ELs can access two online certificate courses after the intermediate or advanced levels, but students enrolled in ESL classes have to attend in person. The University of Houston allows international students to take online classes.

HCC offers a distance learning (DL) option as an additional online course to face-to-face classes. At Lone Star College, ELs have access to the computer language lab, which can advance their English practice. On the other hand, English classes at HCDE are given solely online, limiting the ELs' access to other resources. To know more about instructors' technology integration, a thorough analysis of the ESL is required.

Fees and Financial Aid

Paying for ESL classes is one of the challenges facing FGIs. Their lack of English proficiency stands in the way of getting better jobs and improving their income.

The tuition fees paid for ESL courses vary among the five EIs. Each term, ELs enrolled in the Intensive Program at Rice pay \$2,550 for tuition, \$100 for testing and registration, and \$175 for textbooks. Factoring in the registration fee, the cost per level is \$2,825. This translates to \$16,950 for the entire six sessions in a 1-year period.

At the University of Houston, ELs pay \$5,089 for the Fall term (14 weeks) for one level and the same amount for the Spring term (14 weeks), \$4,473 for the summer

(13 weeks), or \$2,404 for Summer II (7 weeks). The students can cover three of the six levels in one academic year and will spend a total of \$30,534 in total tuition fees for the six ESL levels. From a student viewpoint, this program is twice as long and almost twice the cost of Rice. At HCC, students can be enrolled in the AEL program at \$20 per semester. As for ESL courses in the CE program and ESOL, the fee for each level is \$535. Therefore, FGIs who cannot pay tuition fees would most likely go with the ESL program at the AEL division.

When reviewing the cost at Lone Star College, one finds no costs associated with the ESL classes within the Adult Education and Literacy AEL program, and the books are free. Similarly, ESL classes and textbooks at HCDE are free. These last two EIs most likely will have a broader appeal to FGIs who are facing financial challenges. In fact, not only do FGIs have the opportunity to improve their language skills at these EIs, but they have better prospects for work, given the addition of the counseling services associated with the programs.

The variation in tuition fees at EIs helps explain why FGIs might prefer one program over another. International students who come to the U.S. to learn English can afford high tuition fees that might be impossible for FGIs to pay. Federal funding through the WOIA supports AEL programs in workforce-oriented community colleges and nonprofit organizations, which relieves FGIs from the financial burden. Not only can FGIs improve their English proficiency at no cost, but they can also choose a career pathway and find a job without worrying about the expense.

Pathways

What to expect after finishing the ESL programs is critical to FGIs. As with any university program, the goal would not be to have all ELs directed to the same career or vocational path. While all FGIs can benefit from the first two levels of ESL classes, where the content is general and vocabulary is selected to aid ELs in getting around the community, students may decide to move to a track that is more closely aligned with their goals. For example, those who want to learn English for social reasons can become more English proficient by attending classes and practicing English in the community. On the other hand, ELs who aspire to know more about the different academic programs offered at 2-year or 4-year universities or students who want to join the workforce may find themselves lost in regular ESL classes. At this level, additional information about their future is indispensable. Whether ELs aspire to get a postsecondary degree or join the workforce, more assistance is required while enrolled in ESL courses. AEFLA, which is Title II of WOIA, is the principal source of federal and state funding. Section 202 of AEFLA (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2013a) is closely related to meeting FGIs' needs and includes the following two aims:

- To assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills for employment and economic self-sufficiency
- To assist immigrants and English learners in improving their English and math proficiency and understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship

The purposes of AEFLA align with some of the FGIs' goals who want to improve their English proficiency to acquire the skills necessary for employment, citizenship, or both.

Furthermore, AEFLA contends that students' transition to postsecondary education and training be through a one-stop delivery system (Office of Career, Technical, and Education, 2015). This one-stop delivery system provides all the information and assistance required to bridge the way to adult classes, including ESL. The only concern, in this case, is for FGIs not to have the same privileges or chances as the nontraditional adult citizen who is the target of AEL programs. What is evident is that FGIs are lost in a sea of information they cannot decipher without guidance (Crandall, 2010; Mathews-Aydlini, 2008; Millard, 2015; Raufman et al., 2019; Schmitt, 2018; Suh, 2017). Moreover, the findings of this study showed that ESL programs at 4-year EIs, unlike those at 2-year community colleges and HCDE, focus on improving the ELs' English proficiency without setting a pathway to the future of ELs once they finish the ESL courses. Kanno and Varghese (2010) assert that among the challenges immigrants face in a 4-year EI, other than and more important than their linguistic challenges, are institutional constraints, limited financial resources, and their tendency to self-eliminate. ELs describe linguistic challenges as "controllable" since they could overcome them "as long as they studied harder and put in the extra effort" (p. 323). However, the barriers outside their control are the structural and economic factors. Addressing a more holistic approach, such as providing students with outreach programs targeting racial minority and low-income students, should ease the transition to 4-year EIs.

