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English as a Second Language: Adult Programs and Their  
Impact on Second Language Learners' Aspirations

by

Hala Gheriani

May 2019

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
School of Education

English as a Second Language: Adult Programs and Their  
Impact on Second Language Learners' Aspirations

by


Hala Gheriani

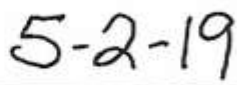
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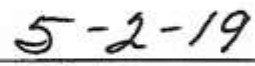
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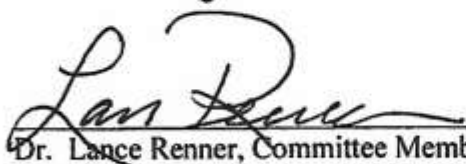
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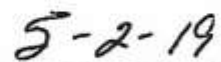
  
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Hala Gheriani

Signature: Hala Gheriani Date: 05-02-2019

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## Abstract

Over the years, millions of immigrants have made the trek to the United States to start a new life away from the known and the familiar (Lopez, Bialik, & Radford, 2017). English as a Second Language (ESL) centers are often the first formal introduction to the English language, and many immigrants will wait on long waiting lists for the chance to learn proper English and, therefore, ascend to a future identity sometimes years in the making (Jhangiani, Tarry, & Stangor, 2015; National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). The purpose of this study was to investigate, through a qualitative project, factors propelling immigrants to enroll in ESL courses and their expectations of such programs. Immigrants' personal aspirations were also examined to determine if newly acquired English language and workability skills do, in fact, propel learners to pursue their initial aspirations. Interviews with adult ESL participants at a Midwest community college indicated participants in the intermediate/advanced ESL classes are driven to enroll in these advanced classes for a purpose, and their expectations of these programs often extend beyond the instructor's scope of influence. In the analysis of data, relevant themes were identified including English Language; a primal need, Instructional expectations; supported self-fulfillment, Brewing American Dreams, and Home is where the heart is. A comprehensive and customizable approach focused on the whole individual is necessary if the ESL adult student is to learn *proper* English. A solid foundation in the language of the host country is a key element in integration benefiting both the individual and the economic performance of the host nation (Choi & Ziegler, 2015).

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Globalization, an increasingly vibrant phenomenon interconnecting people across the world with the aid of information and communications technology, is making the world smaller (Steger, 2017). This globalization, however, is still seeped in national borders and is dictated by world politics (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2017). The movement of people across borders, especially ones from less developed countries to core countries in the developed world, are still controlled and monitored by receiving countries (Torpey, 2018). Approximately one million immigrants are legally admitted to the United States every single year, with slight ebb and flow depending on the U.S. administration's current and forthcoming immigration policies and trending exaggerated and factual news (Hamilton, 2018; Lopez et al., 2017; Partlow & Miroff, 2016).

Immigrating to another country is a life changing event that can impede an immigrant's transformation into his or her imaginary future self in the new host country (Adkins, Sample, & Birman, 1999; Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Once on U.S. grounds, immigrants are quickly faced with the inevitable English language as a prerequisite to find a job and/or continue their education for a better tomorrow (Jiménez, 2017; Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). To achieve the American Dream, immigrants have the option to enroll, at low or no cost, in adult ESL programs in their respective state (Vafai, 2016).

The National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (2016) estimated there are over 52,000 individuals with limited English proficiency in the state of Missouri. Second language learners seek language instruction and experiences, which assist them in communicating and learning about customs and cultures of the United

States and prepare them for employment and self-sufficiency (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], n.d.). In fact, one of the purposes of the Adult Education and Literacy program, of which ESL is a division, is to “assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency” (MODESE, n.d., para. 4).

In this chapter, roots of the ESL program, its progression, and the ever-present integration of workforce skills within the ESL curriculum are described. The theoretical framework providing context and guiding this study is given. English learner’s motivations and the question of whether the ESL program is impacting immigrants’ aspirations for a better future of their choosing is posed in the statement of the problem. Chapter One concludes with the research questions, significance of the study, and limitations and assumptions.

### **Background of the Study**

The ESL program has its beginnings in the century old history of the Americanization movement present since the early 1900s (Esch, 2018; Kliebard, 2004). In fact, ESL classes started the assimilation process of teaching English and civic education to newly arrived immigrants at Americanization centers created for that purpose (Esch, 2018; Kliebard, 2004). Classes were offered for the first time in the evening as not to conflict with traditional working hours, which would impede the immigrants’ presupposed existential role in the manufacturing machines of the industrial revolution (Esch, 2018; Kliebard, 2004). Although Americanization centers did not survive past the 1920s, they did, however, establish the premises of the adult education

system and assimilation model of language learning and adaptation to the economic standards (Esch, 2018; Schuck, 2018).

Assimilation, not integration, to the American way of life was further reinforced by migratory events of the eclipsing 19th century (Cohn, 2017; Vafai, 2016). The end of the 1800s, known for industrialization and the introduction of machinery, saw a new wave of arrivals considered foreign to mainstream society (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017; Schuck, 2018). Many non-English speakers were living on the fringes of society in segregated neighborhoods (Schuck, 2018). These populations were less likely to be naturalized than previous waves of immigrants, from northern and western Europe, now considered the middle and upper class of American society (Cohn, 2017; Leonardo & Vafai, 2016).

This new wave of immigrants, from southern and eastern Europe, has been viewed as a defining moment for cultural constructions and a politics of identity (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017; Esch, 2018; Schuck, 2018). A status differential between immigrants of the European north and west and those from southern and eastern Europe was increasingly evident (Abramitzky & Boustan, 2017; Cohn, 2017). The assimilation of non-White Europeans into American culture was the ideal process towards citizenship as it complemented entrance into the workforce and their introduction to the capitalistic edicts (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016).

Consequently, the curriculum of adult English learners continues to reflect this pervasive discourse of assimilation to the American way of life and subordination to the American working norms (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016). Historical accounts further corroborate attempts of assimilating the new immigrants, notwithstanding the

immigrant's personal aspirations and priorities (Esch, 2018; Vafai, 2015). Growth of the adult ESL programs in the United States correlated with the goals of assimilating immigrants into the mainstream and White culture. This growth was often symbolized by the shedding of ethnic identities and the transformation into patriotic Americans (Esch, 2018).

Teaching English was particularly important for employers because communication barriers negatively impacted productivity (Korman, 1965). Employers' not the employee's best interests were woven into ESL curriculum (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016). Some companies, such as Ford and the United States Steel corporations, dictated curriculum of English and civic instruction to include, above all, discipline and work efficiency (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016). As reported by Esch (2018), to graduate from the Ford English Schools, Irish-Americans, German-Americans, or Italian-Americans were, in some cases, literally herded into giant melting pots from which they emerged as just English-speaking Americans, "having learned to view the hyphen as a minus sign" (p. 44). From the start, "the [social] classes concerned themselves primarily with only one sphere of the immigrant's surrounding: factory life" (Korman, 1965, p. 404).

In fact, Korman's observation in 1965 about the systematic efforts in the direction of workforce training still resonates to some extent in current curriculum and newly standardized common core procedures at publicly funded adult education agencies (Vafai, 2016). It is, however, prudent to note the societal divide and attitude towards southern and eastern Europeans have shifted toward immigrants of color and the target of prejudice in a changing racial formation (Vafai, 2016). Missouri's publicly funded adult

education agencies are not an exception in wanting to prepare its workforce for the 21st century as stated on their website (MODESE, n.d.).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The second language acquisition theory that guided this research is based on Norton's identity and language learning theory supplemented by Norton's investment construct, which has evolved within the common bounds of identity but also ideology and capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Second language acquisition is an evolving field that is, "incredibly, and happily, diverse, creative, often contentious, and always full of controversy" (Lantolf, 1996, p. 738). It is within this complex linguistic environment that second language acquisition's sociocultural and cognitive perspectives continue to coexist and thrive (Zuengler & Miller, 2006).

With the cognitive approach, theorists attempt to explain learning in terms of a psycholinguistic process that mostly focuses on linguistic input and output (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). The applied linguistic approach considers the rapport between the language learner and the broader social world (Norton, 2014). Norton viewed the use of language in real-world scenarios as essential to learning a second language, and participation in everyday life is "both the product and the process of learning" (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 38). For Norton (2014), identity is an integral part of a second language learner's social practice and determines the extent of participation, because there is a direct relationship between language and identity.

Identity, as defined by Norton, is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 36).



As reported by Celik (2007), Norton argued social identity is an “unpredictable outcome of a combination of diverse systems in which people come to terms with who they are in relation to others around them and is highly influenced by the way they view the past, present, and future, respectively” (p. 101). In fact, to understand a learner’s commitment to learn English, it is important to not only consider his or her current identity but also the imagined identity of future self (Norton, 2014).

Norton’s (2014) identity concept is further explained as a negotiable factor in the context of inequitable relations of power as it signals one’s position in the world and impacts how the person understands future possibilities central to the lives of many language learners. Language is a social exercise where experiences are catalogued and identities are constantly negotiated in relation to the power positions in a given context (Celik, 2007). Indeed, Norton’s model operates within broad social domains that are rapidly evolving with the advent of a new world order of instant cyber communication (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). According to Darvin and Norton (2015), because of technology, knowledge extends beyond classrooms, and learners have a heightened agency to not only learn a second language to gain resources and enhance status quo but also to question systemic practices.

The future outlook of where a language learner might land in a rapidly changing social environment extending beyond the brick and mortar classroom brings into play Norton’s concept of investment (Celik, 2007). Unlike motivation, Norton believed investment is “linked to the social context and assumes a complex social identity, changing across time and space, and having multiple desires” (as cited in Celik, 2007, p. 101). Investment holds an important place in language learning theory for indicating the

established relationship between the language learner identity and corresponding learning commitment based on the prevailing social context (Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011). As reported by Kramsch (2013), Norton's idea of investment, "accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavor and in persevering in that endeavor (p. 195).

As such, learners will invest in a second language to "acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" and provide them with a better position to own the language and dominate the situation for a better grasp on the learned language (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). A learner's investment is a conscience effort propelled by a desired future identity, which promises capital to the extent allowable by ideological structures (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Second language learners, however, may choose to refrain from learning a language, while nurturing an identity of welcomed seclusion (Guiora, Beit-Hallahmi, & Brannon, 1972; Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018).

The focus of this study was the driving factors and aspirations, or investment, propelling immigrants to learn a second language. In this study, immigrants' initial aspirations at the start of their formal English instruction were gauged to determine the impact the ESL program had on those aspirations and their shifts, if any, during the program. To understand these second language learners' behaviors, Norton's (2014) theory served as a guide. Understanding the learning of English requires paying attention to learners' multiple and conflicting identities and how those shifts in identities, depending on the particular context, shape the level of investment in learning the

language (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). Discerning identity shifts and how investment can shape commitment to learning a second language was valuable in recognizing the multiple desires leading immigrants to participate in adult ESL programs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The ESL programs, geared toward adults, have been established to introduce adult non-English speakers to the English language and provide them with knowledge to overcome social and economic barriers associated with language deficiency, while preparing them for the workforce skills of the 21st century (Vafai, 2016). The goal is for ESL classes to, naturally, enable immigrants to find a job and be self-sufficient (Vafai, 2016). It is clearly stated on the MODESE (n.d.) Adult Education and Literacy webpage, one of the purposes of this agency is to “assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency” (para 4). However, to provide immigrants with the work skills needed and for the ESL program to be effective, without perpetuating class and racial inequalities, ESL programs must reflect the motivational patterns of the adult learner and meet their occupational aspirations (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2015; Vafai, 2016). To accomplish this task, the English learner’s identity formation process and investment in second language learning must be explored further within the ideological context in which he or she circulates (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Vafai, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Adult English learners enrolled in ESL programs are often juggling numerous priorities and challenges beyond their schooling, yet they persist in the pursuit of a greater purpose that can only be unlocked with language acquisition (Carter, 2016). To

ensure dedicated English learners are indeed benefiting from English instruction and their aspirations are being supported, the results should be tracked and published (Vafai, 2016). Tracking ESL learners' shift in aspirations is particularly important in the Midwest where very low unemployment and many jobs for those without the post-secondary ESL diploma could alter initial aspirations (Kerr, McDaniel, & Guinan, 2014; Nespor, 2014; Van Heelsum, 2017).

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided the study:

1. What motivates immigrants, new to the Midwest, to learn English as a second language?
2. What expectations do immigrants perceive of the ESL program they are attending?
3. How have immigrants perceived their aspirations shift over the course of their ESL studies?

### **Significance of the Study**

The United States is a land of immigrants and it continues to welcome approximately one million legal immigrants within its borders each year (Lopez et al., 2017; Martin, 2014). According to the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, there are over 14,000,000 individuals with limited English Proficiency in the United States and this number is growing (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). Immigrants are essential to help fill-in the gap in the U.S.-born workforce as the Baby Boomers retire but to achieve workforce integration, English instruction is critical (World Education, 2018). According to Kennedy and Walters, limited English proficiency costs the U.S. economy 38 billion dollars and the newcomers

much more, because of their inability to pursue a career, enroll in higher education, or simply communicate and be heard (2013). The economic welfare of the immigrants and the nation is therefore dependent on the successful integration of new comers based on a functional basis in the English language, formally taught in English centers (World Education, 2018).

Immigrants arrive on the shores of North America with apprehensions but also aspirations and an unmistakable desire to learn the language and invest in a future identity in tune with or despite their new environment (Salvo & Williams, 2017; Warriner, 2016). The ESL courses are often the immigrant's first formal introduction to the American way of life and it is within this language learning environment that he or she will attempt to rise up to their imagined future identity and fit in their new community by learning proper English (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Vafai, 2016). Students at the intermediate/advanced ESL levels are driven to learn English, however, a learner may be motivated to participate in the classroom but will not speak, or even drop out of class, if the environment is overpowering to his or her identity without the necessary and justified investment (Darvin & Norton, 2017). The identity and investment of an ESL participant, driven by his or her ambitions and desires to speak English, are therefore important considerations in understanding learners of English and why ESL students will progress through the ESL curriculum or simply drop out (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2017).

Indeed, out of the millions with insufficient English skills, only 670,867 individuals are enrolled in ESL programs and one third of the enrollees leave the program before graduation (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). The

structure of the government sponsored ESL program is believed to be at fault for these low enrollment numbers because they often do not make allowance for immigrants' specific needs and busy schedules, and they are not designed with participant's aspirations in mind (Kennedy & Walters, 2013). Despite the ESL's shortcoming, however, little data is collected on these learners, and current research on adult ESL classes is limited to a few projects concentrating on post-secondary credit gain (Emerson, 2010; Vafai, 2016).

Examining the driving factors propelling immigrants to sign up for the ESL classes, gauging immigrants' expectations, and tracking the shift in English learners' aspirations at the end of the program to remediate for the low participation in ESL programs and premature departure is not a priority (Braggs et al., 2007; Kennedy & Walters, 2013). The effectiveness and benefits of ESL programs are thus still lacking a great deal of information (Braggs et al., 2007; Kennedy & Walters, 2013). To ensure dedicated English learners are indeed benefiting from English instruction and their aspirations are being supported, the results should be tracked and published (Vafai, 2016). This study was, therefore, launched to discover the perceptions of individuals who have participated in ESL courses and add to the body of literature a perspective addressing the students, their struggles to ascend to their ideal identity, and the English program and its effectiveness in promoting the students' well-being, notwithstanding the number of credit earned to secure future grants.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined:

**American dream.** First coined by James Adams (1931); “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement [...] regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (pp. 214-215).

**Assimilation.** A deliberate, “multipath process involving the incorporation of immigrants and their offspring into the economic, political, and social institutions, and culture of [...] the host society” (Morawska, 2014, p. 134). Seidle and Joppke (2012) further described assimilation as a process where, “immigrants were encouraged and expected to assimilate to the pre-existing society with the hope that over time they would become indistinguishable from native-born citizens in their speech, dress, recreation, voting patterns, and way of life” (p. 7).

**Culture.** According to Johnson and Chang, culture is “a process where learners gain membership into a community by learning the cultural meanings of the language” (Johnson & Chang, 2012, p. 20). Culture is taught, best, implicitly and is conveyed through a known or hidden curriculum (Wagner, 2016).

**Cognitive dissonance.** The psychological “discomfort that occurs when we respond in ways that we see as inconsistent” (Jhangiani et al., 2015, p. 124).

**Immigrant.** Those individuals who chose to leave their country of origin, for mostly economic and political reasons, with the intent to settle, permanently or temporarily, in the receiving country (European Center for the Development of Vocational Training, 2014).

**Integration.** The act “through which newcomers become capable of participating in the economic, social and civic/political life of the receiving country.” (Seidle &

Joppke, 2012, p. 9). Furthermore, “the concept [of integration] is not usually treated as a synonym for assimilation” and therefore, in this paper, the terms “integration” and “assimilation” were not used interchangeably (Seidle & Joppke, 2012, p. 6).

**Investment in second language.** Defined by Darvin and Norton (2015) as “the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitments” (p. 37). Investment emphasizes the role of human agency and identity in “engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavor and in persevering in that endeavor” (Kramsch, 2013, p. 195).

**Public self-consciousness.** A heightened sense of self-awareness and the “tendency to focus on our outer public image and to be particularly aware of the extent to which we are meeting the standards set by others” (Jhangiani et al., 2015, p. 137). People high in public self-consciousness want to make good impression on others and they will let the opinion of others guide their behavior (Jhangiani et al., 2015).

**Refugee.** An individual “who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution [...] they cannot return home or are afraid to do so” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d., para. 1).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The following limitations were identified in this study:

**Sample demographics.** The immigrant population extends beyond the Midwest and is a potentially transient population, as families are reuniting and their residence in the area depends on whether they have established relatives and compatriots in the United



States and their relatives' and acquaintances' ability to help (Strielkowski & Welkins, 2015). The sample identified to assist with the research was extracted through purposive sampling from a Midwest community college's Adult Literacy program of ESL intermediate/advanced courses (Institutional Data, 2017).

**Instrument.** An unstructured interview was administered to non-native speakers of English, and while every effort was taken to ensure quality inquiries, questions may have been misinterpreted or answers may not have been self-explanatory.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of participants were offered honestly and without bias.
2. Immigrants enrolled in the ESL program would experience a decline in their aspirations because they are not fluent in English.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the ESL program was introduced. The instructional program's evolution into an empowerment tool for immigrants to learn cultural norms and workforce skills, along with the English language, was also chronicled (Esch, 2018; Leonard & Vafai, 2016; Schuck, 2018). Three questions were proposed to fulfil gaps in the research arena to determine if immigrants are successful in their aspirations to pursue the American Dream (Adams, 1931). The first two questions were posed to explore immigrants' motivational factors for enrolling in and continuing with the ESL program, and whether these adult instructional programs meet expectations of those learners. The third and final question was posed to gauge second language learners' aspiration shifts, if any, while attending the ESL program.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature is undertaken to further instill the theoretical framework and explain immigrants' multiple and often contradictory and complex identities within Norton's (2014) investment construct in second language acquisition. Driving factors propelling immigrants to join ESL classes are then reviewed along with an analysis of the different roles these immigrants occupy and strive to sustain (Jhangiani et al., 2015; Johnson & Chang, 2012). Chapter Two concludes with the prevailing American culture's impact on immigrants' perception of self and their aspirations, as well as a review of immigrants' pursuit of the American Dream within the current societal status quo (Kunst & Sam, 2013; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2016).

