

A UNIQUE ECOLOGY OF LANGUAGE AND SPACE:  
EXPLORING THE LEARNING CONTEXT AND ADULT LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES OF  
A CHURCH-BASED ESL PROGRAM IN THE SOUTHEAST

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## ABSTRACT

The researcher conducted an in-depth descriptive study of a church-based ESL program, with ecological perspectives on language learning as the theoretical framework, and an embedded single case study as the research method. The study first examined the program as a whole by focusing on the role of the Christian religion in constructing a special educational space. It then investigated the perspectives of adult immigrant and international learners concerning their learning experiences. Finally, it explored how these adult students' learning experiences have impacted their parental involvement and social participation.

The findings of the study demonstrate that relational evangelism and servant evangelism function in forming a nurturing learning community in the program. The adult learners reach a consensus on the program's success in meeting their linguistic and social needs. They acknowledge that the program has played an important role in improving their communicative language skills and social adaptation. Their learning experiences in the program have helped them more actively involve themselves in community participation and their children's education.

The study is an attempt to bridge the gap in the field of research about church-based ESL programs. It proposes that future research pay more attention to the special learning context of and expertise within nonformal educational institutions.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who accompanied, encouraged, and supported me during the whole process of creating this document.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Definitions of Terms .....	4
Immigrant and International People.....	4
Faith-based vs. Church-based .....	4
Context.....	5
Community .....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Sociocultural Theory.....	8
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory .....	11
Lave and Wenger’s Community of Practice .....	14
Ecological Linguistics.....	16

Summary of the Theoretical Framework for the Present Study.....	22
Significance and Limitations of the Study .....	23
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	26
Religion and Language Education .....	27
Historical Perspective: The Contribution of Christianity in the History of Education..	27
Theoretical Perspective: Curran and Freire’s Pedagogies Derived from Theological...	28
Curran’s Pedagogical Perspectives .....	29
Freire’s Pedagogical Perspectives.....	32
Empirical Perspective: Recent Research on Religion and Language Education .....	34
Adult Language Learners and Adult ESL Programs.....	40
Immigrant Adult Language Learners .....	40
Affective Factor of Anxiety in Adults’ Learning L2.....	43
Immigrant Parental Involvement .....	45
Community-based Adult ESL Programs.....	47
Church-based Adult ESL Programs .....	51
Summary .....	52
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	54
Research Design.....	54
Qualitative Study .....	54
Case Study .....	57
Embedded Single Case Design .....	58
Researcher’s Role and Biases .....	59
Research Site and Participants .....	62

Research Site.....	62
Research Participants .....	64
Sampling Method for Selecting Main Student Participants.....	66
Data Collection .....	68
Observation .....	68
Interview .....	70
Questionnaire .....	73
Documents .....	76
Triangulation.....	77
Data Analysis .....	79
Research Trustworthiness .....	82
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS .....	85
Findings for Research Question One .....	85
Overview of Program.....	86
Curriculum and supplemental teaching materials.....	86
Placement test and student assessment .....	86
Teacher evaluation .....	87
Facility .....	87
Break time.....	87
Special events and activities .....	88
Outstanding themes of the Church-based ESL program.....	88
Love, care, and help .....	89
Relationship/friendship.....	90

Service.....	92
Openness and being pressure-free .....	92
Community .....	94
Religious framework of the Church.....	95
Findings for research question two .....	98
Findings from student interview .....	98
Reasons and goals for enrolling.....	99
Classroom learning experiences .....	100
Improvement in communicative language skills and social adaptation.....	101
Findings from questionnaire .....	103
Demographics of attending students.....	104
Achieving goals for enrolling .....	108
English language proficiency improvement .....	109
Social adaptation.....	110
Overall evaluation of the program .....	111
Findings from documents .....	112
Summary .....	112
Findings for Research Question Three .....	113
Subcase one: Ana .....	113
Subcase Two: Tabia.....	117
Subcase Three: Paula .....	122
Summary of the Three Subcases.....	127
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION .....	131