Furthermore, partnerships between community colleges and 4-year EIs, considering the students' financial conditions and limited social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, would bridge the gap and facilitate their transfer. There have been concerns raised about the misalignment between graduates in Texas and the workforce needs

(Goldman et al., 2015). According to this report, there is a gap in supply and demand between education degrees and the workforce. One way to overcome these gaps is for the state and postsecondary institutions to systematically analyze workforce data and unmet needs.

Using a Holistic Approach

Educators should never underestimate the significance of the FGIs' purpose in learning English which demands a different approach to teaching ESL and dealing with English learners. Studies such as Networks for Integrating New Americans, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, emphasized a holistic approach whose purpose is to support the integration of immigrants in the civic, linguistic, and economic levels (Kallenbach et al., 2013). Likewise, when studying the variables related to ESL programs at EIs, a holistic approach should be adopted due to the interconnectedness of the variables. Eligible funding providers, such as AEFLA, consider as crucial the "factors that relate to a provider's ability to serve high-needs populations, deliver high-quality services, and coordinate with other programs and services" (TESOL International Association, 2017, p. 11). These factors resonate with the variables mentioned in this study and should be viewed from a holistic perspective. The EIs should comply with the AEFLA guidelines regarding students joining the adult and literacy programs (TESOL International Association, 2017), as seen in Table 8.

Table 8*Comparison of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Guidelines and Research**Variables*

Adult Education and Family Literacy Act guidelines for eligible providers	Variables related to research
Ability to serve those with the highest levels of need, including individuals with low literacy skill levels or who are English language learners	Serving English learners
Best practices are taken from the most rigorous and appropriate research available	Improvement Science
Effective use of technology, including distance education	Use of technology
Instruction delivery by well-trained personnel that meet state standards and access to high-quality professional development	Instructors' qualifications
Develop career pathways by coordinating the provider, education, training, and resources such as elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools; institutions of higher education; local workforce development boards; one-stop centers; jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Holistic approach –Career pathways –Workforce
The flexibility of schedules for adult learners and coordination with support services necessary to enable individuals to complete the program, such as childcare, transportation, mental health services, and career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Timing and schedules –Support services –Mental health services
High-quality information management systems for tracking and reporting on student performance	Tracking English learners' performance
The provider is in an area of demonstrated need for more English language acquisition programs and civics education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Instructors' qualifications –Citizenship and civics education

In other words, it is incumbent on the EIs to use technology effectively, have well-trained instructors who continuously have access to PD, coordinate with service providers to develop career pathways for adult students, have flexible schedules and

support services, and use a tracking system to follow up with students. Despite the focus of the WIOA on aligning adult learners with education and work opportunities, studies have shown variation among five states in their strategies to support adult learners transitioning to postsecondary education in different states (Hector-Mason et al., 2017).

In addition to the variables under study, other factors differ from one FGI to another, which might affect the FGIs' choice of a program. First, the location of each EI is an essential contributor to FGIs' enrollment in a program. Many FGIs attend classes in the evening after work. Others do not have the means for transportation to go to distant classes. Two-year EIs are a good choice for FGIs because of their multiple locations. Choosing a nearby EI would make it easier for them. Another factor to be considered by FGIs before enrollment is the prerequisites for ESL courses. FGIs are diverse in their educational attainment. Twenty-six percent have less than a high school degree (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.), and as a result, these students might not be accepted if high school is a prerequisite to ESL enrollment (see Table 9).

Table 9

Location and Prerequisites of English as a Second Language Programs

Educational institutions	Locations	Student level requirements/prerequisites
Rice University	1	Completion of high school
University of Houston	1	Completion of high school
Houston Community College	7	High school for continuing education No degree for the Adult Education and Literacy program
Lone Star College	7	No degree necessary
Harris County Department of Education	7	No degree necessary

Note. Location and prerequisites at educational institutions in the Houston metro area.