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

America is a nation of immigrants; the flow of immigration started tens of thousands of years ago when the original inhabitants crossed the land bridge from Asia into North America (Martin, 2014). The motto, *e pluribus unum*; from many, one; is often used by American politicians to reference America's diversity and its greatest strength of starting anew in the land of opportunity (Martin, 2014). This welcoming attitude towards immigrants, however, has been eroding and the current political environment has magnified this xenophobic sentiment (Bobo, 2017; Söhn, 2016). Although it has been remarkably curtailed in recent years, the flow of immigrants, with different circumstances and American Dreams, is continuing (Martin, 2014). Immigrants, however, are no longer found in major ports of entry alone (Ferraro, 2016). The Midwest region of the United States is a major attraction for its quality of life, job opportunities, and growing communities of immigrants attracting new comers to their familiar folds (Ferraro, 2016).

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors propelling immigrants to enroll in ESL courses. Personal aspirations leading second language learners to enroll in ESL classes were also examined to determine if newly acquired English language skills and workability skills do, in fact, propel learners to pursue their initial aspirations. In this chapter, efforts are presented to investigate immigrants' pursuit of aspirations framed within a socio-cognitive outlook on second language learning, which draws on social, environmental, and individual aspects and their interdependence (Cao, 2014).

Following the presentation of the theoretical framework, driving factors propelling second language learners to enroll in ESL are presented. The diverse

composition of the ESL classroom and identity and broad educational spectrum of the advanced language learner are introduced, along with implications and repercussions. The social categorizing of minority cultures as sub cultures which could lead to self-deprecation and deflation of aspirations, a theme addressed in this research's questions, is also presented. The literature review concludes with immigrants' ideals of the American Dream, the threat perceived by the White American majority, and impact of the current administration and its professed xenophobia on immigrants' resettlement in the host country.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in this study was Norton's identity and language learning theory supplemented by Norton's investment construct, which has evolved within the common bounds of identity, ideology, and capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Given the breath of second language acquisition, Norton's (2013) theory of identity and language learning, within the second language acquisition's sociocultural context, narrowed the aim and focused on the individual learning the second language and not the process of language learning. Norton's construct of investment, as opposed to motivation, in second language learning further examined how second language learners are positioning self to language assimilation within a given context (Luo, 2014).

**Language identity.** Despite the plethora of second language acquisition research, it is unclear how languages are learned, and hence, second language acquisition is still considered a "chaotic/complex system" (Menezes, 2013, p. 1). The list of proposed second language acquisition theories continues to increase, and none have come close to thoroughly explaining the language learning mechanism, because the process of language

learning is not linear nor is it as predictable as some theories proclaim (Cook, 2016; Ortega, 2014). It is difficult, however, to reject any theory because theories add to the second language acquisition component, and none seem complete for unilateral adoption (Menezes, 2013). Chaos and unpredictability in second language acquisition, however, results in “a zone of creativity (edge of chaos) where small changes can occur, creating significant effect on learning processes” (Menezes, 2013, p. 411).

Before the 1960s, the process by which people learned a second language was studied in correlation with a language teaching pedagogy supported by the then prevalent behaviorism learning theory with roots in psychology (Myles, 2010). Second language learners memorized, through constant drilling and repetition, grammatical patterns and vocabulary of the new language to create new stimulus-response pairings and form new habits (Myles, 2010). During the 1960s and 1970s, second language acquisition theories tended to focus on the formal qualities of language (Corder, 1974). Theorists debated meanings of particular errors, whether these errors were first language interference errors, and the order in which learners, in general, acquired particular grammatical forms (Corder, 1974). During that same period and especially in the late 1960s, second language acquisition research was established as a field of inquiry, although it is impossible to pinpoint an exact date (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

Raven in 1968 and Huang in 1970, for example, were among the first to publish studies focusing on second language learners. It was Corder, in 1967, who first advanced a theoretical case for examining second language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). Behavioral approaches to learning were thus sidelined, but not annulled, by a new wave of empirical research focused on characteristics of the second language learner and

how these characteristics evolve as acquisition takes place (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

In the 1980s and 1990s, theorists shifted their attention from language itself to its social context; the learning process and styles of the language being acquired (Cohen, 2014; Cook, 2016; Oxford et al., 2014). During this phase, it is prudent to mention the development of the categorization of learning strategies, which allowed teachers to individualize instruction (Cook, 2016; McCarty, 1991; Oxford et al., 2014). The customization of the curriculum, however, risked grouping individual learners to the learning profile associated with their ethnic group by further promoting the concepts of minority sub cultures (Cook, 2016; McCarty, 1991; Oxford et al., 2014). The approach to individualized learning also ushered in the social context of language learning (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2013). Theorists began to question second language acquisition and the understanding of the language learner's relationship to the larger social world and the nascent theory of identity and language learning (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2013). In the last 16 years, the role of identity in the language learning domain has grown and, increasingly, researchers are interested in how the function of identity and later investment affect students' engagement with language (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018).

In her research over the past two decades, Norton (2013) questioned why second language learners communicate successfully in some situations, while in others they hesitate or remain silent. Norton (2014) contested the idea that discrepancy in language participation, depending on the context, could be satisfactorily explained in binary terms as in introvert or extrovert, inhibited or uninhibited, motivated or unmotivated. Darwin and Norton (2015) further explained, along with such descriptors, researchers and second

language educators have to also consider, “affective descriptors [which] are frequently socially constructed, changing across time and space, and possibly coexisting, in contradictory ways, within a single individual” (p. 36). Darvin and Norton (2015) advanced the thought of identity as, “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 36). Indeed, learning is more than the accumulation of skills and knowledge because it, “transforms who we are and what we can do” and is thus “an experience of identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 215).

Within Norton’s (2013) identity theory, the concept of “imagined identity” is inherent in, “how the person understands possibilities for the future” and cannot be discounted (p. 45). As stated by Norton (2014), to comprehend a learner’s commitment to learn English, it is central to understand how the learner is balancing his current identity of how he views himself now and the learner’s imagined identity of his future self. In 2003, Kanno and Norton elaborated on the concept of the imagined identity, formally introduced by Norton in 2001, when they wrote:

What is ultimately most exciting for the authors in this special issue is that the notion of imagined communities provides a theoretical framework for the exploration of creativity, hope, and desire in identity construction [...]. Our identities [...] must be understood not only in terms of investment in the “real” world but also in terms of our investment in *possible* worlds. (p. 248)

In 2007, Pavlenko and Norton further expanded on Wenger and Anderson’s research on imagined identities when they penned:

We argue that the notion of *imagination* as a way to appropriate meanings and create new identities, [...], allows us to transcend the focus on the learners' immediate environment, as the learning of another language, perhaps more than any other educational activity, reflects the desire of learners to expand their range of identities and reach out to wider worlds. (p. 670)

**Ownership of English.** Norton's identity theory is, however, only holistic when the construct of investment is added to the language learning arena (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). To decipher the learning of English, one must consider the learner's multiple, and often conflicting, identities and how shifts in identities, depending on the context, will determine the learner's level of investment in learning the language (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). Indeed, language learners are not investing in just a language but also in evolving identity towards their imagined self (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). Identifying learners as social beings with complex identities, the construct of investment, first introduced by Norton in 1995, highlights the relationship of the learner in terms of his or her target language within the individual's fluctuating identities (Norton, 2013). Darwin and Norton (2015) argued, "an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity which is constantly changing across time and space" (p. 36), further highlighting the complementary nature of identity and investment in the linguistic field.

Norton (2014) suggested to think in terms of investment rather than motivation, because investment, a sociological substitute to the psychological construct of motivation, takes into consideration the identities and experiences of immigrants' language learning context. Prior to Norton's advancement of the investment construct, existing theories of motivation in the field of language learning did not encompass the



learner's experiences and shifting personalities (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Investment, according to Murray, Gao, and Lamb (2011) represents the socially and historically constructed links between language learners' identity and learning commitment. This commitment extends beyond motivation (Darvin & Norton, 2017).

Learners' investment in a second language is betting on the acquisition of a wider expanse of capital, which will in turn enhance the value of their cultural assets and social power (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Norton's positioning of the term investment, "accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavor and in persevering in that endeavor" (Kramsch, 2013, p. 195). The degree of investment in a language is contingent on the learner's dynamic negotiation of identity and investment and, much like identity, it is complex, contradictory, and changing (Norton 2013).

Lack of investment or its outwardly motivation may indicate an imbalance in the participants' desired identity, which, unless reframed, will not propel the learner to language acquisition (Norton, 2014). Indeed, a learner's investment in a target language is therefore dependent on the dynamic negotiation of powers and the extent to which learners are granted or denied the right to speak by themselves or the interlocutor (Norton, 2013). A learner may be motivated to participate in the classroom but will not speak if the environment is racist, sexist, or simply overpowering to his or her identity without the necessary and justified investment (Darvin & Norton, 2017). As stated in Darvin and Norton (2017):

By collapsing the dichotomies associated with traditional conceptions of the learner (good/bad, motivated/unmotivated, anxious/confident, introvert/extrovert),

investment recognizes that the conditions of power in different learning contexts can position the learner in multiple and often unequal ways, leading to varying learning outcomes. (p. 3)

Identity and investment are important considerations in understanding learners of English, because one can draw on investment to better understand how and why ESL students embrace English to inhibit, or exhibit, the perceived identity associated with being an ESL student (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2017). By demonstrating the interwoven social and historical construct of identity and learning commitment, investment has become an integral part in language learning theory to be built upon and analyzed further (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2017). As previously noted in Kramsch's (2013) statement, Norton's investment is:

A strong dynamic term with economic connotations, it accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavor and in persevering in that endeavor. (p. 195)

Most importantly, in the "North American context, investment in SLA [Second Language Acquisition] has become synonymous with 'language learning commitment' and is based on a learner's intentional choice and desire" (Kramsch, 2013, p. 195).

**Investment in the new world order.** As with all things in second language acquisition, Norton's model, and specifically investment, however, does not function in a vacuum but operates within broad social spheres that are rapidly evolving in the relatively new cyber world (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). Social forces are rendered even the more obvious with the propagation of the internet, proliferation of social media, and new

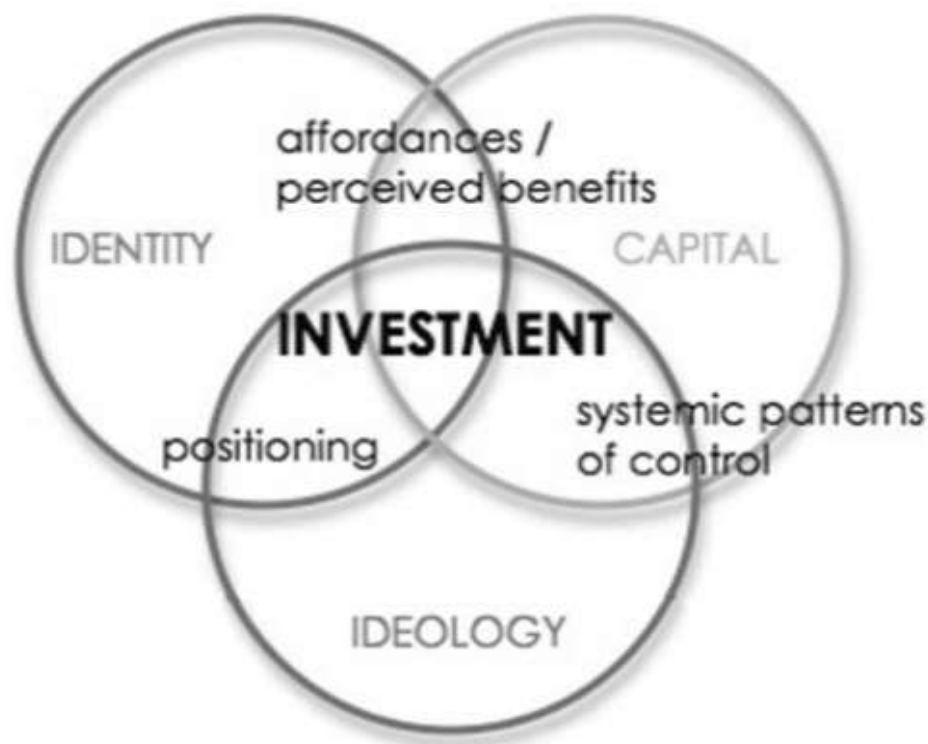
and unexpected dynamics of the online world further redefining identities and investment (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). Indeed, in the last 20 years, learners are able to traverse effortlessly through transnational spaces and switch between the online and offline world, changing parameters of public and private domains, citizenship, and identity (Croucher, 2018; Michikyan & Suárez-Orozco, 2017). Language learning confines are multiplying and evolving with increasingly dissipating structures of defined power impacting what is good language learning and effective learner strategies (Cohen & Griffiths, 2015; Oxford et al., 2014). The dynamic nature of the online world, as well as the increasing diversity of those who choose to operate within it, has altered the distribution of power and concomitant controls, and no longer rests asymmetrically with the native speaker versus the language learner (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Learners are able to go, to some extent, beyond membership in a target community of speakers and adopt identities as legitimate speakers, to a varying degree, in an environment no longer defined by a classroom or the surrounding community (Darvin & Norton, 2015). It is prudent to note, however, to claim the right to speak, literacy has become even more essential online (Choi & Ziegler, 2015; Janks, 2014, 2017). To speak online, one must write, and that fact will anchor second language speakers and especially low-literate immigrants, at least momentarily, to the traditional modes of instruction (Choi & Ziegler, 2015; Flores, Kleyn, & Menken, 2015; Janks, 2014, 2017).

Furthermore, with the shift in global economic powers and rise of China and other newly industrialized nations, language, traditions, and cultures are being renegotiated across the world (Pennycook, 2017; Wright, 2016). This change in the valuing of languages is, in turn, transforming language ideologies and dictating new dynamics in multilingual

encounters (Block, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). There is a certain reevaluation of the English language, but also a certain appropriation of the language that is no longer that of the English-speaking countries alone (Jenkins, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). English is now entrenched in multiple local contexts of use (Jenkins, 2015; Pennycook, 2017).

To encompass the rapidly encroaching internet's impact on second language learning, Darwin and Norton's (2015) investment model was extended beyond the "microstructures of power in communicative events [to also] investigate the systemic patterns of [increasingly invisible] control that recurring communicative practices are indexical of" (p. 51). The new world order has prompted Darwin and Norton (2017) to broaden the original investment framework (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). The new investment model put the construct of investment at the intersection of capital, ideology, and identity, while acknowledging the premises of agency to further embolden the shifting and increasingly invisible controls (see Figure 1) (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). With the new premises of learning extending beyond the classroom, learners have an enhanced capacity to not only invest in second language learning to gain resources and status quo but to question and resist systemic practices and ways of thinking and even transform the status quo (Darvin & Norton, 2015).



*Figure 1.* Darwin and Norton's 2015 model of investment. Reprinted from "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics," by R. Darwin and B. Norton, 2015, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35(2015), pp.36-56. Copyright 2015 by Cambridge University Press.

In the context of the new model, ideology is conceived as “dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion, and the privileging and marginalization of ideas, people, and relations” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 44). Ideologies, framed by agents’ identities and investments, are grounds where social struggles are negotiated for better or worse (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). A learner’s investments are also propelled by the desire to do better with the accumulation of recognized economic, cultural, and social symbolic capital whose value is determined by prevailing ideologies (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). Last, but not least, identity and its outward manifestations, driven by a learner’s imagined identity or the desire to belong to an imagined community, is the positioning element of

investment within the model (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018). In other words, a learner's investment is intertwined with broad social forces constantly interacting and, sometimes, not in the learner's best interest. Investment is driven by a desired future identity with promises of capital to the extent allowable by prevailing ideological structures (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Inevitably, this take on investment in a second language involves choice and is ultimately the learner's decision to partake in learning, at varying degrees, a new language or sit on the sideline biding time while nurturing a passive identity of welcomed seclusion (Guiora et al., 1972; Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018).

### **Driving Factors for ESL Participation**

Each year, approximately one million immigrants arrive legally in the United States (Lopez et al., 2017). These immigrants are often fleeing difficult circumstances, not of their own making, in pursuit of a better life and the promises of the American Dream (Ngo, 2017). Finding safe havens in a host country does not spare immigrants the stresses of the American way, with new cultural and linguistic requirements foreign to their own (Spring, 2016).

In addition to the traumatic stresses which forced them to leave their country of origin, immigrants in their new host country have to confront and deal with migration and acculturative stresses to settle down and make room for the new and inescapable norms and language (Adkins et al., 1999; Spring, 2016). In their migration journey, immigrants leave behind everything they know, including the usual coping resources and societal support system they have come to depend on (Adkins et al., 1999; Bobo, 2017). Immigrants have to culturize themselves for a smoother transition that is being made

more difficult with the outspoken populist movement overtaking the United States and European Union (Adkins et al., 1999; Bobo, 2017).

Despite these newcomers' expectations for a new and different life, they often do not realize how the very fabric of life around them will be different, and even simple tasks will be a test of their resilience not only in terms of language barrier but also in terms of potentially deep cultural misunderstanding (Adkins et al., 1999). According to Szabo and Ward (2015) and Söhn (2016), immigrants feel their very identity is under threat in the new culture. While some new settlers will resist, most will eventually capitulate with the generational advent, because they cannot isolate themselves, and especially not their children, from the calls of a seemingly better future (Söhn, 2016; Ulman 1997).

The conflict of cultures is, indeed, most unfortunate, and immigrants will struggle with the growing cognitive dissonance especially in light of their collectivistic mind frame (Adkins et al., 1999). Cognitive dissonance or "discomfort that occurs when we respond in ways that we see as inconsistent" will motivate the person to attempt reduction of dissonance to achieve consonance, and it can best be addressed by seeking opportunities, such as language acquisition courses, to get closer to ideal self, or imagined future identity (Jhangiani et al., 2015, p. 124). For immigrants, many of whom come to the United States from collectivist societies where individuals are accustomed to shifting their behavior to fit the need of the group, cognitive dissonance is further highlighted in their desire to belong to an ironically individualistic society (Cherry, 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015).

The desire to achieve consonance and to be in harmony with one's own collectivistic beliefs are further reinforced by Bandura's (1997) social learning theory. In fact, according to Bandura (1997), immigrants are indeed learning through observation and are driven by intrinsic reinforcement such as satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment for getting a step closer to their ideal self. Learning new information on a daily basis may not be demonstrable but is necessary to completing the whole new self (Bandura, 1997). Although it may not be in an immigrants' innate desire to conform to the observed behavior and attitudes of citizens of the host country, the desire to fit in will, in fact, drive them to adapt their behavior to their new surroundings (Cherry, 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). The impact of the current populist reaction to immigrants is further increasing some immigrants' intent to integrate and prove their worth, but there are still those immigrants who will resist calls of integration and find strength in their own community and in-group (Abramitzky, Boustan, & Eriksson, 2016).