Summary of Findings.....	132
Summary of Findings for Research Question One .....	132
Summary of Findings for Research Question Two.....	133
Summary of Findings for Research Question Three.....	135
Summary of Findings for the Study as a Whole .....	136
Ecological Interpretations of the Case and Subcases of the Study .....	138
Findings in Relation to the Literature Review of Past Studies .....	139
Religion and Education.....	140
Adult Language Learners and Adult ESL Programs.....	145
Immigrants’ Parental Involvement.....	146
Implications.....	148
Implications for Researchers.....	148
Religion and Education.....	148
Church-based ESL Programs .....	149
Implication for Educators .....	149
Conclusion: A Critical Pedagogy of Space .....	151
REFERENCES .....	153
APPENDIX A Participant Information Form .....	166
APPENDIX B Five Interview Protocols for Different Groups of Participants .....	167
APPENDIX C Questionnaire for All Student Participants .....	172
APPENDIX D IRB Approval Notice.....	176

## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Teacher Interview Participants.....	65
2.	Student Interview Participants .....	66
3.	Main Student Participants .....	68
4.	Transcription Symbols .....	73
5.	Methods and Data Sources Used in Addressing Each Research Question .....	79
6.	Evangelical Methods and Their Relation to the Themes of the Program .....	98
7.	Students' Country of Origin.....	105
8.	Students' Demographics .....	107
9.	Comparison of the Three Main Student Participants as Subcases .....	127

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Responses for Questions on How Helpful the English Training at the Program in Improving Students' Four Language Skills..... 110
2. Responses for Questions on How Helpful the English Training at the Program in Students' Social Adaptation ..... 111

CHAPTER I:  
INTRODUCTION

Background

America has always been considered a country of immigrants. It is said that the United States has received about sixty million immigrants since its founding (Martin and Midgley, 1994). However, compared to the situation before World War II when the majority of immigrants came from Europe, in the last 30 years an increasingly large numbers of immigrants are arriving from very different language backgrounds, where the script may not use the Roman alphabet. Starting with an influx of immigrants from Mexico, the Philippines, China, Korea and Vietnam in the 1980s (Martin and Midgley, 1994), the recent immigrants coming from Asia and Latin America are becoming the two largest groups. Data from the US Current Population Survey and the US Census of Population and Housing show that of immigrants entering the US between 1990 and 2003, 58 percent came from Latin American and 26 percent from Asia.

With the rapid growth of immigrant families coming from non-English-speaking backgrounds into the United States, the number of ELLs (English language learners) has increased dramatically. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of English language learners enrolled in public schools increased by more than 100% to approximately 4.5 million nationally. In contrast, the general school population increased just 12%. By the year 2030, nearly 40% of all school-age children will be English language learners (Thomas & Collier, 2002) or children for whom English is not a first language (L1). How to teach ELLs is becoming an urgent problem in US schools and a heated issue in the field of education (Himmele & Himmele, 2009;

Hill & Flynn, 2006; Haynes, 2007).

### Statement of Problem

Comparatively speaking, immigrant adult education, especially adult ESL (English as a second language) is overlooked and underfunded. According to the statistics, among the recent immigrants an estimated 23.3 million adults are Limited English Proficient (LEP), (American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). This group of immigrants is in great need of English training since English proficiency is critical to increasing their participation in the economic and civic life of their communities. It is well acknowledged that English proficiency helps promote economic advancement, improved health, and civic participation. At the same time, it is an unavoidable fact that English plays a role in immigrant adults' parental involvement in their children's schoolings. While the LEP population is rapidly increasing, federal funding for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programs has actually declined over the course of the past four years. In 2006, only 1.2 million participants – a fraction of the LEP adult population – were enrolled in federally funded ESOL programs (Asian American Justice Center, 2006). While the challenge of integrating the newcomers of LEP immigrants is growing on a national level because of the lack of federal funding, society has seen a growth of community-based ESL programs, including church-based, which provide more spaces for language learning (Asian American Justice Center, 2006).