Because of their open policy, 2-year EIs are the best choice for FGIs who do not have postsecondary credentials. On the other hand, 4-year EIs are the choice of FGIs with an intermediate or advanced English proficiency who would like to continue their education and earn a degree. Cooperation between 2-year and 4-year EIs is essential for FGIs who aspire to earn a university degree but lack the financial resources.

Limitations

In this study, the ESL programs provided at EIs in the Houston Metropolitan area were compared in five variables that are considered to influence the enrollment, continuation, and graduation of FGI. Of equal importance are the goals of FGIs that are as diverse as their educational background and linguistic abilities. Therefore, this study focuses on the alignment of ESL programs with the diverse goals of FGIs. Only then can FGIs reach their dreams or aspirations, whether joining the workforce, continuing their education, getting their citizenship, or being able to communicate in society. Each of the five EIs was chosen in this study because it represented other institutions of the same category. For example, Rice University represents a private 4-year EI. The University of Houston represents a public 4-year EI. HCC and Lone Star College represent public community colleges. Finally, HCDE was chosen for its services in a county considered the third highest nationwide in population.

One of the limitations of this study is the limited number of institutes presented. Therefore, a larger sample would represent the EIs in Houston better, and the study would be more comprehensive. Furthermore, other institutions, such as nonprofit organizations and private language institutes, could have added a different dimension to the study.

Another limitation of the study is the limited variables evaluated in the five EIs. Timing and duration, instructors' qualifications, advisors and counselors, technology, fees, and financial aid are not the only barriers FGIs face as ELs. Other variables could have been considered, such as the availability of career pathways for ELs, partnerships with employers, and preventing waste of intellectual talent. OCTAE has made it clear that all Adult Education and Literacy programs should be linked to pathways and partnerships that secure future jobs for adult learners. Whether this is applied to students studying ESL at postsecondary institutes is not clear. However, WOIA requires that states receiving its funds streamline programs and pathways for workforce education and training (Goldman et al., 2015).

In addition, the underutilization of professional FGIs or lack of work is a pertinent issue that should be addressed. Around 25% of immigrants with college degrees are either unemployed or in low-skilled jobs, contributing to lost wages of \$39.4 billion per year (Batalova et al., 2016). Specifically, in Texas, 21% of foreign-born adults who have limited English proficiency and have college degrees are underutilized, because of unemployment or employment in low-skilled jobs, whereas a smaller proportion (16%) of native-born similarly educated citizens suffer the same circumstances (McHugh & Morawski, 2015).

Future Directions

Several areas of study deserve further inquiry. One is the value of advisors, counselors, and other services that can assist the FGIs individually and not as copies of other FGIs. Academically, FGIs need assistance, especially when thinking about their goals. Psychologically, the need is even more urgent. Although it is not very obvious,

what surfaces is the anxiety, low self-esteem, and low confidence that affect the FGIs' performance. The significance of intrinsic motivation was mentioned in the study as part of self-determination theory as a precursor to better learning. Instructors need to be reminded by counselors about the FGIs' psychological needs as necessary as the academic, yet unique to each individual.

Another realm that requires further investigation is the pathways for the FGIs who have not been exposed to the K–12 public system and lack the English proficiency to decipher what is found on the websites of EIs. Once English learners leave school, they stop being part of the Texas Education Agency and come under the umbrella of AEFLA and the Texas Workforce Commission.

A third consideration should be given to the underutilization of FGIs with advanced degrees from their countries. Their education and expertise are an asset to the country, significantly that the number of FGIs with professional degrees is increasing (Batalova et al., 2016). To overcome this problem, EIs play a significant role. World Education Services, IMPRINT, and the Institute of Immigration Research at George Mason University analyzed the factors that influenced the success of college-educated immigrants, such as English skills, social capital, workplace acculturation, and country where a degree was obtained. These variables were found to correlate with economic and professional achievement. It was suggested that adult education programs take steps to curb this problem. According to the study, besides teaching ESL classes, EIs should consider other measures such as understanding the college-educated population and collecting data about their degrees.