The ESL courses are often immigrants' first formal introduction to the American way of life, a new cultural and linguistic platform (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016; Vafai, 2016). It is within this language learning environments that immigrants attempt to prevail over their cognitive dissonance, rise up to their imagined future identity, and fit in their new community (Darvin & Norton, 2015). For all practical reasons, an immigrant's acquisition of a host country's official language is also a key element to successful integration, higher education, and meaningful employment (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). Second language learners, although of diverse backgrounds, are eager to claim the badge of speaking in the primary language of the host country (Darvin & Norton, 2015). For the most part, they do so by rising up and owning



their identity while reframing it based on the situation presented and within their perceived investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

**The diversity of the ESL classroom.** Immigrants' linguistic integration and a solid foundation in the language of the host country are deemed a key element in integration benefiting both the individual and economic performance of the host nation (Choi & Ziegler, 2015). Without being able to converse, read, and write in the host country's language, immigrants are unable to get a job, further their education, build relationships within the community of locals, and grow independent of the social support on which they depend (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). The ESL programs are, therefore, at the forefront of efforts to streamline immigrants and ultimately provide a reliable workforce to the economic engine (Vafai, 2016).

As with any open enrollment institution, ESL programs are expected to accommodate a wide range of second language learners with varied goals and aspirations and widespread educational levels (Derwing, 2018; Rodrigo, 2018). Younger ESL female learners may wish to enroll in language acquisition classes while their children are at school (Vafai, 2016). By participating in ESL courses, mothers are in fact enriching self while enabling themselves a more active role in parent-teachers meeting, helping their children with homework, and leading by example (Vafai, 2016). Some of these women, driven by their successes in helping their children and communicating with the teachers, will then further pursue their ascension to better language skills, through higher levels of ESL, to achieve their own academic goals and achieve consonance with their imagined identity (Vafai, 2016).

The same cannot usually be said of older adults who tend to focus on social aspects of the learning process by building on community relationships and forming friendships while practicing their language skills (Vafai, 2016). Another group of participants in the ESL program have assumed a career path and their focus for participation in the program is to gain employment or enhance career prospects (Eyring, 2014). Attendance and commitment of the career-focused ESL participants are for a purpose, and these participants are most likely to gravitate to the higher echelons of the ESL classes (Vafai, 2016).

Due to the nonlinear nature of second language acquisition, ESL participants, and especially those at higher levels of the ESL program, may make substantial progress only to plateau and remain at the same level for some time (Peterson & Knorr, 2016). These career-focused individuals, in their eagerness to transition to a more liberating identity, may come to see their investment contradicted by what they believe are extraordinary and futile literary and academic expectations (Peterson & Knorr, 2016). According to Brown (2014), this fossilization or cessation in learning a new language could develop when second language learners begin to master the new language and culture. The ensuing “feeling of social uncertainty, homelessness or dissatisfaction, in which one may feel neither bound firmly to one’s native culture nor fully adapted to the second culture” will further undermine learner’s efforts to realize their ideal self (Brown, 2014, p. 188).

To bypass this stagnating stage, learners have to reassess not only their learning process but also their potential identities and be willing to readjust their vested efforts beyond their satisfied status at the ability to communicate (Thornburry, 2014). Some advanced learners experiencing fossilization can unhinge themselves from the “OK

plateau” while others may need years to act on their misgivings, if at all, to ascend to a higher level of proficiency and self-fulfillment (Thornbury, 2014, 25:31). Learners experiencing the effects of fossilization are, in effect, undermining their own ideal self by continuing to ignore their, perhaps not so obvious, linguistic shortfalls (Norton, 2013). In fact, learners will only move beyond this stage when they come to terms with their new environment, are fully engaged in their imagined community, and when that imagined community is that of the target language community (Norton, 2013). This is a tall order to achieve, and second language learners will either cross the threshold of necessary investment for the ideal identity or will, at least for a while, revert to their initial language and the comforting familiarity of their own culture (Guiora et al., 1972).

Among the aforementioned ESL participants, low-educated adults who have very little to no formal education in the script of their mother tongue are often present (Bardovi-Harlig, 2015). Low-literate learners face significant roadblocks integrating, linguistically and otherwise, into their new host country because they do not possess the linguistic units and study skills necessary to process the learning of a new language (Choi & Ziegler, 2015). Progress is usually slow, and learners are often driven to premature fossilization in an attempt to hold on to their pre-existing cultural and ethnic identity when all else, despite their efforts, fails to materialize (Guiora et al., 1972).

Obviously, participants in an ESL program have diverse interests, family roles, education, and aspirations, and these interests and orientations are not necessarily static or one-dimensional (Vafai, 2016). It is important, therefore, to examine the participants’ lives with as much of their complex and uncertain realities as possible (Lee & Walsh, 2015). The particular cultural social identities of the participants, hence, need to be

investigated, within the family and workplace, while paying close attention to the ways those identities are gendered and connected to the participants' lives as members of a particular cultural and ethnic group (Oxford, 2016).

### **The Adverse Societal Impact and the Accompanying Self-Mirroring Effect**

In the pursuit of a second language, immigrants must concurrently learn the culture within which the language dwells, because “culture and language cannot be divided” (Roswell, Sztainbok, & Blaney, 2007, p. 153). It is in knowing both that an informed understanding of one's community can be gained (Ovando & Combs, 2018). Drawing on definitions of culture used by Wagner (2016) and Gee (2007), culture is a process during which learners gain membership into a community by learning the cultural meaning of the language. Indeed, depending on the context and situation, words may possess more than one meaning (Gee, 2007). Adult ESL learners will hence need access to the specific cultural meaning of those words to gain membership into the community in which they reside and to which they must abide for consonance (Gee, 2007).

**Minority subculture.** Taken-for-granted theories that consider the third-plus generation and its White members, in particular, as the norm-setting population to which minority groups of immigrant origins should adjust, still exist (Jiménez, 2016). Recent research further proves these expectations and their ongoing relevance in the current term (Bobo, 2017; Lamont et al., 2016; May, 2018; Major, Blodorn, & Major Blascovich, 2018). According to racialization theories, minorities are often relegated to subordinate status defined by a racial social system rooted in White hegemony (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Omi & Winant, 2014). The presence of minority groups, including immigrants, reaffirms the superior status of Whites (Healey, Stepnick, & O'Brien, 2018).

Likewise, assimilation theories treat the established White population as gatekeepers to fully belonging to society (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Park, Myers, & Jiménez, 2014). In fact, Kivisto (2015) and Portes, Gomez, Aparicio, and Haller (2016) presented the dominant culture of Whites as an essential component in the context of reception that governs ethno-racial and class segments of U.S. society under which today's immigrant origin population assimilates. According to Bonilla-Silva (2017), Caucasians' superior position remains firm in the U.S. racial social system, and immigrants have cemented the composition of ethno-racial categories by fitting into their presupposed lesser categories, for the most part (Omi & Winant, 2014).

The mostly White trendsetting majority in the United States rules the superordinate prototypical category, and with this entitlement the "out-group is judged as deviating from this normative standard and therefore evaluated unfavorably" (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2016, p. 2). Adverse categorization of minorities, and thus immigrants, was often not overtly obvious or even conscious, because "the spreading of social norms strongly condemning blatant negative attitudes towards minorities" were compelling individuals to adopt a certain ambivalence "to balance two opposite motivations at stake – i.e., the favoritism of their own group along with the desire to appear fair and equitable" (Pacilli, Mucchi-Faina, Pagliaro, Mirisola, & Alparone, 2013, p. 11). This measured response towards immigrants, however, has changed in recent years when immigration was on the forefront of many political agendas to leverage sentiment of populism and win elections (Bobo, 2017).

As early as 2011, close to 50% of polled Americans and Europeans stated immigration is not an opportunity but a problem (Alba & Fonner, 2015). Bobo (2017)

purported, White Americans with strong identification with their group are feeling a group status threat, and they are explicitly and implicitly pushing back and hearing their reactions are justified. Membership in this superior order nevertheless, despite the best of intentions, is often linked to social advantages such as entitlements and perceived legitimate higher status (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2016). Minority groups are then left looking at the majority culture as the country's identifier of success and belonging and as the key to upward mobility (Pacilli et al., 2013)

**Self-mirroring effect or the molding of aspirations.** Minority groups, including immigrants, with a collective ethos bent on belonging to a community are, driven to achieve internal consonance and to rise up to their ideal future identity (Jhangiani et al., 2015). As stated by Kunst and Sam (2013), immigrants “are in general motivated to reconcile their ethnic culture with the national culture” (p. 488). Immigrants are also willing to abide, at least for a while, by the less than favorable categorization of the minority group, which could, unfortunately, perpetuate their social stratus and exacerbate that same cultural adaptation so sought after (Kunst & Sam, 2013). In fact, according to Kunst and Sam's study (2013), “members of ethnic minorities experience relatively strong acculturation expectations among the dominant and their own group, and [...] this experience is related to higher levels of stress and to lower levels of adaptation” (p. 487). The disconnect, caused by unreasonable acculturation expectations, is leading these minority members to languish in their social stratus, to reevaluate their future imagined identities, and to settle for less (Kunst & Sam, 2013).

When immigrants compare their current behavior against their internal perception of prevalent cultural standards, and if they realize the discourse between their reality and

the ideal self, they will experience a certain distressing self-discrepancy (Jennings, Mitchell, & Hannah, 2015). The feeling of self-discrepancy and the distress accompanying it is further augmented when the person comparing his or her actual and ideal self is facing a mirror (Phillips & Silvia, 2005). Immigrants, most of whom are from a collectivist society have a high public self-consciousness, and like a mirror, this will be a constant reminder of their cognitive dissonance adding further to their stressful pursuit of belonging and rising up to their imagined future identity (Cherry, 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). Immigrants, especially those from collectivist cultures, focus on their public image, how they are perceived by others, and change their ideals to be closer to their current state or find ways to be closer to their cultural ideals (Jhangiani et al., 2015). Simply, individuals shift behavior to fit situations, a not so flattering position promoting stress and animosity especially in the current atmosphere with obvious discontent towards immigrants (Bobo, 2017; Major et al., 2018).

### **The American Dream**

Over the years, millions of immigrants have arrived in the United States (Lopez et al., 2017). Although reasons for leaving their countries vary, a majority of these immigrants come to share a common goal; the American Dream (Graham, 2017). The term “American Dream” was first coined by Adams in 1931 when he defined it as that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement [...] regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (pp. 214-215). Indeed, the American Dream is not merely about financial success and material possessions; it is also a dream of social order and “a genuine individual search and

striving for the abiding values of life” (Adams, 1931, p. 326). In other words, the lure of material conquest cannot be discounted, but it should be tempered by the moral ideals of the social order (Adams, 1931). It is Adams’ definition of the American Dream that is attracting millions of immigrants because in their struggle to make a living, they have not given up, as Adams stated, on actually living (Adams, 1931; Talwar, 2018). In fact, reports from the Department of Homeland Security (2016) suggest only 16% of legal residents admitted annually into the United States are economic immigrants.

The impact of immigration on the United States, socially and economically, has had its critics and proponents (Shulman, 2017). Studies of immigration are, indeed, characterized by two divergent perspectives; while one outlook celebrates immigrants’ contribution to American society, the other is protesting the increasing number of immigrants and their encroaching on the homogeneity of the American White identity and dream (Borjas, 2014; Card & Peri, 2016; May, 2018; Shulman, 2017). The two extreme positions on immigration, however, are not exclusive of each other; “one can celebrate the public gains from immigration and to immigrants individually, but one also can harbor concerns about the local outcomes and impact in one community or another” (Card & Peri, 2016; Clark, 2003, p. xiii).

**Majority group status threat.** Strongly competing agendas, for and against immigration, have stirred opposing emotions and amplified group boundaries and divisions marked by ethno-racial distinction that won political debates and even the U.S. presidency at the expense of immigrants (Bobo, 2017; Lamont et al., 2016). According to Bobo (2017), one of the primary cores in Donald Trump’s successful presidential bid rested on racism, its deep historical and cultural roots and pervasive presence, and White



supremacist beliefs in preserving the White American culture and institutions. Changing racial demographics in America is increasing the perceived threats to the Whites' group status and further undermining precarious situations of immigrants already in the United States (Major et al., 2018; Shaw, 2018; Shulman, 2017). According to Shaw (2018), migrants are often portrayed in the media as criminals further dehumanizing and marginalizing an increasingly significant out-group and making their transition into the American culture and dream more difficult.

According to Cox, Lienesch, and Jones (2017), economic factors played a role in Trump's election; however, it is the fear of cultural displacement that put him over the top. Ryder, in 2016, further highlighted the non-optimal environment for immigrants and minorities when she wrote, "the threat of economical ruin or political anarchy...was simply not as frightening to voters as the overall threat to the culture" (para. 7). In addition to culture, identity was prominent and, as reported by Holyk (2016), people are not as concerned over the economy as they are with their national identity and who they are.

These concerns are not without merit; according to the U.S. Census Report and as reported by the Brookings Institution, by 2043 the U.S. population will become, for the first time, a majority-minority nation (Frey, 2018a, 2018b). The White racial group will not make up the majority even though they are still the largest single race group (Frey, 2018a, 2018b). It is prudent to also mention, President Trump is not creating these increasingly vocal xenophobic sentiments but simply giving voice to the 26% of eligible voters or 19% of the total U.S. population who elected him (Pew Research Center, 2016). As early as 2011, about 50% of Europeans and Americans polled reflected on

immigration as a problem void of opportunities for the host country (Alba & Fonner, 2015; Frey, 2018b). Needless to say, immigrants, those already in the country and those en-route to the United States, are not impervious to these reports, further complicating their integration, ascent to cognitive consonance, and transformation into their imagined future selves as worthy of investment (Adkins et al., 1999; Norton, 2014).

Theories of identity and intergroup relations in the social psychological realm suggest that demographic shifts, deemed threatening to the majority status of a group, will propel a threatened group to align with a far greater conservative political system and increase their discriminatory practices against the outer groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2017; Trepte & Loy, 2017). Based on social identity theory, an individual's sense of identity is based on his or her group membership and the degree to which he or she identifies with the group (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Persons are motivated to keep a positive social presence by comparing their group's status to that of other groups (Trepte & Loy, 2017). However, if the group's hierarchical influence and position in society are perceived to be under threat, the group will most likely experience a *group status threat*, will attempt to protect their status quo, and will most likely retaliate and exhibit signs of discrimination against outgroups (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). These sociological manifestations and increasing diversity of the United States, as predicted by the integrated threat theory, pose a specific threat to White American resources and values, which in turn will increase prejudice against minorities and specifically immigrants (Stephan & Stephan, 2017). In fact, as stated by Branscombe and Wann (1994), when group threat is felt, the manifestation of explicit and implicit racial bias towards

outgroups promotes the collective self-esteem of the ingroup and further promotes the behavior.

White Americans' fear when faced with an increasing number of diverse individuals and coupled with a zero-sum conscience have been shown to increase support to more conservative political policies, further jeopardizing minorities and immigrants' place in society (Tsukamoto & Fiske, 2018). Recent research confirms the extrapolation of increased adverse attitudes towards immigrants of color and explains the election of President Trump, a divisive member of the Republican Party, to lead the nation (Outten, Schmitt, Miller, & Garcia, 2012; Danbold & Huo, 2015; Bobo, 2017; Major et al., 2018). In 2012, Outten, Schmitt, Miller, and Garcia (2012) determined White Americans showed greater apprehension towards minorities and a decreased acceptance of minorities after reading an article about the increasing diversity numbers. In 2014, Craig and Richeson were also able to conclude that White Americans were more prone to show prejudice and support far right political views after reading reports predicting the group's waning influence by 2042, further promoting intergroup hostility. Danbold and Huo, in 2015, noted heightened concern among Whites who believed not all groups represented America equally, further undermining collaboration among groups and the integration of new immigrants.

**Pursuit of a dream under duress.** According to Bobo (2017), the current political environment under President Trump, and prevalent xenophobic sentiments, encouraged, in part, by the latter, are making it even harder for immigrants to invest in their own social identities and their possibilities for the future. An unmistakable and reverberating mix of anti-minority populism coming down hard on incoming immigrants

and the recently arrived cannot be overlooked (Bobo, 2017). When presented with evidence reflecting the increasing demographic diversity in an uncertain economic environment, many White Americans experienced a heightened emotional animosity towards minorities, a decreased endorsement of diversity, and an increased tolerance to racially offensive epithets (Outten et al., 2012).

Drawing on the aforementioned research, Major et al. (2018) sought to further experiment with the White Americans' group status threat as a result of the ongoing U.S. changing constituency and the extent to which it affected their political preferences in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Major et al. (2018) demonstrated increasing racial diversities are considered a group status threat by White Americans, which in turn accelerated their xenophobic attitudes and affected their voter preferences. As stated by Pew Research Center (2018), 54% of U.S. Hispanics, the nation's youngest and fastest growing minority group, are saying it has proved to be more difficult to be Hispanic in the United States in recent years. Hispanics, foreign and U.S. born, have felt the backlash of the White American group status threat, and nearly 40% of those surveyed have experienced an explicit form of offensive incident perpetrated by White Americans (Pew Research Center, 2018). One need only to replace the mention of Hispanics with Blacks or minorities to have an overview of what's happening in the other groups (Bobo, 2017).

Many White Americans in the United States are thinking about opportunity and resources in zero-sum terms further undermining minorities and, especially, new immigrants' efforts to attain cognitive consonance and their investment in the pursuit of opportunities for the imagined social identities of the future (Darvin & Norton, 2017; Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). As such, status gains for minorities is funded by an equal loss

of status for Whites, and the diminishing of bias against minorities is inherently resulting in more bias against Whites (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014; Wilkins, Wellman, Babbitt, Toosi, & Schad, 2015). Unfortunately, without a reliable and subsidized commitment on the part of the host society and its government, some new immigrants will, most likely, struggle in their new country (Clark, 2003). Immigrants will find themselves attempting to define their space in a minority sub-culture on the defensive while simultaneously thriving to, “reconcile their ethnic culture with the national culture” (Kunst & Sam, 2013, p. 488). This attempt at reconciliation will be done to subdue the collective ethos of many immigrants and to attain a seemingly impossible consonance within a mostly hostile but still trendsetting majority White culture (Jhangiani et al., 2015).

Immigrants’ self-mirroring tendencies add to their stressful pursuit of belonging and rising up to their imagined future identity (Jhangiani et al., 2015). Immigrants are, thus, focusing on their public image and how they are perceived by others, and they will change their ideals to be closer to their expected state or find ways to be closer to their own cultural norms (Jhangiani et al., 2015). This struggle to live up to a host country’s presupposed expectations is a not so flattering position, in an already denigrating environment that promotes stress and animosity in an already charged environment (Jhangiani et al., 2015; Major et al., 2018). Immigrants are having to either settle, at least momentarily, within disparaging categories to gain a footing within their new community, or they are retreating from the outward social life with Americans and finding solace within their own, further undermining their integration and cementing language fossilization (Brown, 2014; Jhangiani et al., 2015).

It is important, however, to mention, not all Whites feel threatened by the changing demographics of the nation (Major et al., 2018). On the contrary, this phobia of minorities is tempered by how closely White Americans identify with their ethnic group and whether they perceive the group as the definition of America's culture (Danbold & Huo, 2015). White Americans low in ethnic identification are not threatened by the racial shift and are, in fact, on the front lines pushing back against the fears of prejudiced Whites, the increasing racial categorization, and decreasing norms of political correctness that prohibit bias in speech (Major et al., 2018). In the past, America's White identity was considered a non-issue in political tendencies because "White's whiteness is usually likely to be no more noteworthy to them than is breathing the air around them" (Sears & Savalei, 2006, p. 901). This is no longer the case, however, as White America is scrambling to comprehend their ongoing shift in status while their fears are being leveraged by the competing political currents (Major et al., 2018).