At the same time, in the academic field of language education, there is the growing recognition that learning language is a more complex process than just learning linguistic structures and language learning and using are shaped by sociopolitical processes. With this recognition, sociolinguistic and contextual approaches in second language (L2 ) research have gained more and more popularity over the past twenty years (Toohey, 1996; Cumming &

Burnaby, 1992). The fields of SLA (second language acquisition) and applied linguistics have seen a rapid growth of research in communities. Recent studies (Peirce, 1993; Willet, 1987, 1995) have encouraged investigators to pay particular attention to the importance of the social contexts in which a second language is learned, the learners' relations with the teachers and other participants in the community, and the various interactions and communications in different learning spaces. Under this circumstance, the researcher of the present study was inspired to examine the complex dynamics of L2 language learning with a specific interest in studying immigrant adult language learning in community-based (especially church-based) ESL programs.

#### Purpose of the Study

In the Southeastern Region of the US, where Christianity is the dominant culture and Baptist churches are thriving, the church-based ESL programs function as one of the main sources that provide English learning opportunities for newly arrived immigrants and international people. In a small college town situated in the area historically known as the Bible Belt, a Christian Baptist church is offering an ESL program to immigrant and international adults in the community to help with their language learning and social adaptation. With the interest of examining language learning and teaching in church which has received little attention in the field of educational research, the researcher in the present study intended to conduct a detailed descriptive study of the church-based ESL program. This study was interested in getting a holistic picture of the program by investigating the role of Christian religion in the formation of a learning community in the context of the church-based ESL program. Furthermore, this study was dedicated to investigating the perceptions of adult language learners concerning their learning experiences and improvement of English proficiency and social adaptation. In addition, this study also tried

to explore how immigrant and international adults' language learning experiences interact with their parental involvement in their children's education and social participation in local community.

The present study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. How does the religious framework of the institutional context mediate the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program?
2. How do the adult learners perceive their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program in regard to improvement of communicative language skills and social adaptation?
3. Given the adult language learners' experiences in the church-based ESL program, how do the adult learners involve themselves in their children's linguistic and academic development at home, in communication with their children's schools and teachers, and in the overall community activities?

### Definitions of Terms

#### *Immigrant and International People*

The learner participants of the church-based ESL program are immigrant and international people. *Immigrants* in the present study refer to people who come to live permanently in the US while *international people* refer to people who come to live temporarily in the US. Because the present study was situated in a college town, the international people are mostly composed of international students, visiting scholars, and their family members. Therefore, *immigrant and international people* in the present study refer to people who come from other countries or places to live permanently or temporarily in the US.

#### *Faith-based vs. Church-based*

The term *faith-based* refers to a variety of religious organizations. This study focused on Christian organizations, specifically Southern Baptist churches because the study took place in a small southeastern university town where the Southern Baptist faith is representative of the local population. For the purposes of this paper, the term *faith-based* includes any religious organization offering education, specifically English language classes to adult language learners; *church-based* refers specifically to Christian organizations providing English language classes to adult language learners.

### *Context*

Soldatova (1993) addresses the dynamic nature of context with the following statement: “research could be designed to hold a word or concept constant while varying the context or vice versa and the interest in the issue would be exhausted. But contemporary studies in a variety of disciplines force us to recognize that a context, too, is dynamic, fluid and complex” (cited in John-Steiner, Panofsky, & Smith, 1994, p. 10),.

According to Soldatova’s assertion, context is defined by the interactions of members of a social group, through the activities in which they engage during the communicative process. The definition of context goes beyond the common view of context in terms of physical location. The learning context, in the same token, is not just the physical location and the setting of the learning activity. Physical setting is just one contextual element. There are other elements, such as background of the teachers, prior knowledge of the students, the learning environment, the history, culture and structure of the educational institution, etc. (Alfred, 2002).