Moreover, immigrants should be assisted in transferring their credentials to the United States. Finally, EIs should link college-educated immigrants to professional employment (Bergson-Shilcock & Witte, 2015). For example, in Texas, a study revealed five specific occupations experiencing significant shortages that need to be aligned with degrees at EIs (Daugherty et al., 2014).

Conclusion

This research shows a variation between five EIs, in terms of timing and duration of ESL courses, instructors' qualifications, availability of advisors and counselors, technology, and tuition fees. This variation can be attributed to the purpose behind joining EIs. At a 4-year institution, the purpose is, in most cases, to pursue an academic degree. Career pathways to the workforce are not available. It might not be the destination of FGIs who want to improve their English proficiency first, especially since the tuition fees are very high, but it might be a choice for a future academic degree where FGIs can be transferred from 2-year EIs to 4-year EIs. Rice seems more affordable than the University of Houston since it takes less time and money to complete the ESL courses. Community colleges do not differ significantly in the duration of ESL courses and instructors' qualifications. As for the community colleges and HCDE, ESL courses under the umbrella of Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) are given at no cost since AEFLA funds them. This might be confusing to FGIs, but the presence of advisors before or during registration should clarify the difference and guide them to the right ESL courses under AEL. In this respect, EIs should consider the significance of advising, counseling, and other services to FGIs who require guidance and assistance. These services are provided at the beginning of the term for student placement, and some can be

contacted for assistance. FGIs can benefit from counseling regarding financial, social, or other problems.

In general, advisors and counselors can play a considerable role in adjusting the variables to fit into the FGIs' lifestyles. As for the instructors' credentials, attending professional developments can enrich their knowledge about FGIs and ESL. Instructors would eliminate many obstacles FGIs face in and outside class by coordinating with advisors and counselors. Each FGI comes to class with a load of entangled problems that need the assistance of professionals to acknowledge, guide, and assist FGIs in overcoming them. Assistance and guidance are dim at 4-year institutions but more visible at community colleges and HCDE. Having online classes seems to be shared by all postsecondary institutes, but this is not enough. An integrated technology-based instruction should find its way to ESL classes, starting with policymakers, administrators, and instructors who should pave the way for students to embrace technology in ESL classes.

Chapter VI

Action Plan

The significance of this study lies in its implementation. On the surface, the FGIs and EIs should benefit from this study which bridges a pathway for FGIs to a place that resonates with their needs and aspirations. The goals of FGIs should be acknowledged by EIs and made accessible to FGIs, whether it's civic engagement, joining the workforce, or continuing education. Each FGI, just like any other student at EIs, should be considered an individual whose needs and goals are unique and, therefore, be allowed to transition to the proper path. On a deeper level, the United States will profit when FGIs become more language proficient and self-reliant. In addition, their proficiency will have a ripple effect on their family, work, and community.

The evaluation of the ESL programs at the five EIs is based on the alignment of the variables with the needs and goals of the students. The FGIs seek English for different purposes: civic engagement, joining the workforce, furthering their education, or acquiring citizenship. These needs and goals of FGIs should be acknowledged in ESL classes and in tandem with the variables.

Although this study is qualitative, it has the potential of using improvement science to adopt new ideas, apply them to EIs, and expand them to other EIs (see Table 10). According to Bryk and colleagues (2017), improvement science, whose primary purpose is to accelerate by doing, is based on six improvement principles (Bryk et al., 2017). Therefore, applying improvement science to this evaluative study allows the EIs to discover what the students need and what variables lead to better proficiency. In addition,

having a variety of EIs working together is similar to the networked improvement communities (NIC) that Bryk and colleagues (2017) stress in improvement science.

Table 10

Applicability of Improvement Science to ESL Programs at Educational Institutions

Improvement Science—Six principles	Applicability for programs at educational institutions
1. Problem-specific and user-centered work	Instructors, students, and administrators work together to address specific problems, plan, and set expectations.
2. Variation in performance	The diversity of FGIs demonstrates variations in performance.
3. Understanding the systems that affect outcomes.	All variables should be investigated to come up with the proper solution.
4. Need for measurement to adjust what needs to be improved.	Students' performance should be measured to confirm or negate the plan's effectiveness.
5. Using a disciplined, virtuous cycle of inquiry: plan, do, study, and act to identify successes and failures.	The PDSA cycle allows instructors to adopt studied methods, adjust, or abandon them, depending on the results.
6. Learning accelerated through networked communities.	Sharing the results with other EIs offering ESL would strengthen the findings.