As shown in Figure 2, Major et al. (2018) plotted the result of their experiment, and one is pressed to see tempering of the identity factor on the group status threat. Although both the control and studied groups showed a positive trend relating to group status threat, the latter group had a more positively related ethnic identification to group status threat with a .47 Beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) as opposed to the control group's .20  $\beta$  (Major et al., 2018). Beta is the value predicting how strongly each condition influenced the criterion variable (Major et al., 2018). Whites high in ethnic identification displayed greater group status threat in the racial shift condition than the control condition ( $\beta = .29$ ), meanwhile Whites low in ethnic identification did not ( $\beta = .01$ ) (Major et al., 2018).

The shifting demographic of the nation and the slipping of the White group from its coveted majority is, therefore, worrisome to White Americans but not all Whites (Major et al., 2018). Group status threat did not propel White Americans with feeble identification with the group to retaliate against minorities (Major et al., 2018). On the contrary, it did cause them to become less tolerant of the current administration's policies and the trending and politically incorrect speech norms (Bobo, 2017; Major et al., 2018).

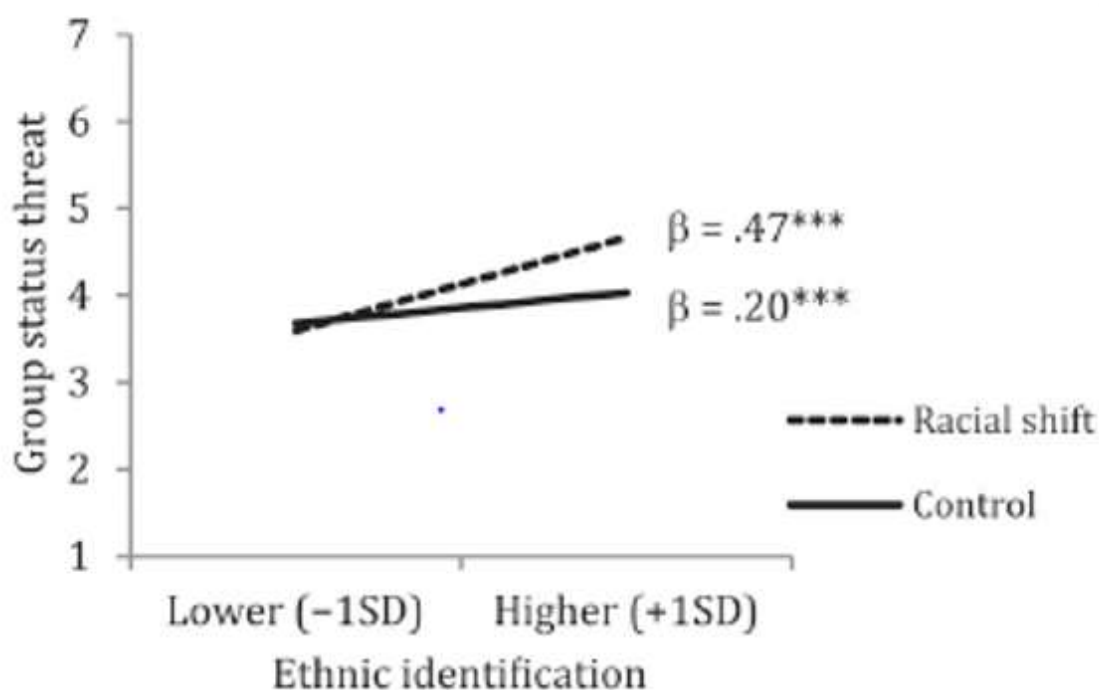


Figure 2. Interactions between condition (racial shift vs. control) and ethnic identification.

Adapted from "The threat of increasing diversity: Why

many White Americans support Trump in the 2016 presidential election", by B. Major, A

Blodorn, G. Major Blascovich, 2018, *Group Process & Intergroup Relations*, 21(6), pp. 931-940.

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Sharply rising inequalities, the shrinking income of the lower- and middle-income Americans, and publicized export of American jobs overseas, in the current shifting

demographic composition perceived as a group threat by some, is setting the pace for a resonant mix of anti-minority populism, further highlighted by an antagonistic political arena (Bobo, 2017). Some of the Whites' concerns are not unfounded (Bobo, 2017). However, due to the response to the threat, by demonstrating overtly or otherwise, social bias is raising the threatened groups' self-esteem and further accentuating the schism between groups and even propelling outgroups to rebel in turn (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Indeed, the host society and its government cannot default on their commitment to help new immigrants in a new country without further aggravating a potentially explosive social mix (Allen, 2016; Clark, 2003). Bridges have to be built and can only be built when the legitimate claims of all groups can be given a voice and are heard by all (Allen 2016; 2017). Muting claims of key groups, such as the White American group, seldom yields a long-term strategy of coherent coalitions focused on the wellbeing of a country as a whole (Major et al., 2018). This is indeed the attitude of some White Americans who are thinking of the changing ethnicity of the nation but in terms of its effect on the country as a whole and not just their group (Major et al., 2018).

The pursuit of the American Dream, within this immigrants-averse environment, is further exacerbated by immigrants' lingering emotional void and longing for country of origin, especially when in an environment so foreign to their own (McLeod, 2018; Waldinger, 2015). Immigrants are often torn between two countries, two cultures, and between the familial self within a familiar context and the prospect of new relations and opportunities to reaching their ideal self in their host country (Abramitzky et al., 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). Immigrants' settlement in the United States is often thwarted by their connections in country of provenance, and this rapport will compel immigrants to



relive their past and recreate it into their imagined future in their host country (Le Bigre, 2015; Shachar, 2014).

Staying in meaningful contact with loved ones left behind in country of origin, short of bringing them to the United States, is an important element of immigrants' wellbeing and successful integration (Souralová, 2018). As reported by Peters, Stodolska, and Horolets (2016), the draw of immigrants is, in fact, for the people left behind. The American Dream, therefore, will also have to include reunions of kin or the creation of new social connections to compensate for the long-distance ties and to fulfill the need to be whole in a new country; an oxymoron in the current American environment (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015).

### **Summary**

In Chapter Two, the theoretical framework based on Norton's (2014) identity language learning theory was presented. A literature review, far from comprehensive but nevertheless encompassing, followed to further explore variables driving the research topic and how they are perceived academically. Driving factors for ESL participation and the complicated diversity of the ESL classroom were discussed to introduce immigrants, their ambitions, and the many roadblocks they have to navigate (Adkins et al., 1999; Spring, 2016; Vafai, 2016).

Complex societal expectations of the dominant culture under threat were presented, and the immigrants' struggle to fit in a host country with foreign cultures and draconian and conflicting rules was discussed (Jhangiani et al., 2015; Kunst & Sam, 2013). The reader is left to ponder the immigrant's pursuit of what seems like an impossible internal ascension to an elusive ideal self in an increasingly xenophobic White

culture manipulated by fear and the political axis of the current administration (Bobo, 2017; Cherry, 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). The chapter concluded with an overview of immigrants' conflicting emotions at melding the old and new self (McLeod, 2018).

In Chapter Three, research questions are discussed, and the qualitative methodology best suited to answer those questions is subsequently presented. The target population and sampling method are discussed before instrumentation is succinctly presented to allow for efficient data collection and analysis. Last, but certainly not least, Chapter Three concludes with ethical consideration that prevailed through the project to protect participants, data collected, and institutions that took the risk to affiliate with this topic and research.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Second language learners' first formal introduction to the English language is often at an English as a Second Language (ESL) language center (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). Participation in the federally subsidized, and often free, English instruction programs is voluntary and yet these centers are usually operating at capacity with thousands on waiting lists (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016; Vafai, 2016). Eager participants, however, will wait for their chance at learning proper English within the ESL's formal setting while transitioning to their new home country (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). Because of their popularity, an ESL center appeared to be a prime location to conduct the necessary research to attempt an answer to the questions proposed in this study (Altherr Flores, Hou, & Diao, 2018; Vafai, 2016).

In this chapter, the problem and purpose are reiterated before the adopted qualitative methodology approach is presented as the best method for this particular study. The population and sample of the study and instrumentation to be used for data collection are also offered. The process of data collection is detailed, and data analysis proposed for this study is explained. This chapter concludes with important ethical considerations upheld throughout the research timeframe.

#### **Problem and Purpose Overview**

The ESL programs attempt to serve an important role in society (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016; Vafai, 2016). The purpose of ESL programs is to familiarize non-English speaking immigrants with the American norms and prepare them with the appropriate skills for employment opportunities (Vafai, 2014).

Immigrants' aspirations, however, have to be met for these individuals to transcend ongoing social inequalities often perpetuated through ESL (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Oakes et al., 2015; Vafai, 2016). Immigrants' first introduction to formal English instruction is through the subsidized ESL programs that inherently reflect and teach the American perspective, norms, and ideologies (Baker, 2015; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Oxford, 2016; Pennycook, 2017). Second language learners, in an ESL setting are often unintentionally subjected to the notion they, as opposed to the majority culture, belong to a minority sub-culture that is subordinate and of a lower status (Macedo, Dendrino, & Gounari, 2015; Oxford, 2016; Pennycook, 2017). The outlook on immigrants as being of a lower status could in fact negatively impact immigrants' aspirations by leading them to mirror the social expectation and self-identify as such (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018).

To successfully deliver the intent of the ESL program, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the second language learners' expectations of the program and the motivational factors propelling them to enroll in such a program ((Esch, 2018; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Vafai, 2015). The ESL participants' aspirations should also be considered to further engage participants in the program and promote their successful integration in the community (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Oakes et al., 2015; Vafai, 2016). Current research, however, is not tracking the extent of ESL programs' success in supporting immigrants' aspirations (Braggs et al., 2007; Vafai, 2016). Tracking benefits of English instruction to immigrants is relevant in the Midwest, because there is a constant stream of new immigrants coming to the area for its low standards of living and the availability of steady, albeit low skilled, employment (Kerr et al., 2014; Nesper, 2014).

**Research questions.** The following questions guided this research:

1. What motivates immigrants, new to the Midwest, to learn English as a second language?
2. What expectations do immigrants perceive of the ESL program they are attending?
3. How have immigrants perceived their aspirations shift over the course of their ESL studies?

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research was used to gain an understanding of the ESL adult participants' motivation to learn a second language, to gauge their expectations of the ESL program's role, and to gather information on possible shifts in immigrants' aspirations as a result of prior lives lived and current contexts being negotiated in foreign environments. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the human emotions of individuals with different provenance and their social perspectives are best collected using a qualitative method to capitalize on the why and how of the intangible aspects inherent in such a diverse group. Maxwell (2013) further identified qualitative studies as the best approach when seeking to gather "the participant's perspectives and how they view their reality as a result of circumstances and conditions" (p. 22). Qualitative research is evaluated in terms of non-numeric data and is usually carried out through direct contact with study participants using open-ended interviews and the employment of observations to identify the emergence of common themes within the participants' answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

As explained by Maxwell (2013), qualitative research helps to understand:

(1) The meaning and perspectives of the people you study—seeing the world from their point of view, rather than simply from your own, (2) how these perspectives are shaped by, and shape, their physical, social, and cultural contexts, (3) and the specific processes that are involved in maintaining or altering these phenomena and relationships. (p. viii)

These features of the qualitative approach, adopted herein, are not compatible with the more distinct aspects of the quantitative method which depend on measurable variables compared across contexts (Maxwell, 2013). According to Mertens (2014), early researchers, such as Dewey, Mead, and Bentley, rejected the “scientific notion that social science inquiry was able to access the “truth” about the real world solely by virtue of a single scientific [quantitative] method” (p. 35). Adult second language learners’ motivations, expectations, and aspirations could be measured quantitatively via a survey; however, it is much more than that (Mertens, 2014). Open-ended interview questions aim to capture a deeper understanding of the immigrants’ attitudes through the deductive thinking of the qualitative method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, Mertens (2014) stated a researcher’s choices of the type of methodology to use depends on his or her view of the world. The chosen method is the result of the researcher’s “assumption about reality and the nature of knowledge that are either implicitly present or explicitly acknowledged” (Mertens, 2014, p. xviii).

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was comprised of adult immigrants in the Midwest who were enrolled in subsidized ESL intermediate/advanced courses at an Adult Literacy program offered by a state college in the Midwest. The college system, catering to over

12,000 students, is comprised of four campuses, one educational center, and a growing online campus (Institutional Data, 2017). Day and evening ESL classes are offered on three campuses, as part of the college's Adult Education program, to non-English speakers who are at least 18 years old and are not enrolled in school. As reported by the program director, the average number of ESL participants on the main campus has seen a steady increase over the years, and for 2017, over 300 participants took part in the program (Institutional Data, 2017). Participation in the intermediate/advanced ESL class was approximately 56 students but only 17 individuals were the subject of this research (Institutional Data, 2017).

The choice to interview only students in the intermediate/advanced ESL classes was determined to facilitate communication in English and minimize misinterpretation of study questions and answers. Selection of participants in the intermediate/advanced ESL courses also meant participants have had a chance to be exposed to American norms and the pursuit of the American Dream throughout the ESL course progression. The sample for this study was purposive, because it was chosen deliberately to collect rich information about the central topics of the study and to minimize the risks to reliability associated with interviewing participants with limited knowledge of the English language (Creswell, 2015b; Yin, 2014).

### **Instrumentation**

Data collection and tools used to collect such data are an inherent part to answering the research questions, and special attention was exerted to secure its reliability and validity (Cowles & Nelson, 2015). The instrument selected for this research was a semi-structured interview to understand participants' positions and

attitudes in light of their migration and new environment (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews permit a researcher to understand participants' perspectives and gain further access to information and insight with the use of existing follow-up questions (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2015). Sources were not used to create the interview questions; however, questions were field tested with a similar group of second language learners and adjusted to ultimately reflect the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2016). Conducting interviews and collecting data responsibly, though, can take a substantial amount of time and transcribing and coding of data for analysis can further prolong the process (Creswell, 2014; Saldana, 2016). The advantages of interviewing first-hand study participants outweighed time spent scheduling, collecting, and analyzing codes and observations of non-verbal cues (Saldana, 2016).

**Validity.** The concept of validity in qualitative research pertains to the relevance of conclusions reached on the basis of data collected (Yin, 2015). Validity, in this case, was assured by carefully built interview questions guided by the study's research questions and the subsequent field testing of the interview questions (see Appendix A) to make sure study results can be generalized (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2016). Open-ended interview questions were written using plain and simple English words, and follow-up questions were supplemented on an as needed basis to further probe and expand interviewees' answers to validate responses of the second language learners (Alshenqeti, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

Interview questions were field tested with a similar group of second language learners, and adjustments were made based on feedback. As permitted under qualitative interviewing procedures, interviews took place in a casual, yet private, location where



participants were at ease and interruption were minimal (Creswell, 2015b). Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and field notes were taken, during and immediately after the interview to allow for a thorough analysis. Field notes supplemented audio recordings with observations of the non-verbal nuances, such as body language and other sources of ‘unsaid’ data, displayed during the interview (Saldana, 2016). Non-linguistic aspects represent an interesting source of information to further validate what is being said by triangulating data from several sources (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Morse, 2015). To further validate answers and mitigate any chances for misunderstanding, transcripts were returned to participants for member checking and review of accuracy (Marshall & Rossman, 2015).

**Reliability.** Although Yin (2014) had suggested the concept of reliability in qualitative research to be a subject of debate among social scientists, he also acknowledged the importance of repeatability and consistency, reliability’s two standards, to a study’s credibility. To help the researcher maintain standards of reliability, the same questions were asked of all participants (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Leading questions were not asked to maintain the orderly sequence of pre-written, open-ended questions and potential follow-up questions (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Participants were given a chance to ask questions and clarify any comments they may have made to focus on the individual experience of the participant (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Special care was exerted early on and during the interview to establish trust and allow for a better collection of data (Jagosh et al., 2015).

## **Data Collection**

Approval to conduct this study was first obtained through Lindenwood University (see Appendix B). Research approval was then secured through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the selected Midwestern community college providing subsidized ESL courses (see Appendix C). Once all approvals had been obtained, the process of data collection commenced.

Contact with program director was made, via phone, to obtain access to the target population's contact information (see Appendix D). Recruitment emails were sent to potential participants inviting them to take part in the research (see Appendix E). The invitation to participate introduced the researcher, topics of the research, and allowed targeted individuals to ask further questions before deciding to participate. The email also stressed the voluntary nature of the research and imperative of keeping all identifiable information strictly confidential to all but those legally allowed access to such privilege.

Attached to the email, was the consent form (see Appendix F) to allow participants more time for review of document. Intermediate/advanced level ESL students who responded to the email were contacted via phone to schedule a face-to-face interview. During the phone call, the researcher assessed the need for an interpreter if a student's spoken English was hard to understand and communication was impeded as a result. Interpreters, however, were not deemed necessary, and all participants declined the offer. Upon meeting with each participant, he or she was assured, yet again, in simple terms of the confidentiality of their responses. The researcher stressed the anonymity of their answers ensuring they will not be displayed with any identifying information as to

their source. The researcher then explained the consent form (see Appendix F) to participants and made sure all questions had been asked before completing and signing the form.

To create rapport with the participant and provide him or her with a welcoming environment, the researcher introduced herself and her own immigrant's background first (Yin, 2014). At that point, the audio recorder was turned on, with the participant's approval, to fully capture the interview for its subsequent transcription. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher answered any questions the participant may have had before he or she was commended for their participation and reminded to expect transcripts of interviews via email to ascertain the accuracy. Observations were noted during and immediately following the interview after the departure of participants. As planned, audio recordings were transcribed and sent to respective participant for review before data analysis was entertained.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected during qualitative studies can be overwhelming, and not all will be relevant in the context of the research questions (LaFrance, 2015). Data were thus collected and transcribed during and immediately after the interview before they were thoroughly examined and coded to assign attributes or meanings to words or phrases given in the responses (Saldana, 2016). A line-by-line reading of transcripts was necessary to set the stage and launch the analysis process under the premises of the research questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). During this first phase of coding, codes of data were incorporated into overarching categories to reduce information into substantive findings that could ultimately identify relevant themes for interpretation (Saldana, 2016).

Coding was not completed during the initial phase of data examination, and the researcher implemented a second round of coding and categorization to further hone in on the relevant, expected and unexpected, themes brought forth (Saldana, 2016). Creswell and Creswell (2017) confirmed the need of several rounds of data analysis to unearth, consolidate, and be able to explain findings. The researcher started with an overwhelming number of codes that were further consolidated into more succinct categories with each reading before they were consolidated into pertinent themes for the research in question (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Creswell (2015b) stated, “It is best to write a qualitative report providing detailed information about a few themes rather than general information about many themes” (p. 245).

In line with the traditional approach in social science, the researcher did not pre-identify themes into which data collected must fit prior to examination (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Themes were allowed to emerge from the data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Saldana (2016), not all themes can be anticipated before analyzing data even with the use of a fixed set of open-ended interview questions. Qualitative analysis or coding is the act of discovering themes, as had the researcher in this study (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although ethics are to be professed at the onset of any research project, it is their consideration throughout the project that will assure confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Abed, 2015). To assure confidentiality, all data and documents collected were secured in a locked cabinet under supervision of the researcher to remove any subjective tendencies from occurring and to safeguard participants’ confidentiality. Data,

converted into an electronic database, were saved on an external hard drive protected by a password and accessed on a personal computer to limit breach of data and their unauthorized use. According to the Illinois Data Bank, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, all documents and files must be reassessed at the five-year mark and destroyed to limit the prevalence of participants' information (Anderson, Braxton, Dunham, Imker, & Rimkus, 2016). However, and in accordance to the Lindenwood University edicts, all data related to this research will be destroyed at the three-year mark.