In the present study, the context of the church-based ESL program is defined as an integrated whole of the physical location of the church, the structure of the English classrooms in the church functioning as educational spaces, the historical and cultural background of the learners

and teachers, and the learning atmosphere and environment.

### *Community*

Community is an important concept in the present study. Gee (1990) cautions that we can not fully understand context unless it is situated with the social group with which we are concerned, which he refers to as a “Discourse” community.

The theory on community and its formation can be traced more than one hundred years ago. German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies ( [1887] 1957) uses the term "gemeinschaft" to describe the form of community. It is the pre-industrial community that is characterized by kinship, place, and mind.

Drawing heavily on the works of Tönnies, Sergiovanni (1994) forms his ideas about community and the role of communities in organizational development. He embraces Tönnies' categories of community form and gives them a further clarification. Community formed by kinship includes family and extended family. Community formed by place emerges from the sharing of common habitat or locale. A common understanding of community, such as “local community”, which is formed by residents in the same district/town, is a typical example of community formed by place. Community of mind refers to the bonding of people resulting from common goals, shared values, and a shared conception of being. Sergiovanni sees it as a transformation of an organized collection of individuals to a community of the mind (Sergiovanni, 1994) as the organization becomes an institution with purpose, values, and culture (Sergiovanni, 1996). To achieve this end, Sergiovanni describes an approach consistent with the development of a learning organization or in his view, a community. He suggests a “means, ways, ends” approach that focuses on the development of people. Individuals gather and form a social group for the same “purpose” of learning and each has their own “way” of participating

and contributing to the organized collection. By focusing on "ends" that reflect the shared values, purposes, and commitments of the organization, the participating people form a learning community.

The formation of community by kinship-place-mind serves well the defining of community in the present study. Community, as it appears throughout the paper, is a broad term, which refers to different groups of people bonding out of various situations. For instance, family as one kind of kinship, is one kind of community; the people living in the same neighborhood is a community resulted from place; the immigrant and international adult learners participating in the church-based ESL program form a community of mind out of the same purpose of learning English. One of the focal units of the study, the adult learners, are playing different roles situated in various communities: parents in the family, learners in the ESL learning community, and members trying to integrate in the local community, to name a few.

### Theoretical Framework

Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Lave and Wenger's community of practice, and ecological linguistics serve as the theoretical base for the present study. They all emphasize the importance of sociocultural forces in shaping the process of learning. And all of them, explicitly or implicitly, point to the crucial role played by teachers, peers and the community as various types of interaction occurring between learners and their environment. Therefore, they were applied in the present study as theories concerning the importance of mediation between adult learners and teachers and among adult learners themselves, of the interaction between learners and church environment, and of the connection between church as a place of learning and home as a place of educating their children as far as immigrant or international adult learners are concerned.

### *Sociocultural Theory*

The central theme of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is to understand human cognition and learning as social and cultural rather than individual phenomenon (Kozulin et al., 2003).

Vygotsky (1999) states that "human development is the product of a broader system of social connections and relations, of collective forms of behavior and social cooperation" (p. 41). Unlike the individualistic theory of learning, Vygotsky emphasizes that sociocultural forces are of vital importance in shaping the situation of child development and learning. Furthermore, he points out that parents, teachers, peers, and the community play a crucial role in defining the types of interaction between children and their environments within certain historical-cultural context.

The starting point of Vygotsky's theory of child development is what he terms the *social situation of development*. "The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period"; therefore, to study the dynamics of any age, one must first explain the social situation of development (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 198). Vygotsky thinks that the key to understanding the development/change in the psychological structure characteristics for each age period is a child's specific and comprehensive relationship to his/her environment within the social context (Chaiklin, 2003).

Within Vygotsky's broad theory on child development and educational psychology, the zone of proximal development (the ZPD) is one of the central concepts of his understanding of child development. The story of the ZPD concept begins with his genetic law of cultural development. Vygotsky's well known formulation is that:

Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes.