Note. ESL = English as a second language; FGIs = First-generation immigrants; PDSA = plan-do-study-act; EIs = educational institutions.

Timing and Duration

One of the most common factors prompting students to quit ESL classes (Hakuta et al., 2000) is a lengthy program that extends to 4 or 5 years. FGIs do not have the luxury of time. They want to get employed as soon as possible. They feel helpless,

juggling work, family, and classes. Consequently, courses that take a long time are not desirable for FGIs. They tend to opt for work that provides them with money in a short time than to choose to spend long hours and days in ESL classes that require years of studying before they reap any benefits. The timing of the classes adds up another burden on the adult learner who has to navigate his home and job responsibilities throughout the day and sometimes at night; therefore, having more timing options, such as evening and Saturday classes, would allow FGIs to enroll.

EIs should consider these options indispensable for the FGIs that are in dire need to enroll in ESL classes and persevere throughout each term. To that end, following up with the students who stopped attending is equally important as keeping a record of the students who withdraw and the reasons for withdrawal.

Instructors' Qualifications

Teaching adult students ESL requires specific certificates and expertise. Therefore, it is different from teaching ESL to K–12 students and different from teaching general topics to adults. In addition, like any other domain, attending professional development keeps instructors updated on new research and its application in this field.

Advisors and Counselors

FGIs come to class with needs and fears that dwarf their desire to learn English. Most often, their needs and fears are barriers to learning English, and hence, they should not go unnoticed or ignored by the EIs. Every student needs an advisor to discuss academic options before enrolling in an ESL course, during the course, and after finishing. Each phase is primal for FGIs and has to be discussed with the advisor. It can help set a pathway for their future. Transferring from 2-year to 4-year EI should be

planned with an advisor who sets the path for an FGI from ESL to a desired major at a 4-year EI.

FGIs are caught in a complex dilemma resulting in social and psychological problems from leaving their family, country, and all familiar things and facing a new language and culture (Adams-Gardner, 2018). Once they register for ESL classes and start facing difficulties, they get stuck between the instructor who does not have time to solve their problems on the one hand and their family demands on the other hand. Without the assistance of a counselor, the path would be very bumpy. All EIs have advisors and counselors assisting students academically and psychologically to get over their problems, which would facilitate learning and foster the well-being of the students. The need is even more urgent for FGIs who feel lost instead of asking for help.

Technology

Everything breathes technology, especially the education sector, specifically after the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether used in class or at home, technology can alleviate a student's stress when speaking English in class. Moreover, technology can take the role of the instructor when the student is at home. Because of the diversity of the students, technology can fill any gaps or enrich students who want to learn more. Therefore, the instructor should direct the students to what resources are available for the students. Furthermore, with the help of PD and technology, instructors can gain insight into the new methods that integrate and implement technology in teaching ESL (Bergey et al., 2018; Dobransky, 2015).

Fees and Financial Aid

The first question ringing in the students' heads before enrolling in any ESL class is the tuition fees—one of the obstacles that prevent FGIs from enrolling in classes despite their need to become proficient. Providing FGIs with free classes or financial aid can alleviate many obstacles. To do so, EIs should receive more federal funding, which has been declining in recent years due to the Great Recession in 2008 despite the increase in the number of students with limited English proficiency from 17.8 million in 2000 to 22.2 million in 2011 (National Immigration Forum, 2016). FGIs, instructors, administrators, and stakeholders should advocate for more federal funding through Adult Education and Family Literacy, the primary source of federal funding for the adult English programs.

The variables mentioned in this study cannot exist separately from each other. They work together and affect other variables. For example, instructors and advisors should work together, learn how to listen to FGIs, understand their feelings, opinions, and abilities, and participate in PD workshops. In addition, they have to be well-trained in using new trends in technology that simplify learning ESL. On a similar note, the timing and duration of classes are connected to students' tuition fees. Needless to say, EIs should coordinate to allow FGIs' transfer from 2-year to 4-year EIs.