To assure anonymity, to all but researcher, approximation and slight modifications were used while discussing identifiable characteristics such as immigrants' motivations and aspirations. Such information, in the wrong hands, could make any research participant susceptible to malicious threats; however, immigrants are at a greater risk to foul play because of their nascent knowledge of the American cultural expectations and rule of law (Hafernik, Messerschmitt, & Vandrick, 2014). First names were not used because they are unique in this research area, and pseudonyms were used to lessen the possibility of identifying participants (Hafernik et al., 2014). The sample size of interviewees was very small for saturation, and participants were therefore advised of the possibility that one's comment, without identifying traits, could be recognized despite the approximation and modification measures put in place. Per research standards, participants were also emailed and given an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix F) describing in detail the purpose of the research, possible risks, opportunity to ask questions, and to opt out of the study without negative effects (Bell, 2014).

**Summary**

In this chapter, the use of a qualitative method was justified, and a thorough description of participants was advanced. The interview instrument was discussed in terms of providing a holistic approach to research questions before a detailed data collection process was described. Data analysis, using Saldana's (2016) coding procedures and Creswell's analysis edicts, was then postulated to arrive at research-relevant theme identification. Ethical considerations concluded this chapter to assure anonymity and protect participants' confidentiality. The data analysis process and findings, as they relate to each of the research questions, are presented in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The ESL programs have come a long way from the Americanization Centers established at the turn of the century to assimilate newcomers and get them working as soon as possible in the industrial revolution's factories (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016). Companies were invested in the Centers, and these industrialists often dictated the curriculum with their subsidies (Korman, 1965). Immigrants were being taught the basics of the English language to work on the production line and adhere to the American working norms without much allowance to the person and his or her aspirations (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016).

The role of ESL programs, within an adult learning environment, have evolved to teach immigrants the English language, help them integrate into the American society, and prepare them with the skills necessary for employment opportunities (Vafai, 2014). Federally funded ESL programs are now bound by strict rules, and funding is often dependent upon compliance with curriculum and successful metrics such as the number of participants and credit earned (Emerson, 2010; Vafai, 2015). The ESL participants' emotions, common struggles, and aspirations, as well as the motivational drivers propelling immigrants to enroll in the ESL program, however, are still not considered in program funding, nor are they a major issue in current research (Braggs et al., 2007; Vafai, 2016). According to Vafai (2016), and as witnessed by the researcher, it is important to note persistence by some educators to go beyond confines of curriculum and not only teach English to their students but also support students' pursuit of their aspirations. Needless to say, such extra-curricular activities are often carried out after class and at the teacher's expense (Vafai, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to gain a certain insight on individuals taking the ESL course, motivational factors propelling them to enroll in such non-compulsory classes, and their expectations of the federally funded program. Although, adult immigrants and refugees to the United States are not required to enroll in a formal language course, these classes are often at capacity and waiting lists do exist (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). The ESL participants' shift in aspirations was also considered to gauge their resolve in pursuit of their American Dream in light of their extraordinary experiences and despite their new realities.

### **Data Analysis**

This study's research questions were designed to discover experiences of adult ESL participants related to their new lives in the English-speaking American Midwest. Data were collected using semi-structured, one on one interviews consisting of 13 primary questions directly associated with the research questions. Follow-up questions were used, in some cases, to further probe and expand participants' answers to confirm responses of the second language learner (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Participants' unique experiences while transitioning to the United States and the type of personal insight sought dictated the use of face-to-face interaction for data collection (Murray & Andrasik, 2014). As determined by Creswell and Poth (2017), unstructured interviews are valid instruments to facilitate the collection of data based on perceptions and opinions because, among other things, they provide for a more relaxed atmosphere permitting further in-depth questioning when needed. The proposed questions captured a deeper understanding of immigrants' attitudes through the deductive thinking of the qualitative method used for this research (Creswell & Poth, 2017).



**Demographic analysis.** This study was carried out at a midsized public community college in the Midwest, and all participants were recruited, via email, from the college's Adult ESL intermediate/advanced level courses. The decision to interview intermediate/advanced level students allowed the researcher to amass rich information about central topics of the study and to minimize the risks to reliability inherent with interviewing participants with limited knowledge of the English language (Creswell, 2015b; Yin, 2014). The deliberate choice to interview the advanced/intermediate levels ESL participants also served to make sure participants had a chance to experience the American norms and the pursuit of the American Dream throughout the charted progression of the ESL levels.

All 56 students registered for the intermediate/advanced ESL courses were invited to join the study. Of those, 18 students agreed to participate in the research, and 17 students completed the interview process. Of the participants, ten were female and seven were males. Participants hailed primarily from South America and Asia, but Eastern Europe and Africa were represented as well. No interpreters were necessary, and interviews were conducted in the English language. Although none of the participants chose to use a pseudonym, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants, students were identified by number only; Participants 1, 2, 3, etc. (Saldana, 2016).

**Analysis of interview questions.** Transcripts were generated from each of the 17 interviews. Field notes supplemented audio recordings with observations of the non-verbal nuances during interviews, because non-linguistic aspects are an interesting source of information to further validate what is being said (Alshenqeti, 2014; Saldana, 2016). Because not all data collected in the interviews are relevant to the research topic, a line-

by-line reading of the transcript was necessary to assign codes to words or phrases before these codes were incorporated into overarching categories in an attempt to harness the information into practical findings and to facilitate the identification of relevant themes (LaFrance, 2015; Lindlof & Taylor, 2017; Saldana, 2016). As expected, a second phase of coding and categorization was implemented to further extract and consolidate codes and categories to identify relevant themes for interpretation (Creswell, 2015b). In the next section, the responses from the interview questions are compiled and analyzed.

*Interview question #1. Tell me about yourself and why you decided to take ESL courses.* Although the countries of provenance may be different, stories were telling of the strong character of the individual and his or her determination to learn English the proper way; in school. Participants hailed from all continents except Australia and most had come to the United States due to circumstances beyond their control. Statements affirming participants' pre-arrival impartiality to the United States were prevalent and can be best summarized in Participant 9's statement, "I didn't come here because I wanted to. I didn't ask to come to the United States. I didn't want to come. I didn't – it was not my desire to come." The aches of leaving family and country was also apparent in Participant 14's still shaky voice,

The first time was really bad, because I never separated [from] my family. I was close to my mom... When I was married, I was crying all the time because I feel homeless... I missed my family.

Over a third of participants immigrated to the United States to be with their U.S. citizen spouses, while the others were propelled on their journey to rejoin children or parents, flee a country ravaged by war, to serve God, or their own compatriots through

the Christian church. Only one participant actively sought immigration to the United States and had overstayed his tourist visa. All participants, however, had come to terms with their new country. Participant 14 stated, “Now, I said thank you [God] for bringing me to this wonderful place.” This acceptance of the new country was echoed in Participant 6’s comment, “I want to say that I got here, and what happens is some miracle. I feel that I [came home] after one time.”

Most of the participants’ initial resistance or apprehension to coming to a new country were replaced with a serious intent to learn English in the classroom. The one exception was an elderly participant, Participant 10, who had enrolled in ESL classes for socialization. She said, “I don’t want to stay alone at home. Second reason [it] is free. ... And for third reason, I want to speak English with other people ... and I have no friends.” Many of the participants had been in the United States for two or less years, some just a few months, but a few had been in this country for over 13 years, and they were finally free to pursue their own endeavors. Participant 2 aptly stated:

Before I was just around [compatriots], and I did not learn well. ... If you are around [your own] people, you never speak – you speak English, but not often. But if you are only by yourself, everybody speaks English. It’s the best.

The same was true of stay at home mothers who had created their own world around child rearing, frequent contacts with the home country, and social media. Participant 12 had been in the United States for eight years before she decided to open up to the world around her:

I stay home to take care of my kids, and then my [child], started the school, and I came here because I need to live here. I need to improve my English and know more about culture, American culture.

Attendance and commitment of participants at this advanced level of English instruction had a greater purpose. All participants enrolled in the ESL courses to improve their English communication skills and improve their pronunciation to integrate in the surrounding community. Participant 17 said he was taking ESL courses because “it’s all about understanding with other people. ... I think from the TV is not a way to learn English.” Another participant put it best when she said, “I like to go to class because teacher will correct my pronunciation. I need to go to school to learn. I need to put myself there” (Participant 16).

A few participants interviewed at this level of the ESL program were enrolled for the subsequent pursuit of an academic degree or a better job. Participant 11 stated, “[I] thought I had decent English, but as [I] was working, [I] realized it was not good enough, so [I] started with some classes here and there.” Participant 8, and others too, echoed those same sentiments when she said, “I’m able to communicate, but if I want to do a higher level, more paying job, educational level, no way, I am very lost.” Some of the interviewees were taking the ESL course along with one or two supplemental adult education or High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) courses leading to a high school equivalency credential. Participant 5 had passed four of his HiSET exams with perfect or almost perfect grades in mathematics and science but he had yet to sign up for the English Arts and Writing exam, because “it is most complex” for him. He needed further support with the ESL resources because, as he stated, “I not know English very good for

my life in the United States, for my next life, for my contemporary life.” Participant 5 is 62 years old.

The ESL program was not talked about as optional, but rather as an empowering or utilitarian tool to accomplish fluency. Some participants needed the structured format of the ESL program, the inherent accountability, and the support of teachers beyond the curriculum. As Participant 12 stated:

I’m not a person who can control, manage my time, or control. I need the person there, and I will study. If I am home, I don’t think I will start it by myself. ... I need to go to school to learn.

Other participants were propelled to enroll in ESL courses because they were terrified at the thought of being caught in an awkward situation and not being able to explain themselves and be heard. Participant 14 spoke for more than four minutes about her decision or need to take the ESL course to communicate with her American family, to be understood, and also to be heard. She said with an increasingly higher voice:

I needed to take English class because ... my family now, they don’t speak [my language]. And also, I need to take English class because I [worry] what [would] happen if my husband has an accident, how can [I] say [to] the doctor or paramedic what happened?

She then took a deep breath, wiped her forehead, and continued by saying:

Some people, they can be kind and say, “Please would you say again?” ... And other people, they can be rude, and they can just say, “Okay, you don’t understand, you don’t understand.” They stop you. ... I’m always afraid...how can [I] talk to other people if I need something or asking something. ...It’s so

frustrating.... I can check my translator in the cell phone, [but] I don't want lost time, because I don't want other people they feel exasperated waiting for me.

Participant 14's feelings were shared by many other participants although not with the same urgency. Participant 11 was taking ESL courses, among other things, because a relative of hers "got old and sick, and she never learned English. Never, never, so she was in the hospital and she had a panic attack because she was not able to communicate."

***Interview question #2.*** *Why are you learning English? (to get a job, improve job, go to college, help my children with homework, make new friends, etc.).* Participants often made statements underlying the necessity to learn the English language. The feeling 'this is home' permeated through the answers to this question. Participant 6 stated, "Now, it's my country, too. I want to become a member of community, a member of society." Participant 12 went on to say:

If I want to live here, I need to. I need to learn English to connect with society. Even, you know talk to my kid about his homework, or listen [to him] talk. I mean, I need to understand what they talk [about].

Multiple participants talked about the importance of speaking English well and not just understanding the language. Spouses needed to communicate with husbands, "I wanted to speak with him, and I can't" (Participant 15). Employees wanted to be understood, "If I get something wrong, I talk with [supervisor]" (Participant 3). New immigrants wanted to meet friends, "I want to be easy to talk with some people who I don't know" (Participant 3). Participant 1 said it fully with his statement:

English ... it's an international language today. ...If you don't know English, you are like a prisoner in your mind. You can't express idea very easily. You can't go to school.... And you can't defend yourself...

More than one participant felt the need to speak English to self-actualize and protect themselves from insignificance. Participant 13 answered question two of why she is learning English with "More confidence. I go somewhere, I don't feel alone. I can do nothing. I cannot do anything. And I need more power, and more personality." After relating a relative's panic attack in the hospital for not speaking English, Participant 11 went on to say, "For me, it was like ... if you are going to be here in the states, the first thing you need is the language." A few participants were learning English to avoid misrepresentation and to be able to speak on their own behalf. Participant 10 mentioned her discomfort at having an interpreter, "because they are from my country. We have not too much people [from country] in U.S. and ... they cannot keep other people's secret. ...my speaking is not good, but I try to speak."

*Interview question #3. If you are employed, how will taking ESL courses help you?* Not all participants had a job at the time of the interview, but those who had a job, for the most part, were benefitting from the ESL course and certainly the instructor's guidance. Participant 3 credited the ESL course for "making it easy to talk with ... supervisor.... If I get something wrong, I talk to him." Participant 1 further elaborated on this sentiment when he said:

ESL helped me get some new words, to understand them, and they teach us some new expressions that American people [use] here.... And this class is helping me

to change the form of my English and understand the people, and people to understand me.

Although the ESL courses were said to be helpful in enriching participants' English language skills, a few participants did not think the ESL course helped them with their jobs, because their jobs did not require in depth interaction with coworkers or employers. Participant 9 is cleaning homes by herself, but she is taking English courses for subsequent opportunities. Participant 6 further validated the previous statement when he stated, "I'm working a little bit. But it's not work for me. It's what I do for money."

Although one participant did not see the benefit of the ESL courses, as they are taught, most other participants were taking the ESL courses, with or without the HiSET classes to prepare themselves for future employment. For Participant 15, taking the ESL courses helped her develop: "I can develop. Develop, and I can give my opinion, my idea. I can work. In the beginning when I just came here, I was feeling like deaf and mute."

***Interview question #4.*** *How important is learning to speak English to your future career and educational success?* Learning to speak English was very important to future career. Over 50% of participants thought learning English to be of great value to their future career. Participant 16 answered this question:

Extremely important. Without talking English, ... nobody will give me a job. Nobody will trust me – can [you] have an employee that don't talk? I can't understand or I can't write, or she can't understand me, so this is very, extremely important.



Participant 9 further stated, “If you don’t know English, you won’t progress.” The English language is paramount for educational success too, and most participants had plans to continue their education. Participant 1 mentioned:

[English] is going to open the door for everything. If you don’t know English, you can’t go to college. And if you don’t know English very well, you can’t even go look for a job, interviews are very difficult ... there is like hindrance over it, something blocking you.

Without exception, all participants, even the senior citizen looking for companionship at the ESL course, affirmed the importance of speaking English to their future self: “I think maybe my future depends on my quality of my knowledge of English” stated Participant 5. Another participant, Participant 7, mentioned, “[speaking English] is very important.... because when you are in United States, people speak English. I’m supposed to speak very better English, yeah.” Participant 17 echoed the same sentiment when he said, “You are in a state that the only language is English, and you have to know it, yeah. I think it’s important.”

*Interview question #5. Do you plan on going back to [country of origin]? (visit or for good?)* The notion of returning permanently to their home country was not very popular with participants. For some, going back to their country of origin was not an option. Participant 10 took a deep breath before answering, “To be honest, I don’t want back because my first time in [country] very bad” and she then grimaced, and we quickly moved on. Participant 7 answered the question with a simple “No!” before looking down with tears in her eyes. Participant 3 summed it up by saying, “No, I can’t go back to [country] because there [are] some people that don’t like me. They hate me.” All

participants, nevertheless, had family or business interests in their countries of origin tugging at their emotions and, in some cases, needing their financial support.

Some participants had less stringent reasons preventing them from going back to their country of provenance. These participants go back on an as-needed basis only to take care of unfinished business or see family; their allegiance was not to the old country rife with problems. Participant 6 was in the United States to get his citizenship and bring his adult children to this country. He stated, “I think that future of my children [is] here, ... there are so many problems in [country]. Participant 5 followed by saying, “[country of origin] is not my country. It is very big country. I love only my city.”

The other participants are married to U.S. citizens with far off hopes that someday, they will be able to split their time between the two countries or go back altogether. Participant 16 answered the question with a resounding, “For visit, yes, and in the future, who knows. Maybe we can move, but this is a long plan.” Spouses of U.S. citizens with children, however, visited more often and did not have obvious plans to return to their country of origin. Participant 11 reflected that attitude when she spoke, “I usually go every summer and take my kids, so they get [to know] their family ... that’s what we do every summer.” Participant 12 responded to the question with, “Visit every two years.... I would like to visit my family there, but not live there.”

A handful of participants did not know if they wanted to go back to their countries of origin. Some, like Participant 5, were in the United States for too short of a period to make a decision, and their home country was still tugging at them: “I am missing some things. When you move to another country, you don’t have things that you had in your

childhood, or things that you had before. ...For now, I don't know." Participant 1, a refugee, was indecisive as well, as he weighed his answer to an unpredictable future:

I had to leave my country ... and then come here. What I want to do right here, right now, is first go to school, and get done with education, and then I can decide if I can go back, help my people over there, or stay here.

One participant was conflicted over going back because, "I am here 13 years, and I am not sure if I could go back, if I will be able to be there because I am adapt [sic] to what the U.S. [way of] life right now."

*Interview question #6. Do you have children? What are your dreams for them and how will learning to speak English help them succeed?* Many of the participants did not have children, and it seemed children were not a priority, yet, in their complex situations. Participant 2 spoke of uncertainties, "Not yet. I'd like to have, but I think I [had] complicated situation because I wasn't sure if I'll be here, if I wanted to stay here. That's why I was waiting." Four of the participants had adult children, and they all spoke the English language better than their parents. Participant 5 left his country to be with his daughter in the United States and he stated, "This is main reason I am here, my daughter." On the other hand, Participant 6 chose to immigrate to the United States because "America is not for me. It's for my children. [They are] engineers, they talk in English." The participants' dreams for their adult children, whether in the United States or in the country of origin, is for them to have children of their own. Participant 10 proudly announced, "So, before I have a dream for him, now he has a son. I have a grandson, so I don't need to [anymore]."

The younger children of participants spoke better English than their parents. The children were either born in the United States, or they caught up and surpassed their parents in English proficiency. Participant 15 commented, “In the beginning, I was learning [English to help them]. But they learn easier [than] me, so now they help me.” Participant 12, whose child was born in the United States, does not help her child with English:

I don't think my English is good, so I don't speak English to him at home.... he can learn English from his classmate or teacher or friend.... I always speak [native language] to him, because one reason is I hope he keep understand [native language]. Another reason is I don't want my accent.... and poor grammar to affect him.

Indeed, all participants spoke native language to children, at home, to keep it current.

Participants wished their kids to be independent and happy. Good education, however, was a prerequisite to those epithets and parents did not seem willing to compromise on the education subject. Participant 4 stated, “As parents, we just give her or him the best way to start [their life], education.” Participant 12 reiterated this fact when she said, “I hope he can get higher education, so we support him to any [length].” Participant 15 had the same dreams for her children as the other parents, but she did not censor her Hispanic self when she explained, “[I don't want them] like Mexican or Latin American to come here to do the dirty work for this country” nor did she want them to be like the “American people.” She continued:

...scratching their head or hair, waiting for the government [to] give money to them. This is what I don't want for my kids. I want for my kids [to be] architects, engineers or something like that, and a good person.

***Interview question #7.** Can you tell me what you look for in a good ESL course?*

The attributes of a good ESL program were as diversified as the interviewees. However, and according to many participants, a good teacher in tune with student needs was essential for the success of the program. Participant 2 reflected on the importance of the teacher when he said, "Good ESL class, I think, depends on a good teacher. If teacher loves her job, it's the best." Another participant, Participant 11, would like to have teachers "understand the students, like where they come from... and why [are they] learning the language?" Participant 11 went on about wanting teachers to be "engaged [and use all the time]. [I] need those two hours to count" because time is of essence."