First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child

as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition....it goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57)

In this genetic law, Vygotsky explains cultural development as a two level process called internalization through which interpersonal and person-environment interaction forms and transforms one's internal mental functions. Based on this explanation, he develops the concept of ZPD and defines it as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). In other words, Vygotsky proposes that each child, in any domain, has an "actual developmental level", which can be assessed by testing him or her individually, and an immediate potential for development within that domain. This difference between the two levels is the zone of proximal development.

The ZPD emphasizes development through assistance by a more competent other and this assistance is meaningful in relation to maturing functions needed for transition to the next age period. Before the child goes to school (usually around the age of six), there are several critical periods of development. Thus, parents' assistance within the context of family will be crucial for the child's development before schooling. For the newly-arrived immigrant family, parents know the child's actual level of development far better than teachers in the US schools and therefore they can help the child to reach his/her potential level by providing appropriate assistance within

the ZPD. Immigrant parents with higher English proficiency might make an easier parental involvement in communicating with the teachers of the US schools about the child's current situation and potential room of development.

ZPD has proliferated most broadly among Vygotskian sociocultural theory of child development and his many contributions to cultural and educational psychology. Originally developed by Vygotsky to argue against the IQ test as a means to gauge students' intelligence, the concept is now used widely in studies (as summarized by Chaiklin, 2003) about teaching and learning in many subject-matter areas, including reading, writing, mathematics, science, and second language learning (e.g., Dunn & Lantolf, 1998). It is also applied in studies with diverse kinds of pupils, including both gifted and struggling students, and with people of various ages, from preschool children (e.g., Smith, 1993) to adults (e.g., Kilgore, 1999). Besides the previous discussion of the ZPD's application in parental involvement in immigrant families, which is part of the present study, ZPD can also be used to analyze the immigrant adults' learning and development with the assistance of learners with higher English proficiency and the guidance of the teachers in the church-based ESL program. For Vygotsky, the teacher (or competent peer) acts as a facilitator and the provider of assistance. Teachers (or other competent students) perform a great service to students by providing any forms of assistance that might help students develop their language and cultural skills. In the L2 classroom, Vygotsky's idea of assistance might include a hint or clue, a word of praise, a suggestion, a learning strategy, a grammar/vocabulary reminder, etc. It can be anything that a particular second language learner gets at a given time. In the church-based ESL classes, the facilitating or helping activities and actions from the teachers or among the learners will be one of the main classroom observation focuses to study the construction of language learning and teaching in the present study.

The sociocultural theory is constructed with social constructivist epistemology (Oxford, 1997). Vygotsky recognizes that human cognition and learning has social origins and human thoughts and ideas are constructed through communication with others. Sociocultural theory provides theoretical backbone of the present study which explored language learning through a communicative and interactive social process.

### *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory*

In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979, 1989), development is defined as "a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment" (1979, p.3). Thereof, he endows vital importance to the evolving interaction between people and the environment. He then proceeds to define environment as "a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (1979, p. 22). Bronfenbrenner posits that human development must be studied in natural contexts and not in a laboratory because development is a process that is influenced by relations among human beings, their immediate natural settings and the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. As a human develops, the natural setting(s) influences the person and the person influences the natural setting; development is a reciprocal and dynamic process. The natural setting is not limited to the immediate surroundings, but includes the extended structures.