A Holistic Approach as a Vehicle to Improvement Science

To apply Improvement Science to ESL programs at EIs, the six principles should be applied, addressing specific problems that can be measured using the plan-do-study-action (PDSA) cycle. First, each EIs plans a proper program that considers the abilities of students and their goals in learning English. To do so, FGIs should be involved in a

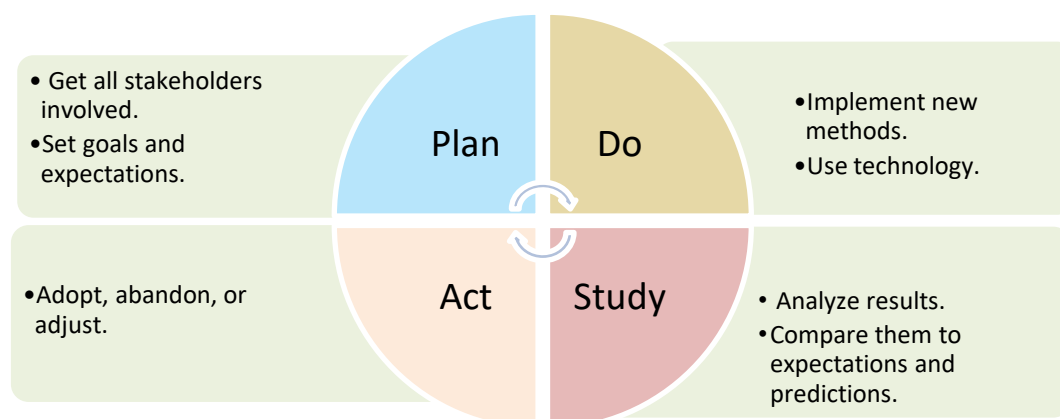
survey about their goals and expectations of ESL programs and the problems that prevent FGIs from reaching their goals. Instructors' opinion is important, too, in addition to administrators, stakeholders, and policymakers. The next step is to apply the plan, or the do phase: it consists of implementing new teaching methods and new technologies that have been planned. In the study phase, the results should be analyzed and compared to the predictions and expectations in the planning phase, emphasizing what worked and adjusting what did not work. Based on the results, action should be taken to adopt the new methods, make adjustments, or abandon the idea and look for a new one (Figure 11).

The PDSA cycle keeps on changing, adapting new strategies that have been proven to work and dropping the ones that did not. When every postsecondary institute develops this inquiry, communication about the results through a network of ESL programs can significantly benefit the field. Anthony Bryk and his colleagues (2017) emphasize the idea of setting a network of professional communities to target common problems:

[We are] recognizing that today's problems cannot be solved through isolated individual actions. Each participant holds expertise that is valuable in solving a given problem, but each also recognizes that he or she must join together with others to solve it. (p. 17)

Figure 11

Applying Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle to ESL Programs in Educational Institutions



Note. ESL = English as a second language.

Change always takes time, but it should be adopted by policy makers, EIs, instructors, and all stakeholders because it leads to improvement. Change should come from within the institute or ESL program. All changes implemented in the past and were thought to be the solution were not approached from within each institute or program and were not discussed with other ESL programs at other EIs. Involving all EIs teaching ESL to adult students in the PDSA cycle would set the program on the right path.

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Appendix

Houston Area ESL Programs at Educational Institutions

Table 1

Characteristics of ESL Programs at Educational Institutions in the Houston Metropolitan Area

Variables	RU	UH	HCC	LSC	HCDE
Program	Intensive English Program	Language and Cultural Center	Adult Education and Literacy	Adult Education and Literacy	Adult Education
Duration	4 hours/day 5 days/week 7 weeks/level 6 levels	4 hours/day 5 days/week 14 weeks/level 6 levels	3 hours/day 3 days/week 6 weeks/level 3 levels	3 hours/day 2 days/week 16 weeks/level 4 levels	3 hours/day 2 days/week 8 weeks/level 4 levels
Instructors' qualifications	Advanced degree	Advanced degree	Not specified	Instructor with PhD	Not specified
Advising, counseling, and career services	Academic Advising and immigration	Counseling and Psychological Services	Advisors assist at beginning of term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Success Center • Counseling Services • Counseling and advising offices 	Individualized career, vocational, and college counseling
Technology	Certificate programs online	Not specified	Distance learning software	Offers virtual classes	Virtual ESL only
Fees and financial aid	\$2,500/term; books \$175	\$4,633/term	\$20	Free	Free

Note. ESL = English as a second language; RU = Rice University; UH = University of

Houston; HCC = Houston Community College; LSC = Lone Star College; HCDE =

Harris County Department of Education.