Some participants extended the role of the teacher beyond the teaching of English. A teacher needed to empower students and help participants not to be afraid to speak English. Participant 7 stated, "I am afraid to talk. I'm afraid to speak.... I'm afraid to read." Participant 14 reflected on her teacher's support beyond the English instruction, "[The teacher] is a very good teacher, and I like her because she always encouraged student to don't feel afraid to talk to other people – you never say I'm sorry my English is bad." She then added:

This teacher is really like my momma, because she is always worried or wonder for the student.... She say to the student... you need go up, you need to go study more. You don't want to stay here, you need to prepare. You need more and more and more and more.

A majority of participants' main concern was with pronunciation. Some have lived in countries whose official language is English, but still could not comprehend nor pronounce the American English with all its jargon and fluctuations. Others are fluent in technical English from former jobs, but they seldom had to speak English. Participant 5 further elaborated on his need to speak and be understood when he said:

I need speaking practice.... I've used English for 30 years, but I only write. I write technical papers.... I'm used to modern technologies, all modern technologies from the west, describe it in English.... but I did not have practice to speak.

Pronunciation transcended the need to simply be understood and, in many cases, it defined the participants' fulfilled coexistence with native speakers and defined their assumed ranking in a conversation.

A few participants defined a good ESL course as one with a focus on grammar to polish their English. Participant 1 summed up those expectations when he said:

We need grammar because [as they say in my country] "*la grammaire est la mère de la langue*" ["grammar is the mother of language"] – in any language, grammar is very important. We don't have more time [for] grammar, ... grammar is the only thing that can improve someone's English, ... like expression, the construction of the sentence, and so on.

Some participants were seeking to learn about the American culture, meet other immigrants, and fit in their new country. Participant 6 described a good ESL program as one where new immigrants can meet each other to realize they are not the only ones struggling; "As immigrants...it made my wife think we have a problem. But when I saw

other people... who have little children... they have the problem.” He then reiterated the importance of assimilation in the host country and the role the ESL program plays in this adaptation. Participant 6 revealed, “It’s important ... to not oppose American society and culture. For adaptation, [ESL course] is very, very important.”

Participant 2’s answer to question seven summarized participants’ answers when he said:

Everybody has different needs. I think teacher has to first ask the students what they want to do, [see how they’ve done in the test], and then teacher can decide which way to go to help everybody. I’m thinking best idea is to do everyday something different.

All participants were conscious of the monumental task they and the ESL instructor were facing and will continue to face.

*Interview question #8. In what ways has the ESL program helped you socially and academically/career wise?* The ESL program has had a positive social impact on participants within and outside the classroom. For some participants, the program offered a safe place to practice their English skills among peers and make friends. For two of the participants, their social life revolved around the ESL program and the friendships they made within. Participant 12, a long-term resident in the United States stated:

I feel I have a social life with classmates, and they came from different countries, and then I don’t know about American society. I [don’t] spend, you know, a lot of time with American society.... I feel comfortable in ESL class because the classmates are from different countries, the same as my situation. [We are different from the] American society because we [have] different background.

Participant 10 considered the teacher to be a friend, because she had invited students to her home for a get together and “[taught me], not only English, [but also] how to live in U.S.”

Newly acquired communication skills were often being channeled to boost participants’ confidence and subsequently their communication skills with native speakers. Participant 2 said it best when he said, “I can make better friends, because I speak better English.” Participant 16 spoke of her lack of social life hindered by her insufficient English skills to meet native speakers outside the classroom. She also added, “I know that I don’t speak well, but before the beginning [of ESL], I was very shy.... I did not try, and right now, well, I will try.” She then recounted the evolution of her friendship with a native speaker to further describe how confident she had become using the English words she was accumulating in the ESL classroom:

In the beginning, I just – you know [say] hi, hello, and try to walk faster to avoid the communication, because what do you talk? But right now, we spend time talking, playing with the dogs.... I can tell in short period of time, I learn. I learn a lot.

When asked if her confidence increase, she replied, “Especially, yes!”

A few participants were benefiting from the ESL course and becoming independent of their native English-speaking husbands. Participant 14 stated, “Before [ESL] always depended on husband. He always everything, when I’m going to the restaurant, to the store, and everything, and talk to other people. And I feel like I don’t know, like helper.” Participant 15 saw an increase in her business, and she was able to



communicate better with her husband: “[ESL] help me with my personal life because if I don’t learn English, how my [husband] will love me?”

Very few participants felt the ESL program helped them with their careers, because most participants were working in temporary positions just to make money and live. A few participants mentioned being able to communicate and be understood at work after starting their ESL courses, but none mentioned making a career of their then current jobs. A few participants did not benefit from the ESL course, although one of them admitted, “at least, I have [gained] the very basic.”

*Interview question #9. What was your job or course of studies in [your country of provenance]?* Among participants was an engineer, lawyers, and an accountant with college degrees and middle-class living standards in their countries of provenance. Participant 5 stated, “Long time, I work on different complex electronic systems.... It was my specialty, and it is my specialty.” Other participants had more humble beginnings and rudimentary education. For example, a few female participants had to interrupt the pursuit of higher education or a career to join up with spouses already established in the United States. Participant 13 mentioned, “I was student. My dad is farmer, I helped him [too], then I came here” after she had gotten married to her U.S. residing husband.

There were also the refugees, a roofer, waiter, and blue-collar participants with often no high school or technical diplomas and living standards dictated by the unfortunate turmoil engulfing their countries of origin. Participant 1, a refugee, spent six years in a host country as a teenager before being admitted to the United States:

In [country of origin] I was a student in high school. In [country where he took refuge] just any job you could have, because there no one could give us a job. We were like refugees, and we used to live on [aid].

Participant 2 did not grow up in a refugee camp, but he grew up under the rule of a communist regime and subsequent difficult and chaotic transition of his country away from this form of government. He went on to explain:

I [had] a few jobs, but it wasn't easy to get job, because I wasn't able to get better education...my parents [were not members] of the [communist] party. There's no chance to get anything better.... I got their education, a roofer.... Communism [may have then stopped] but in higher position, it's the same people in power.... If you don't have their friends in higher position, you have no chance.

A few business owners were among participants, and they were looking to jump start or improve their entrepreneurial ventures in the United States. Participant 15 was a successful hair stylist in her country of origin and had been cutting hair professionally since the age of 15. She owned her own business when she was 19 years old. While Participant 15 sold her business back home, Participant 4 kept an interest in the business and in the country of origin and only sold some of his shares to a partner "just in case."

***Interview question #10.*** *When you were in [country of provenance], what was your American Dream?* The definition of an American Dream proved to be very subjective among participants, but none dreamt of coming to American to strike it rich, at least not initially. Participant 2, who had come to "see America and help [self] to change life," reflected best on the trepidations of immigrants arriving on U.S. grounds when he explained, "In a different country, you are like a fish in the ocean." The fear of the

unknown taking over any thoughts of the American Dream was palpable when

Participant 1 stated:

In the first time when I came here, I was afraid. Sometimes, I was crying. When I was in the plane, I was crying. And I didn't know exactly where I'm going to and how my life is going to be, what exactly I'm going to become.

In fact, many participants did not have an American Dream. Participant 11 stated:

Honestly, I've never had American Dream. I have no idea.... It took me a while to realize what was America about, because I felt it was like [country of origin]. Just make friends, have fun, and make enough money for the week, and then I realize like many years later that it's different. You work and work, and then, you make something big..., and then, you go travel around the world.

Participant 14 never had American Dream, although she did add, "My American Dream was my husband. When I married, I never talk [about coming] to United States with my American husband, never, never."

For some participants, the American Dream consisted of getting away from circumstances beyond their control. Participant 1 said it best when he stated:

I didn't really have a very big dream, because the first dream I had in my country is to go to school and become a very successful man and help my people from there. The only thing that forced me to leave my country is war.... then, after the war started, I was forced to leave the country and come here. I didn't come here to get money, or to become rich, or to get car, no; only I was looking for peace.

Participant 15 elaborated on her pre-arrival's immediate needs before she was able to dream: "[I did not have an American Dream] No. Now, I have a dream to have my salon,

but when I came here, I didn't have any dream, just I want to get out from my ex-husband."

A few participants' American Dream was to be reunited with adult children on American soil. Some had realized this dream, while others were still dreaming. Participant 5, whose daughter is in the United States, said, "My dream was and is my children." Meanwhile Participant 6 was still dreaming and working very hard to have his "children... come real close." A few of the younger participants had American Dreams to become a singer, automotive technicians, or civil engineers, but they all were very conscience of their insufficient English skills. Participant 16 further elaborated when she said:

When I discovered that I will live here, it scared me a little bit, because what do you do? The first thing is I can't talk. This is basic thing to do, everything.... I would like to study civil engineer.... I will try. I think this is my American Dream.

*Interview question #11. What are you currently doing to pursue your aspirations?* The majority of participants were conscious of their insufficient English skills, and most were actively taking care of this first obstacle to their aspirations. Participant 4 confirmed the supremacy of the English language over the pursuit of aspirations when he said, "Right now, I think my English is not enough, so I just keep going to ESL course and then I think in one year, I can start to study the insurance course." Participant 7 echoed those feelings when she said, "When you don't go to school, everything not better." Some participants are enrolled in both HiSET and ESL classes to improve their English skills and pursue their subsequent aspirations.

Participant 2 was indeed studying hard: “I am in the school every day, five days. Through the week, I am taking two classes, ESL and HiSET. I’m in the school every day six hours.”

Other participants needed to work and be self-sufficient before pursuing their aspirations. Participant 17 stated, “I can’t right now. I need some time... because I need to be on my own first.” Participant 15 too was “working for [her] dream” while improving her English skills in ESL to grow her business and its clientele base. Participant 15 was learning English to target non-Spanish speaking customers to grow and replicate her business success in her country of origin. One elderly participant did not have any aspirations and was concentrating on the present even though she never misses any ESL class: “I have no dream for my future. Only stay in the present. I am sorry.”

*Interview question #12. What are your five-year and ten-year career goals?* In many cases, the future seemed very distant to participants, and none answered the question, literally, in terms of career goals only. While most participants were planning for the coming years, they were also still overwhelmed with their present. Many participants answered the question with built-in tentative stipulations. Participant 8 stated, “[I want to get] an associate, work a couple of years..., get bachelor, but I know it’s going to be hard, so I want to take it step by step.” Another participant, Participant 3, demonstrated the same apprehension when talking about future plans:

[In five years] I want to do like a little bit in school, [and] I have to work my job.

In 10 years, maybe I don’t know. How can I say about 10 years because it is

future? I can't say about that.... I don't have [dreams about the future]. I can't plan that, because if I plan that, I don't know what's God's plan for me.

Participant 7 was direct when she did not want to address her 10-year career plans: "Ten years is very far, just do five" she said.

All participants had some future outlooks on their lives. All of the interviewed were forging forward – step by step. Many stated future plans toward a college degree and related career, business ownership and expansion, or the ownership of a home, becoming a U.S. citizen, and finish raising the children. Participant 11, a dependent spouse and mother, stated:

I'm more adventurous, [contrary to my husband, but] I'd rather have [husband] happy than living big adventures, so I like step by step. I go to library [in the meantime]. I read everything I can on the internet..., you find lots of stories of people who dream of something and came up with something, so that's very inspirational.... So right now..., I just enjoy being with [children].

***Interview question #13.*** *Have your career/educational goals changed since you arrived in the U.S.A.?* With the exception of a few participants whose career or educational goals did not change, most of the participants' goals have changed with the discovery of new opportunities and a better understanding of the American norms and expectations as a result of a longer residency in their host country. Participant 11, in the United States for over 10 years, stated:

Well, definitely. I think in [country of origin], my mom never taught me about working and dreaming. She was more like stay at home, and let's knit and crochet and talk, and have a coffee, and meet with friends. That's all, so that was

my life. I thought my life was going to be like that, but here, it's been changing a lot.

Participant 14, elaborated on her changing goals while stressing the importance of a higher education and the mastery of the English language when she said:

[My goals] change because I can see if you are not high level for education..., you cannot be successful. Yeah, I can see in other people..., how is their life, and if they are [not educated], [they] study more and more, more [the fundamentals of English] or they cannot be successful.

Participant 12, also in the United States for over 10 years, said, "I didn't think I want to go to school, but now, I think about it. Maybe I want to go to school." Another long-term resident of the United States, Participant, 2, explained his change in outlook when he stated:

At the beginning, I just wanted to see America, to change my life, but I wasn't sure how to change my life, because I did not know about America anything. But now, I know a little bit more, and I know what eventually I'd like to exactly [do].

Participant 2 had been living surrounded by compatriots before deciding to move away and immerse himself in the English-speaking American Midwest research city.

A few participants, all in the States for two or less years, were on course to pursue their imported career/educational goals and seek out opportunities they had studied or imagined. Participant 4, was finally able to explore a new career goal because, as he stated:

In [country of origin], you didn't do what you want to do. But in United States, you can do what you [want] to do. [In country of origin, I had to do that one job], but I don't want to do that again.

Participant 4 then explained, in length, his new career goal, how he settled on it through research and observation and why he is taking the ESL courses to make it a reality.

Participant 3 replied to the question of whether his career/education goals have changed since arriving in the United States with, "No, it can't change. It's still the same."

Participant 1 was as adamant in his reply when he answered, "Since I arrived here, I didn't change my mind.... This is my final decision and I can't change it." Participants were aware of the difficulties they may encounter. Participant 16 had said:

Well, if I am living here and this was my dream in [country of origin, it] can be my dream here too. Right? Will be a little bit more difficult because [in country of origin] I speak the language, I know how things work, and here is different..., so, I have a lot of things to learn.

Analysis of the collected raw data from interviews and observations brought forth overarching themes within the study. Presented in the next section are the identified themes reflecting the supremacy of the English language, the consensus to focus on the basics, the brewing American Dreams, and notion that home is where the heart is, although no man is an island. Narratives, complemented by observations made during and right after the interviews, are illustrated in four themes.

**Emerging theme: English language; a primal need.** Participants, without exception, spoke of the importance of the English language to succeed. Although some participants had been in the United States for a significant amount of time, none



considered their lack of English an acceptable substitute to success but a necessary evil to raising children or getting over their hesitation to integrate. Learning English was considered an important first step in comprehending one's environment and inching closer to the participants' own definition of success. For most participants, success was having a good job or growing their own business.

Fluency in proper English was felt to be a prerequisite. Education was often required, and the ESL classes were not optional if they wanted to reach subsequent, and often on-hold, goals. Expressions 'like fish in an ocean' and 'being reborn again' were common place among participants. The feeling of uncertainty without English skills needed in the American, often monolingual, Midwest was palpable among the newcomers and those with multiple years in the United States.

Desires to be 'independent,' 'confident,' and able to communicate unhindered with friends and in cases of emergency were crucial. Participants, new and old immigrants to the United States, were uncomfortable and in some cases terrified by the idea of being caught in situations where they are not understood or taken seriously. Spouses of U.S. native speakers felt overly dependent on husbands who had lovingly perpetuated their dependency, for the most part. Mothers were not ready to let go of their growing children. They did not want to miss out on the children's expanding social circle of friends, friends' families, and significant others. There was an across-the-board urgency on behalf of all participants to learn and to speak English the proper way 'one step at a time,' to expand their horizon, bring forth their identity, and to understand and try to integrate in the American culture so foreign to their own.

**Emerging theme: Instructional expectations; supported self-fulfillment.** A vast majority of participants were taking the ESL course to improve their pronunciation and be able to function independently in society. The inability to communicate was frustrating to some and terrifying to others. Being dependent on loved ones or the online translator app was not a welcomed solution to their impediment either. Correct pronunciation and getting over the fear of speaking English was the one skill all participants expected from a good ESL course.

All participants possessed enough vocabulary at the ESL intermediate/advanced level to have a basic conversation with native speakers. None of the participants, however, felt comfortable enough with their current pronunciation to engage in any meaningful conversations, interview for better jobs, or sincerely welcome a customer to their business. Pronunciation was paramount for the newly arrived participants and those who had been in the United States for a prolonged amount of time.

The services of a passionate ESL instructor were also deemed important for a successful ESL program, according to the data analyzed. Despite the participants' differing needs, the instructor's role and personality were the stepping stones of the language program. Participants preferred a passionate instructor who loved the profession and was able to customize programs to take into consideration, not only participants' placement scores, but also their immediate needs and future goals. In fact, the teacher's role was often expanded beyond instruction of the English language to encompass the role of coach and cheerleader. The ESL program did bolster participants' confidence, first among peers and then in public, and improve their spoken English to be understood. The lack of professional and academic fluency in English, however,

continued to be a concern for participants whose American Dreams were on hold while they struggled to make up for their real or imagined shortcomings.

**Emerging theme: Brewing American dreams.** The existence of an American Dream before arrival to the United States was seldom acknowledged and in fact denied by some participants. A majority of the interviewed had come to this country because of circumstances beyond their control, to rejoin children or parents, or to marry and settle down in a husband's place of residence. Most participants were anxious, perhaps scared, and these feelings were taking center stage before immigrating to the United States.

Dreams of doing better and helping loved ones left behind did emerge once participants were safely on U.S. ground, but they were also on hold. All participants but one were taking ESL classes to become proficient enough in the English language to pursue education and or a better job to help loved ones in the country of origin and in the United States. It took some participants over a decade, immersed in their nuclear family and communities of compatriots, to finally decide to learn and polish their English and follow their own pursuit. A lot of participants did see a shift in their aspirations over the years as they adjusted to the demands of the American lifestyle. Participants with two or less years of residency in the United States, however, were relentlessly inching towards their initial aspirations unabated by their new realities despite their obvious struggles with integration.

**Emerging theme: Home is where the heart is.** This fourth and final theme was complex in nature, because it was founded on common thread found throughout the subjects' narration and non-verbal cues. No particular sets of questions or answers defined this theme, in particular, as it was imbedded in participants' comments and

candid additions. Without a doubt, all participants were grateful for being in the United States. While some participants were unable to go back to their home countries even if they wanted to, most participants chose to do so, but only to visit family.

The United States was home for participants, and in some cases, the undisputable homes of their children, and yet the draw of the extended family back home was too strong to ignore. Participants who were able to go back for a visit went back often, and those who did not visit were still vested in their old countries. A few participants still had property or business interests in their countries of provenance as a backup to their new American life or as an investment for their retired self.

Participants, in all cases, felt torn between two cultures, two countries, the draw of the old country, and opportunities of the new. English language fluency was the biggest challenge faced and perceived. Individuals were working hard to overcome this language obstacle. English proficiency could, perhaps, permit them to fully embrace opportunities and build relationships, while taking care of their emotional needs to be accepted into an environment so foreign to their own, even if they had been on location for over a decade.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the transcribed answers to study interview questions were analyzed. Data and direct quotes were presented as findings for each of the 13 study questions. Varying views were presented, and observations made during and immediately after the interviews complemented transcribed data for a better understanding of the individual's emotionally laden answers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Four overarching themes reflecting common elements among study participants'

responses to the questions emerged: English Language; a primal need, Instructional expectations; supported self-fulfillment, Brewing American Dreams, and Home is where the heart is. The perceived supremacy of the English language was a common thread, as were the very important pronunciation skills and services of a fitting educator to facilitate communication and empowerment of self. Evolving American dreams put on hold was another theme that prevailed throughout interviews, as was the theme emanating from the conflict between loyalty to loved ones left behind versus that of the self and children in the new country.