To be specific, there are four levels of systems or four environmental layers in Bronfenbrenner's model of development in context (1979) that encompass children or young people: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. A microsystem is defined as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (1979, p. 22). It is the innermost environmental layer. The microsystem includes those groups of people, e.g., family,

peers, classroom and schools, community-based organization, and neighborhoods that immediately affect the child in early life. Not only are children influenced by the people in their microsystem, their characteristics and behaviors influence the companions as well. The mesosystem, the second layer, is defined as the relationships and interactions between and among the microsystem as family, school, and peer-group. Although it is speculated that children do not participate directly at the mesosystemic level, this level does exert a powerful influence upon them. Young people's success in school may depend on, in addition to interactions with teachers and other school personnel, how the family and school relate to each other. The third layer, the exosystem, is defined as settings that do not have direct contact with youth but in which decisions are made that directly influence the child or the child's microsystem, e.g., the parent's learning and working environment. Lastly, the macrosystem is defined as the values and ethics of society's institutions that represent the structural and ideological foundations of all systems. A macrosystem is the broader social and cultural context in which the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem are embedded. This system includes understandings and views about the nature of human beings and about what children need to be taught to function in society as adults. As far as children are concerned, the macrosystem is an overarching ideology including all the aspects of raising and educating children. It can greatly influence the experiences children have in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and all other contexts that affect them in a direct or indirect way (Shaffer, 2000).

Even though Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is originated by the study of the development of children and young people, the theory is applicable to people of all ages since there is no age boundary on the notion of development. All people are situated and embedded in various environmental layers and social contexts. Adults can also be seen at the center of the four

ecological systems.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory fits very well in the theoretical framework of the present study that is located in various layers of social contexts. The adult language learners, especially parent learners, are situated in the microsystem as family, mesosystems as the ESL program, and exosystem as their children's schools.

One point needing iterating is that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is an environmentalist perspective on development. It focuses on the environmental influences. In the present study of an ESL program under the special educational environment of church, one of the main research questions is how the religious framework of the church-based institutional context influences the construction of language teaching and learning in the ESL program.

In addition, the concept of "ecological transition" in the ecological systems theory is also very important in the present study on the part of the social adaptation of immigrant adults and their children. As defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), "an ecological transition occurs whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both" (P. 26). The notion emphasizes the crucial development in setting changes.

Bronfenbrenner asserts that the interconnections between settings are very important; they can be as important as what actually takes place within a setting. Concerning children's development, the interconnections between their two main settings, home and school, are quite influential in their education. Bronfenbrenner states that one way to link two settings is through intersetting communications, messages that provide specific information about the child in one setting to persons in another setting. And in the case of children's education, parents are the best message-delivering persons to do the intersetting communications between home and school by providing information of children's situation at home to teachers at school. As for children from

immigrant families, the immigrant parents' English proficiency is of vital importance to function as the message-delivering person. Part of the present study explored how immigrant parents involve themselves in communicating with their children's teachers and schools given their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program. Furthermore, for immigrant adults and children who have experienced an enormous ecological transition of the change of resident country and the change of social and cultural environment, the study of their development in English language proficiency and cultural adjustment is worth special attention.

#### *Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice*

Lave and Wenger (1991) put forward the notion of community of practice in their famous work "Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation." Based on the studies of different kinds of apprenticeship, Lave and Wenger state that a community of practice is formed by social subgroups, such as the tailors or midwives, who are engaged in social activities of some common professions. Instead of being explicitly taught, apprentices learn the skills required in these activities by actually participating and engaging in the practices together with expert members. Lave and Wenger assert that learning to participate in the sociocultural practices of a community is not "merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership" (1991, p. 53).

Lave and Wenger view learning as situated activity, what they term "Situated learning." Their defining of the situatedness of activity goes beyond the general conception of the locatedness of people's thoughts and actions in space and time. Rather, they emphasize "the relational character of knowledge and learning," "the negotiated character of meaning," and "the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved" (1991, p. 33). Subsequently, Lave and Wenger (1991) form the concept of "legitimate peripheral

participation” to describe the process by which the newcomers become part of a community of practice through situated learning. “Peripheral” does not mean “at the edge” or “opposed to central” as the common usage of the word. Instead, “peripheral” is used here to suggest the multiple and varied ways in which a learner or an apprentice can be located in a social practice. Hanks (1991) explains the multiple ways of participation of the mode of legitimate peripheral participation by elaborating that an apprentice does not merely occupy “a particular role at the edge of a larger process,” but “engages by simultaneously performing in several roles — status subordinate, learning practitioner, sole responsible agent in minor parts of the performance, aspiring expert, and so forth — each implying a different sort of responsibility, a different set of relations, and a different interactive involvement” (p. 23).

Even though Lave and Wenger (1991) derive their idea of legitimate peripheral participation by studying apprenticeship, they intend its implication in all kinds of learning in a much broader sense. They explain that legitimate peripheral participation is “an analytical viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning” (p. 40). They propose that this central concept can be applied to any educational setting:

... learning through legitimate peripheral participation takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional educational form at all. (p. 40)

The approach of Lave and Wenger (1991) has been applied widely in the field of human science, education, and even in the field of second language acquisition (Toohey, 1996; Haneda, 1997) after its publication. The concepts brought forward by Lave and Wenger, such as community of practice, situated learning, and legitimate peripheral participation, speak to the present study of investigating the English learning in the church-based ESL program. Lave

and Wenger define community of practice with focus on the set of relations among people, activity and the world. They see learning as socially situated and constituted by relations among members of the community. Hanks' foreword (1991) summarizes Lave and Wenger's approach precisely:

Rather than defining learning as the acquisition of propositional knowledge, Lave and Wenger situate learning in certain forms of social coparticipation. Rather than asking what kinds of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kind of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place. (p. 14)

Learning is a process that takes place in a participating framework, not in an individual mind. ... It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who 'learn' under this definition. Learning is, as it were, distributed among coparticipants, not a one-person act. (p. 15)

Through the lens of community of practice, the researcher of the present study saw the formation of a community of learning by the coparticipation of adult learners and volunteering teachers in the church-based ESL program. Instead of studying learning as an individual cognitive process, the present study intended to explore the learning in this ESL program with specific interest in the various relations among adult learners (some are newcomers while some are old-timers), and between learners and teachers. It also investigated the different levels of interactions among and between participants in the program and the contextual elements, such as the physical settings of the classes within the church, the learning environment, the historical, cultural and structural characteristics of the church, etc.

### *Ecological Linguistics*

Before starting the discussion of ecological linguistics, it is necessary to have a look at second language acquisition theories.

Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991) categorizes SLA theories into three types: nativist, environmentalist, and interactionist theories of SLA.

Nativist theories are theories that seek to explain language acquisition by “positing an innate biological endowment that makes learning possible” (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 227). Nativism believes that children are endowed with an “acquisition device” which is an innate system that both guides and supplements people’s interaction with experience (O’grady, 2003). Chomsky’s Universal Grammar (UG) is a typical example of this type. Chomsky (1965) claims that humans are innately endowed with universal language-specific knowledge. For Chomsky, the inborn acquisition device has a grammatical component which he calls UG. UG is defined by O’grady (2003) as “a system of categories and principles that is taken to determine many of the core properties of human language” (p. 44). Therefore, Chomsky’s UG is also called grammatical nativism. There is another type of nativism called general nativism. Theories developed in this group include Marin Braine (1987), Dan Slobin (1985), etc. With contrast to grammatical nativism, general nativism believes in innate acquisition device for general cognitive notions but denies that it includes a component with grammatical categories or principles. That is, general nativism does not believe that grammatical knowledge is inborn; rather, grammar is the product of the interaction of the acquisition device with experience (O’grady, 2003). Still other works on nativism (Dulay & Burt 1975; Felix, 1985) claim that the innate endowment involves both linguistic principles and general cognitive notions. However, all nativist theories of SLA believe in acquisition device endowment.