The results uncovered during this research study and conclusions drawn from these findings are further discussed in Chapter Five. The next chapter also serves as a platform to relate findings of Chapter Four to research questions first proposed in Chapter One and explore implications for future practice. Recommendations for future research related to the topic in this study conclude Chapter Five.

## Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover perceptions of individuals who have participated in ESL courses. Effectiveness and benefits of ESL programs in promoting second language learners to pursue their aspirations are still lacking a great deal of information (Braggs et al., 2007; Vafai, 2015). Current academic research has been limited to a few pilot projects reviewing and celebrating post-secondary credit gains for participants (Emerson, 2010; Vafai, 2015; 2016). Therefore, this study was conducted to ensure dedicated English learners feel they are indeed benefiting from English instruction and their aspirations are being supported within the confines of the language program. The ESL participants' driving factors to learn English and their expectation of the ESL program were also considered to holistically review individuals' aspirations and any shift in these aspirations.

Each year, approximately one million immigrants arrive legally in the United States (Lopez et al., 2017). Immigrants arrive on the shores of this North American, English-speaking country with apprehensions and aspirations but also an unequivocal desire to learn the language and invest in an identity in tune with or despite their new environment (Salvo & Williams, 2017; Warriner, 2016). Many immigrants are in pursuit of a better life and the promises of the American Dream, but some are also encumbered by a low literacy level in their own maternal language, further complicating the assimilation of the English language (Bardovi-Harlig, 2015; Choi & Ziegler, 2015; Ngo, 2017). Findings of this research project were reviewed in light of Norton's identity theory under the construct of investment and its other inherent elements.

In this chapter, a summary of findings guided by the study's research questions is included. Findings are followed by conclusions where the results of the study are reviewed in light of the literature presented in Chapter Two. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are then discussed before the chapter concludes with a highlight of the study's main points.

## **Findings**

Adult participants in advanced courses at a federally subsidized ESL program were interviewed individually, and their answers were recorded and then transcribed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in an effort to gather supporting information for the three research questions posed in this study. Seventeen participants answered questions regarding their motivations to learn English, expectations of the ESL program, and aspirations before and after landing on U.S. soil. Each of the research questions is presented with a summary of its respective interview questions. Themes, discussed later in the chapter, emerged from the following summary information. It is notable to mention the nature of the semi-structured interviews did put interviewees at ease, and some answers extended beyond the primary purpose to touch on other research questions and further highlight participants' lives in their new or not so new host country.

**Findings from research question one.** *What motivates immigrants, new to the Midwest, to learn English as a second language?* Research Question One was best answered by interview questions one, two, three, four, five, and six. A summary of the responses is provided in the next section.

**Interview question one.** *Tell me about yourself and why you decided to take ESL courses?* Question one served as an 'ice breaker' activity, and permitted researcher to

learn about participants' provenance and journey to the United States. This compound question also provided participants with a gateway to avoid talking about their past and focus instead on the ESL courses if a difficult past was not to be resurrected. The struggles but perseverance of participants was obvious in the responses. All but one participant had no plans to immigrate to the United States, but once on U.S. grounds, the supremacy of the English language was eventually inescapable. Participants were determined to learn proper English, and participation in ESL, therefore, had a greater purpose.

*Interview question two. Why are you learning English? (to get a job, improve job, go to college, help my children with homework, make new friends, etc.).* The answers to question two went beyond practical reasons of getting a job or going to college, and revolved around self-actualization and protecting self from insignificance. Participants considered the English language an inherent part of creating the feeling of home in the United States and the best way to meet people, communicate with others, and be understood. The English language was the first stumbling block towards integration, and participants at the intermediate/advanced ESL level had come a long way to overcome this major obstacle to settling in and owning a new identity.

*Interview question three. If you are employed, how will taking ESL courses help you?* Not many participants worked, but those who held a job credited the ESL class and especially the instructor for facilitating the process. Working participants, however, were in menial jobs requiring no in-depth conversations with supervisors or co-workers, and they were just employed "for the money" to make ends meet. The ESL courses were attended for an ulterior purpose extending beyond just learning the language and usually



involved the pursuit of a better existence that often included the ultimate goal of a good job.

*Interview question four. How important is learning to speak English to your future career and educational success?* The supremacy of the English language in this monolingual country and within the participants' frame of mind was further highlighted in participant answers. With the exception of the elderly, Participant 10 taking ESL courses for socialization, all participants understood the importance of the English language in their educational and/or professional attainment. This directed their participation in ESL courses to learn proper English to further pursue their goals.

*Interview question five. Do you plan on going back to [country of origin]? (visit or for good?).* The overwhelming answer to this question was 'no,' but it did not preclude the pain that came with such a decision. Some participants could not go back for safety reasons, while others preferred to visit but remain in the United States with or for their children. The emotional tug of war was evident. Mothers ached for their children to stay connected with the old country, and young wives were willing 'victims' of their chosen circumstances. One participant wondered if there was yet a place for him in the old country after his long absence. The United States was 'home' to the majority of participants and learning its official language was therefore considered a wise choice for all intermediate/advanced participants.

*Interview question six. Do you have children? What are your dreams for them and how will learning to speak English help them succeed?* Almost half of participants did not have children and did not think it was the right time to have children. A minority of parents had older children, and they either joined them in the United States or

emigrated to the United States to bring them forth. Parents of adult children speak their native language with children and dreamed almost exclusively of grandchildren.

Young children, if not born in the United States, caught up and surpassed their parents' English skills quickly. Participants spoke to their young children in their native language as well to reinforce the children's native identity but also to avoid polluting the children's English language. Participants wished their kids to be independent and happy. A good education in English was a prerequisite to those epithets, and parents did not seem to compromise that subject while leaving English to more capable individuals. The drive for parents to learn English was not their children, and it often stalled while raising them but was a price parents were willing to pay.

**Findings from research question two.** The query posed in research question two, *What expectations do immigrants perceive of the ESL program they are attending?* was best addressed by interview questions seven and eight. Responses are summarized in the next section.

**Interview question seven.** *Can you tell me what you look for in a good ESL course?* Answers to this question were as diverse as the participants' educational needs. The role of the instructor, however, was clearly a pivotal element in the success of the course. The successful educator was to be in tune with students, and he or she must respond to their needs and adjust curriculum accordingly. The instructor was also expected to serve beyond the traditional role of teacher, as a counselor, coach, cheerleader, and even friend. The teacher was, in many instances, the reflection of the surrounding majority culture, and participants expected to learn the language, model its usage, and gain a window to the outside world and where they fit in it.

Pronunciation and the desire to be understood were paramount, as was grammar. Participants enrolled in ESL advanced/intermediate courses were seeking to go beyond ordinary English taught on the street. Articulate pronunciation and the ability to be understood were a very important priorities to all participants. Interviewees also sought to have a glimpse into the American culture, including its jargon, in a relaxed environment among peers. A good ESL course was thus customized to individual needs of participants and inclusive of the American daily norms to accommodate the needs of the job and education seekers, those focused on the primal needs of integration, and those who fall in between.

*Interview question eight.* *In what ways has the ESL program helped you socially and academically/career wise?* Socially, the ESL program was instrumental as it provided a safe place for participants to practice their English language among peers and in a non-intimidating environment. There was a general consensus to the positive social impact from participation in the ESL program. Participants were more confident to engage with native speakers, despite their perceived continuing deficiencies in pronunciation, and were gaining some independence from overpowering but well-meaning English-speaking husbands if they exist.

Participation in the ESL program was helping participants academically as a reinforcer of skills taught in the HiSET program but not career wise (Zinth, 2015). Participants were working menial jobs for the money and were not vested in a track within which they hoped to grow. Participants' interactions with co-workers and supervisors did not extend beyond the basics.

**Findings from research question three.** The third and final research question, *How have immigrants perceived their aspirations shift over the course of their ESL studies?* was multi-layered, and the researcher had to often pry for more in depth answers. Participants seemed, for the most part, focused on the present and immediate future and not willing to venture beyond what was within their control in a still foreign environment. Very little allocations were made, at that moment, for the pursuit of the American Dream. Research Question Three was best answered by interview questions 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

**Interview question nine.** *What was your job or course of studies in [your country of provenance]?* Answers for this question presented a stark difference among participants. There were educated participants, those whose education was prematurely interrupted, and chain migration participants versus those who came to this country, often alone, for legitimate fears for their lives. Participants were all humbled by their experiences and grateful of the new and yet familiar community they held within the ESL program.

**Interview question ten.** *When you were in [country of provenance], what was your American Dream?* The definition of an American Dream proved to be very subjective. None of the participants, however, dreamt of coming to America to strike it rich, at least not initially. In fact, none of the participants had planned their immigration to the United States, except for one. He came to see American Indians first and foremost, and then he stayed to get away from communism in his country. Prior to their arrival to the United States, participants were anxious and their anxiety did not allow for any resemblance of the American Dream to materialize. While some were rejoining family or

husbands and an established network of acquaintances, others were fleeing for their lives, and their arrival in a country to call their own, although scary, was a dream-come-true in its own right. The desire to act on aspirations which led to an American Dream was therefore on hold in almost all the cases.

*Interview question eleven. What are you currently doing to pursue your aspirations?* The majority of participants were conscious of their insufficient English skills and most were actively taking care of that first obstacle before tackling any aspirations. Good English was, therefore, the first order of the day, every day. Aspirations for a better education or job were not inexistent, but participants were taking it one day at a time. The pursuit of aspirations was ongoing and participants were learning English first, while weighing and defining those aspirations in their host country. While aspirations of the newly arrived participants seem to ebb from recent experiences, aspirations of participants with many years in the United States were more nuanced by their accumulated experience in their host country and not their participation in the ESL program. Mothers with school-aged children were finally pondering their options, the recluse who had been living among his compatriots was ready to integrate, and the new comers could not wait to learn English and embark on what was next with an effervescence unmatched by the seasoned and perhaps worn and tired immigrants.

*Interview question twelve. What are your five-year and ten-year career goals?* All participants had an upcoming outlook on their future, but it was undertaken with caution, perseverance, and sometimes a great deal of patience measured in years. The concept of the five-year and ten-year goals was considered premature by most participants. Participants were pragmatists, and the majority were still negotiating their

present. The future seemed distant or not within their grasp without the English skills they had deemed necessary for lift off. The answers were, hence, evasive with many built-in tentative stipulations. None of the participants addressed the core of the question: career goals.

*Interview question thirteen. Have your career/educational goals changed since you arrived in the U.S.A.?* The change in goals since the arrival of participants to the United States was tied directly with how long the participant had resided in his or her new host country. Newly arrived immigrants were anxious but determined to pursue their initial goals once the English language impediment was overcome. Participants who had been living in the United States for a relatively long time, eight years on average, saw their aspirations change and develop based on their experience in host country but not as a direct result of the enrollment in ESL courses. Female participants who were done raising young children, were exploring new opportunities while learning English, an all-important element in their definition of accomplishment and success.

## **Conclusions**

In this section the themes detailed in Chapter Four are summarized. Inherent findings which emerged from data collected during interviews were evaluated in light of the literature review described in Chapter Two. The theoretical framework served as a guide to frame themes within the context of this research.

**Emerging theme: English language; a primal need.** All participants interviewed at the intermediate/advanced ESL level were particularly conscious of the importance of the English language for their success. ‘Proper’ English was a prerequisite to any future goals and a formidable roadblock that had to be overcome (Salvo &

Williams, 2017; Vafai, 2016). Participants were from all walks of life and from almost all corners of the world, yet they converged on the primal role of the English language in their pursuit of cognitive consonance and transformation into their imagined future selves worthy of investment (Adkins et al., 1999; Norton, 2014).

Participant 9 reflected on the need to be fluent in English when she said, “I want to trust myself. I want to be confident.... I don’t want to struggle.” This statement further reflected participants’ internal struggles to reposition themselves and ascend to an imagined identity within the constraints of their environments and the leveraging of their investment to suit their perceived opportunities (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Learning English superseded any serious thoughts to the future and it was reminiscent of a starting point in a trajectory towards an ultimate career objective (Vafai, 2016). Participant 16 put it nicely when she said,

Without English... nobody will give me a job... I would like to study civil engineer... I don’t know if it will be possible, but I will try... The first thing is learn the language.

The English language was not an optional tool to participants’ multi-dimensional and evolving interest and orientations (Vafai, 2014). In some cases where participants had been in the country for many years, the lack of English was not considered an obstacle to success. Deficiencies in English were a necessary evil to upholding participants expected social responsibilities or to coming to terms with participants’ struggles to break from in-group pressure in order to achieve cognitive consonance (Abramitzky et al., 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). For example, some individuals had to first fulfill their maternal responsibility of raising children before assuming a forward-

looking identity worthy of their investment within their and others ideological positioning of capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Vafai, 2014). Participant 12's comment is reflective of that sacrifice for the greater good:

First five years, I stay home to take care of my kid, and then my son, he started the school, and then I came here [ESL location] because I need to improve my English..., to connect with society.

Other participants found comfort in their own group and in turn shut out the intruding appeals of their new host country before succumbing to the inevitable lure of a seemingly better future (Söhn, 2016; Ulman, 1997). Participants' urgency to learn and speak English, the proper way, was palpable as they progressed through the levels of ESL driven by investments in ulterior motives of their own (Norton, 2013; Vafai, 2014).

**Emerging theme: Instructional expectations; supported self-fulfillment.**

Participants' expectations of the ESL program were multidimensional, but they revolved around self-expression, a desire to be understood, and an instructor willing to serve in multiple, non-traditional, roles. The desire to own one's identity and be able to function independently in society were paramount (Norton, 2014). The inability to communicate and be understood frustrated most participants and terrified some. Participant 14's fears of and frustration for not being understood were obvious when she said, "If I need [to] call 911, [can I] tell them what happened, what is the situation? ... What will I do?" She then added, "It's frustrating when other people, they tell you 'I don't understand,' or 'I don't know' ... I am frustrated." At the intermediate/advanced level, participants had accumulated enough vocabulary to have a conversation with natives, but their perceived lack of proper pronunciation, in the presence of native speakers, impeded participants'



ascent to their ideal identity within a given context (Norton 2014). The almost overwhelming desire to be able to communicate usurped participants of the confidence needed to actually hold a conversation on equal level with the interlocutor, further undermining their efforts (Luo, 2014). Participant 6 put it succinctly when he said:

The most important for us was pronunciation.... In English language, 34 sounds, but 14 from them does not exist [in own language]. We heard only noise when we talk English. It came out different each voice, all noise.

Pronunciation was a necessary tool for empowering the ideal self, completing the whole new self, and to expanding participants' range of identities and reach out to wider worlds (Bandura, 1997; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Learning was hence expected to extend beyond accumulations of vocabulary and knowledge acquired, because it transformed who the participants were and what they could do (Wenger, 1998). Participants' pressing need for good pronunciation to communicate, be understood, and prop up their identity towards their imagined selves had shaped the level of investment in learning the language (Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018).

Indeed, investment in the target language was an investment in the participants' own social identity, cultural assets, and social power (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2017). It took Participant 2 over 10 years to extract himself from the safety of his in-group and face the inevitable for the attainment of his imagined future self:

I think without English, I have no chance to go to college..., and then I can do what is my dream.... I am study hard..., I am in school every day for six hours.

In this study, participants placed a lot of emphasis on learning the natives' language when they were ready to express self, be understood, and finally be able to ascend to an identity that will permit them to fulfill hopes and ambitions.

Participating in the ESL intermediate/advanced courses was hence an experience of identity constantly evolving in light of the perceived capital and within the ideological parameters of the context (Darvin & Norton, 2017; Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, as in this case, this 'experience of identity' depended mostly on the outward component of pronunciation and the support of a dedicated instructor (Darvin & Norton, 2017; Wenger, 1998). The success of these courses, therefore, relied on the instructor's astute ways of appealing to participants' future self and in engaging their attention sufficiently to earn their commitment and investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The instructor was hence expected to customize the learning to suit the audience's imagined identities, and her role of the teacher was magnified to also promote the possibilities for the imagined futures of a diverse population of students (Norton, 2014).

On multiple occasions, participants based the success of the ESL course on how much the "teacher loved her job," further insinuating the unrelenting commitment required in this kind of class and on the ability of the teacher to "first know the student," suggesting the personal nature of this program extending beyond just learning the language. Participant 10's comment "At least my teacher's a friend. Not only teach grammar.... She invited the class to her house for a party and showed American living status or something, how they live" reflects not only the commitment of the teacher but also the far-reaching role of the educator.

Reliance on the instructor to hone multiple roles and support learning can also be attributed to participants' perceived subordinate role and their desires to reduce dissonance and achieve consonance with a majority culture represented, in this case, by the instructor (Bandura, 1997; Cherry, 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). According to Darwin and Norton (2015), immigrants will attempt to prevail over their underprivileged situation within formal language learning environments, and they will come to rely on the instructor to model and lead the way (Bandura, 1997). Participants' investment in the course reflected the instructor's ability to inspire learners and leverage their imagined identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

A few participants in this study also expressed their reliance on the instructor to learn cultural nuances of American society to further facilitate their membership into the community in which they reside and to which they must abide (Gee, 2007). Indeed, minority groups are often left looking up at the majority culture as the threshold to success and the key to upward mobility (Pacilli et al., 2013). The disconnect among participants and prevalent culture is significant and even simple words, for instance, can possess more than one meaning depending on the context, situation, and intonation (Gee, 2007). Participant 1 stated, "When I came here, the English we speak in [country] and the English we speak here are very different." Those cultural affinities need to be picked up from the instructor, a member of the majority group, practiced among unbiased peers, or else participants will be at the source of much misunderstanding in public further debasing their aspired status (Adkins et al., 1999; Bandura, 1997).

**Emerging theme: Brewing American dreams.** The existence of an American Dream before arrival to the United States was seldom acknowledged and, in some

instances, it was denied perhaps in response to the anti-immigrant populist movement currently rippling through the country (Bobo, 2017). All participants but one did not actively plan their immigration to the United States, and although they may have thought of how different life would be, none realized how the very fabric of life around them would be a constant test of their resilience (Adkins et al., 1999).

Once in the United States and reality had settled in, dreams of doing better and helping loved ones left behind did emerge, although they were mostly put on hold. More pressing matters such as raising children; taking refuge in the familiar fold of one's own group, at least initially; and/or earning a living, albeit in menial jobs, had to be resolved first (Vafai, 2014). Becoming proficient in proper English was a prerequisite to pursuing the aspirations of an education, a better job, and subsequently an American Dream within reach now that participants were at the intermediate/advanced levels of ESL (Vafai, 2014).

Many participants had plans extending only in the very near future, and it all depended on their own subjective measures of the English language proficiency. Beyond participants' goals of learning 'proper' English, ulterior plans did exist, but these plans, as was often professed, were subject to change. Participant 16's American Dream was to be a civil engineer, she did not "know if it will be possible," but she was determined to give it a try. Contrary to new immigrants, participants with 10 or more years in the United States were particularly prone to changing aspirations, but it was a result of the new opportunities discovered during their lengthy sojourn in host countries and not as a result of the ESL programs' suspected manipulation.

The notion of the American Dream, however, was not affected. For the most part, participants' American Dreams were not to strike it rich but they resided instead in a steady progression towards a balanced existence between financial success and the moral ideals of their current social order (Adams, 1931). Undoubtedly, the American Dream included loved ones coming near and the creation of social connections within the current environment to compensate for the sentimental ties of the old country and to fulfill the need to be whole in the adopted community (Anderson et al., 2015; McLeod, 2018; Solheim, Zaid, & Ballard, 2016; Waldinger, 2015).

**Emerging theme: Home is where the heart is.** Although no questions related directly to this theme; it was prevalent throughout the interviews in their narrations, candid additions, and non-verbal cues. Participants, for the most part were drawn to their country of origin and the appealing comfort of loved ones left behind (McLeod, 2018). Participant 14 had not gone back to her country of origin yet, and she missed her loved ones: "I cannot visit every day to my parents or check how they are..., so really, really sad for me." Without a doubt, however, all participants were grateful for the privilege of living in the United States, because they were either safe, with family, raising children and creating a family, or looking forward to bringing family to the United States for the abounding opportunities. In most cases, the draw was not for country of origin but the people left behind and the fond connections built afar (Peters et al., 2016; Waldinger, 2015).

Some participants were unable to go back for safety reasons beyond their control, and their pain of separation was obvious although not often put into words. Other participants were going back regularly, with children and sometimes husbands in tow, to

visit family members and for children and husbands to build rapport with relatives and friends of participants. Participant 11 goes back to her country of origin every summer with her children. Staying in meaningful contact with loved ones in their country of origin was an important element of participants' and their children's wellbeing (Souralová, 2018).

Participants were torn between two countries, two cultures, and between loyalty to true self and blood relatives in old country and the prospects of new relations and opportunities in this country (Abramitzky et al., 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015). The lack of English language fluency was compounding the problem. Participants, however, were attempting to improve their English skills to fully embrace the opportunities and build relationships to satisfy their emotional needs of acceptance into an environment so foreign to their own, despite being on location, in some cases, for over a decade. Participant 12 stated, "I live here [for 5 years] but actually not. You know if you don't go out, no. Your English won't be good." Here again, timing had to be right, and participants, as was the case with Participant 12, had to choose going beyond their passive identity of welcomed seclusion within the ingroup or assume the pursuit of their imagined identity and ultimately the American Dream itself (Guiora et al., 1972; Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018).

### **Implications for Practice**

Research addressing the person taking ESL classes, while considering adult immigrants' specific needs and taking into consideration their background and future aspirations, are far and few between (Emerson, 2010; Vafai, 2015, 2016). Results of this study suggested multidimensional, complex, and proprietary needs of adult ESL

participants may not be supported despite instructors' and institutions' best efforts. Immigrants choosing to assume what they consider a relevant role within the American society are therefore, unwittingly, being rebuffed and left to their own devices. The transformation into an imagined future self is dependent on a plethora of conditional and multilayered support necessitating a holistic approach to integration. Immigrants' desire to be relevant and their pursuit of aspirations are subject to daily tests of participants' resilience, not only in terms of language barrier but also in terms of potentially deep cultural misunderstanding with significant impacts on the participants' pursuit of aspirations (Adkins et al., 1999).

**A comprehensive approach to integration.** The ESL population at community colleges is the largest and fastest growing segment of adult education in the United States, necessitating a call to arms to streamline the process of integration by understanding overlooked needs of the person making up the ESL persona (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2015). Understanding and addressing the needs of the adult ESL population, especially those at the higher levels of instruction is, as a result, paramount to their independence and economic performance of the host country (Choi & Zeigler, 2015). Immigrants' inability to transcend beyond their passive identity of spectators will impact their ability to be independent, to converse, read, and write in the host country's language and will limit their opportunities for a good job, relevant education, and pertinent relationships within the community of locals (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Pietrantuono, 2017).

Unfortunately, some ESL curriculum makes it difficult for adults learning English to move from ESL to academic courses or relevant jobs in tune with participants'

interests and/or academic degrees from country of origin (Fernandez, Kreeft Peyton & Schaetzel, 2017). This seemed to be the case with the ESL program examined in this study, despite the purpose, as stated on the Adult Education and Literacy program website, to “Assist adults to become literate and obtain the Knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency” (MODESE, n.d., para 4). Although a review of curriculum was not performed, a few participants did attest to this fact, when at the conclusion of the highest ESL course, some still felt ill equipped to pursuit a career in the 21st century.

**A winning individualized educational plan (IEP).** The inability of advanced level graduate participants to transition to academic courses and relevant careers, however, cannot solely be blamed on the ESL program. The scarce resources instructors have to work with while dealing with individuals needing much more than instruction in the host country’s language further impede the success of the second language learning center. Intermediate/advanced ESL classes are, based on the interviews conducted, populated with what could be considered ‘special needs’ individuals who could greatly benefit from an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). A team of professionals, such as instructors, social workers, counselors, and job coaches could support the whole person and help him or her navigate and push back on daily struggles within an unknown system of opportunities not within his or her unsupported reach. The IEPs would also speed up integration of immigrants and increase their contributions to the economic welfare of the nation.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, an IEP program will address the individual needs of each participant, as was called for throughout the interview process.



This solution, albeit difficult but not necessarily more expensive, could in fact address and satisfy the different needs and divergent capabilities of the ESL participants. Aspirations can then be pursued more efficiently, progress can be measured and redirected based on the individual's circumstances, and American dreams will actually be more prone to becoming a reality, benefiting the learner and host country.

**The resetting of immigrants' expectations.** Last but not least, in light of this research, ESL participants, despite their best efforts, need to transcend the notion of the 'proper' English, as there is no such thing for second language learners (Nair, Krishnasamy, & De Mello, 2017; Thornburry, 2014). Native-like proficiency in English may be achieved in the written format, but it is not possible with pronunciation (Nair et al., 2017). Despite its high ranking in the intermediate/advanced ESL students' top priorities, a great number of second language learners have major difficulties with English pronunciation, even after many years of practice, and this was obvious in the study (Rajadurai, 2016). Efforts, therefore, should be exerted to teach pronunciation but also to promote reasonably intelligible pronunciation, permitting second language speakers communicative empowerment based on realistic and attainable expectations (Cook, 2016).

Speaking like a native speaker is in itself an impossible task, because an adult second language speaker, by definition, is not a native and will never be (Brown, 2014; Thornburry, 2014). Coming to terms with this issue will allow second language learners to more easily have confidence in their speech and feel empowered to assert self without second guessing their abilities and, in turn, undermining their positioning in a

conversation. An imagined identity in the works, albeit with an accent, is better than a status quo identity expecting a long-awaited miracle to materialize.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To allow interview results to inform future research in the field of second language acquisition with a focus on the student, one is driven to amend several aspects of this study. Limits based on the scope of the sample, perspectives gathered, and questions asked could be further examined and developed.

**Scope of the sample.** The number of participants, 17, and the choice of only one institution may have limited findings of the study. Furthermore, and according to Creswell (2015b), limiting one's research to only one institution for analysis could limit the scope of research and the ability to generalize, and it may render biased results. Future research could benefit from expanding the study to include several higher education institutions across a wider area and the resultant increase in the size of the student sample (Creswell, 2015a). A larger target population, and thus sample, which is inherently more representative of diverse second language learners, would further validate the study's results and permit the researchers to generalize their findings (Creswell, 2015a; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016).

**Perspectives gathered.** Perspectives from this study were gathered only from adult participants attending ESL intermediate/advanced courses at a community college, and findings may have been biased. Subsequent research could include instructors' perspectives to view the other side of the equation and visits to the participants' home to gain further insight into their personal spaces to gain a holistic perspective of the forces impacting the second language learner's decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The two

interviews which took place in the participants' home provided the researcher with valuable insight into the student's family and a better understanding of the student's answers, while taking into consideration their environments and place of residence. No man is an island, and factors such as family composition and economic circumstances will undoubtedly affect participants' decisions (Le Bigre, 2015, Shachar, 2014).

**Questions asked.** Special attention was paid to the number of interview questions and simplicity of the syntax to avoid any misunderstanding and keep the study's topic manageable. Additional questions, however, could be supplemented to further probe for some of the unexpected findings that arose during the study. Questions assessing the impact of social media and reliable cyber channels to participants' previous life in the country of origin would be beneficial in evaluating participants' desires and drive to integrate in the host country.

Questions pertaining to the prevalence of the free but sophisticated translation apps may determine whether second language learners are increasingly dependent on this technology at the expense of their learning 'proper' English especially if no prior education exists. These questions will also evaluate if these technological tools are in fact undermining the participants' pursuit of their aspirations and desires to integrate. Questions developed to determine the educational background of refugees could also shed some light on the lack of an anchor language for refugees and its impact on their capability to assimilate the new English language being taught. This fundamental flaw could also negatively impact the participants' desires to rise up to their imagined identity, and educators will have to account for this deficiency in their lesson plans.

Needless to say, it is unreasonable to expect participants to sit through all the questions, because their time is limited and scheduling an hour for the interview was a challenge enough. Topics raised by all these questions, however, are indeed essential for a holistic understanding of the second language learners. Motivations to learning English, aspirations' shifts for a hopefully better self, and participants' expectation of the ESL program would be thoroughly analyzed and understood, and the new immigrant can be better understood as a person and not just in terms of ESL credits earned.

### **Summary**

America is a nation of immigrants, and the flow of new arrivals, although curtailed, is continuing nevertheless (Martin, 2014). New immigrants, however, are bypassing the traditional ports of entry and settling instead in the Midwest where ESL centers are operating at capacity and year-long waiting lists are the norm (Ferraro, 2016; National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). Because of their popularity, an ESL center in the Midwest was a prime location to conduct the research.

This qualitative study was launched to gain an understanding of the person taking the ESL classes in a federally funded Adult Education ESL program in a Midwestern community college. Research questions directed the study to gain insight on the immigrants' driving factors to learning English, their expectations of the program, and shift in aspirations, if any, that may have occurred while frequenting the program. Semi structured interview questions using plain and simple English words were used to validate the responses of the second language learners and to follow-up on any questions to further probe and expand on interviewee's answers (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Participants' answers were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify themes which subsequently

were used to understand the ESL learner's English language acquisition journey in his or her host country.

Findings were corroborated by the literature review in Chapter Two. It was determined that immigrants signed up for ESL classes because the instruction of what is considered proper English is a prerequisite to any subsequent endeavor in the United States (Vafai, 2016). The English language was not an optional tool but rather a fundamental component in overcoming cognitive dissonance and achieving the imagined future identity within the constraint of the immigrants' circumstances and with the leveraging of investment worthy of the opportunities presented (Darvin & Norton, 2017). The urgency to speak proper English and ascend to a perceived ideal identity was the driving factor for participants to sign up and persevere in ESL courses.

Another theme to emerge was the perhaps unreasonable, but certainly justifiable, dependence on the instructor to serve in multiple roles to accommodate the diverse needs of all the participants (Darvin & Norton, 2017; Luo, 2014). The daunting task of self-fulfillment and ascension to higher ranked identities and wider worlds through speech and self-expression was also a prominent finding within this theme (Bandura, 1997; Luo, 2014; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Participants believed that the capability to express themselves and be understood through good pronunciation was a fundamental element in their ascension to an empowered identity capable of fulfilling their hopes and ambitions (Darvin & Norton, 2017).

Immigrants' aspirations and American dreams, and whether they shifted throughout the duration of the ESL program were also examined. Immigrants' main focus resided in learning the English language first (Vafai, 2014). Aspirations and

American dreams were put on hold while second language learners were building their language capital and foundation for an imaginary identity bolstered by their investment and within their and other's ideologies. One final theme was prevalent throughout the study in what was said but also in the non-verbal cues. Immigrants' split allegiance between a host country full of promises and loved ones in country of origin was painful to witness for there were no real or happy solutions to this problem within the current administration's anti-immigrant policies (Abramitzky et al., 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2015).

The study concluded with final recommendations for practice and future research. These recommendations included the establishment of an IEP program for intermediate/advanced level ESL participants to support the instructor. The expansion of the population and sample demographics, inclusion of different perspectives, and addition of relevant questions to address unexpected findings that came to light during the study were also recommended. These suggestions provide guidance to further explore and subsequently support the identities of the second language learner and tell the mutually beneficial story of immigrants and host country.

## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and why you decided to take ESL courses?
2. Why are you learning English? (to get a job, improve job, go to college, help my children with homework, make new friends, etc.).
3. If you are employed, how will taking ESL courses help you?
4. How important is learning to speak English to your future career and educational success?
5. Do you plan on going back to [country of origin]? (visit or for good?)
6. Do you have children? What are your dreams for them and how will learning to speak English help them succeed?
7. Can you tell me what you look for in a good ESL course?
8. In what ways has the ESL program helped you socially and academically/career wise?
9. What was your job or course of studies in your country of provenance?
10. When you were in [country of provenance], what was your American Dream?
11. What are you currently doing to pursue your aspirations?
12. What are your five-year and ten-year career goals?
13. Have your career/educational goals change since you arrived in the U.S.A.?

## Appendix B

### IRB Approval

# LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: April 2, 2018

TO: Hala Gheriani  
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [1207627-1] English as a Second Language: Adult Programs and their Impact on Second Language Learners' Aspirations

IRB REFERENCE #:  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: April 2, 2018  
EXPIRATION DATE: April 1, 2019  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review (Cat. 7) based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 1, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.



If you have any questions, please contact [REDACTED] Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to [IRB@lindenwood.edu](mailto:IRB@lindenwood.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

**Appendix C**  
**IRB Approval**



*Institutional Review Board*

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DATE: March 15, 2018

TO: Hala Gheriani

FROM: [REDACTED]

College Director of Research, Strategic Planning and Grant Development  
Institutional Review Board Chair

**HUMAN PARTICIPANTS PERMISSION**

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and [REDACTED] have established standards and guidelines to protect individuals who may be at risk as a consequence of participation in a research activity. The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRB) is responsible for insuring that adequate safeguards are established to protect any individual who may be at risk as a consequence of participation in research activities. Standards for the committee's review are based upon:

- Protection of Human Subjects – Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR 46
- Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information, 45 CFR 160 and 164

All research undertaken by the college personnel that involve human participants in any way, regardless of the source of funds, must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before activity is undertaken.

The lead researcher for the proposed project is to complete the application in the format described in steps 1-8 of the instructions for the Human Participates Protection Application, which appears at [REDACTED]

As the Institutional Review Board Chair, I confirm OTC grants permission for data collection once IRB approval has been obtained by Lindenwood University and [REDACTED] for the proposed research of second language learners' and enrollment in the Adult Literacy English as a Second Language program.

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional assistance.

## Appendix D

### First Contact with ESL Director

Dear [REDACTED],

My name is Hala Gheriani. I am a doctoral student at the University of Lindenwood in the department of Higher Education Leadership. As part of my dissertation project, I am conducting research on second language learners, within the context of ESL. Of special interest are the motivational factors propelling immigrants to enroll in ESL courses, the expectations these learners perceive of the ESL role, and whether the immigrants are effective in pursuing their aspiration as a result of their participation in the program and their acquisition of formalized language skills.

I have secured permission through your institution's IRB process to conduct the research, and I am attaching the IRB approval letter for your convenience. I am requesting the contact information for the students participating in your intermediate/advanced courses. The students will be invited via email; however, phone contact will be made with those choosing to participate to schedule the interviews. Meetings will be set up on campus and at locations of the participant's convenience.

Your assistance in securing the contact information for those students participating in your intermediary/advanced level courses is greatly appreciated and I thank you in advance for your cooperation. Of course, any data obtained through this research will only be reported anonymously and, if requested, will be shared with the Office of Institutional Research at your institution upon completion.

I look forward to receiving the contact information requested, and please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED] should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Hala Gheriani

**Appendix E**  
**Recruitment Email**

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Hala Gheriani, and I am a student at Lindenwood University, in Springfield, Missouri, majoring in Higher Education Administration. I obtained your contact information through \_\_\_\_\_'s English as a Second Language (ESL) program.

For my dissertation, I am conducting research to identify the motivational factors propelling second language learners to enroll in ESL, the expectations of second language learners of the ESL program's role, and whether second language learners' aspirations have or are changing during the course of the ESL program.

Your participation in my research would be extremely valuable. If you are willing to participate, please respond with a 'YES' to this email or call me at the number listed below. I will contact you to schedule a time and location for your interview.

Please note that all information during the interview will be kept strictly confidential, and your identity will not be revealed. Should you have any questions about the research or the process, please feel free to contact me via email or phone as listed below. You may also contact \_\_\_\_\_ my advisor at Lindenwood University at \_\_\_\_\_ should you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Hala Gheriani  
Doctoral Student  
Lindenwood University  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Consent Form

# LINDENWOOD

## Research Study Consent Form

### Adult Programs and their Impact on Second Language Learners' Aspirations

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Hala Gheriani under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all of your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

#### **Why is this research being conducted?**

Ensure dedicated English learners are indeed benefiting from English instruction and their aspirations are being supported. We will be asking about 20 other people to answer these questions.

#### **What am I being asked to do?**

Willing participants will meet with researcher at a mutually beneficial time and location.

Participant will be presented with a consent form to read and sign. Researcher will answer all questions participant might have and will only proceed when Consent Form is agreed upon and is signed.

Researcher will then proceed with asking participant the interview questions. Interview will be recorded for transcription at a later time.

The meeting is not expected to take more than an hour.

#### **How long will I be in this study?**

One hour

#### **Who is supporting this study?**

Study is not funded by a grant or funding agency. There are no financial conflicts of interest to report.

#### **What are the risks of this study?**

- **Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will be collecting data that could identify you, but each survey response will receive a code so that we will not know who answered each survey. The code connecting you and your data will be destroyed as soon as possible.

**What are the benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefits for completing this survey. We hope what we learn may benefit other people in the future.

**What if I do not choose to participate in this research?**

It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

**What if new information becomes available about the study?**

During the course of this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

**How will you keep my information private?**

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

**How can I withdraw from this study?**

Notify the research team immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

**Who can I contact with questions or concerns?**

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Director, [REDACTED]

\_\_\_\_\_. You can contact the researcher, Hala Gheriani directly at \_\_\_\_\_ . You may also contact \_\_\_\_\_

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

|                                   |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| _____                             | _____       |
| <b>Participant's Signature</b>    | <b>Date</b> |
| _____                             |             |
| <b>Participant's Printed Name</b> |             |

|                                                       |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| _____                                                 | _____       |
| <b>Principal Investigator or Designee's Signature</b> | <b>Date</b> |
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### Vita

Hala Gheriani is currently an adjunct instructor at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Missouri. She holds a five-year undergraduate degree in Change Management with a concentration in Computer Information Systems from Eastern Michigan University and a Master of Business Administration with a focus in Computer Data Management and Security completed at Missouri State University.

Prior to her current role, Gheriani worked with Hewlett Packard, General Motors, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. However, it was during her leave of absence to raise a family that she discovered her passion for civic engagement through education. Gheriani served as a substitute teacher and a professional volunteer for well over five years. The revolution and ensuing civil war in her country of origin, Libya, propelled her into further action to empower youth and to make sure no one is left behind, because it is in knowledge that we prosper and through it that we achieve consensus and then peace.

Gheriani is married to her best friend and partner. Together they are almost done raising two confident, responsible, honest, and compassionate children ready to embark on their own life adventures and be the change they want to see. Gheriani's family in Libya is her inspiration and joie de vivre. Gheriani and her six siblings were raised by an incredibly smart but illiterate mother who literally fought through thick and thin to make sure her boys *and* girls had access to education that World War II and a marriage in her early teens had deprived her from.