Environmentalist theories of learning deem that an organism’s nurture, or experience, is

more important to development than its nature, or innate endowment. They even claim that innate device plays no role at all except that it provides the organism with the internal structure that environmental forces can proceed to shape (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Behaviorist and neo-behaviorist stimulus-response learning theories, such as those of Skinner (1957), are best known examples of this group. Environmentalist theories of SLA take constructivist view of language acquisition. Constructivism denies there is an inborn acquisition device for language acquisition and claims that language acquisition is the result of everyday experience and analysis of the language input with the mechanism no difference from other knowledge acquisition. Among various tribes of constructivism, connectionism with its dynamic models has been advanced because its advantages in explaining how complex and specific language structure can emerge from generic learning mechanisms (Ellis, 2003). PDP (Parallel Distributed Processing), proposed by Rumelhart & McClelland (1986), has become one of the most applied connectionist theories to the field of SLA. PDP theorists hold that learning is based on the processing of input while the input processing does not result in the buildup of rules. Instead, learning is, in Larsen-Freeman & Long's (1991) words, "held to consist of the strengthening and weakening of connections in complex neural networks as a function of the frequency of stimuli in the input" (p. 250). In summary, environmentalist theories of SLA seek to explain language acquisition by emphasizing external/environmental variables while neglecting cognitive processing.

Interactionist theories of SLA embrace both innate and environmental factors to explain language acquisition. Interactionists think nativist or environmentalist factors alone can not handle the explanation of LA (language acquisition) or SLA which is such a complex issue. While they share the general characteristic, interactionist theories of SLA differ greatly from one another. In Larsen-Freeman & Long's (1991) review of the different interactionist theories,

Givon's Functional-Typological Theory (1979, 1984) and Hatch's Experience Model (Hatch, 1978; Hatch, Flashner & Hunt, 1986) are mentioned and contrasted. Givon's Functional-Typological Theory is functionalist in its view that syntax "emanate[s] from properties of human discourse" (Givon, 1979, p. 49). Givon claims that syntax change is driven "primarily by psycholinguistic and pragmatic principles relating to speech perception and production in face-to-face interaction" (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 267). In contrast, Hatch's Experience Model draws on social, cognitive and linguistic theory and on findings from discourse analyses of first and second language acquisition for their framework for studying and explaining SLA.

Influenced by environmentalist and interactionist theories of LA and SLA, educational linguist van Lier (1996, 2000, 2004) and psycholinguists Leather and van Dam (2003) picked up the "ecology" metaphor which has emerged in other fields, and developed the ecological perspective of language learning. Ecology is the study of organisms and their relations with one another and their environment. With the "ecology" metaphor, the dynamic interaction between language users and the environment is vividly compared to the relationship between parts of a living organism. This ecological perspective emphasizes the importance of language learning environment. Van Lier states his view of language as a semiotic activity, which is defined as "a nonlinear, emergent process of learning making, based on the relationality between signs and the triadic interaction between the self, the other, and the environment, resulting in various processes of sign making" (Kramsch, 2002, p.7).

Ecological linguistics is composed of four basic constructs proposed by van Lier (2002, p. 146):

1. Language *emerges* from semiotic activity.

2. Language does not arise from input that is processed, but from *affordances* that are brought forth by active engagement, and which enable further action and interaction.
3. Language is not transmitted from person to person by way of monolog or dialog, but arises from indicational processes occurring in *triadic interaction*.
4. Linguistic activity in particular contexts can be analyzed in terms of *quality*.

In a word, emergence, affordance, triadic interaction, and quality are the four characterizing features of ecological linguistics. Emergence, in ecological studies, happens when relatively simple organisms or elements reorganize themselves into more complex and more intelligent systems (van Lier, 2004). In the perspective of ecological linguistics, it is used to state that language emerges as an embodied and situated activity. As articulated by van Lier, speaking “is always a part of a context of meaning-producing actions, interlocutors, objects, and relations among all these” (2002, p. 146).

*Affordance*, coined by the psychologist James Gibson (1979), refers to the reciprocal relationship between an organism and a particular feature of its environment. Van Lier (2004) extends the concept of *affordance* in the realm of language learning: an affordance expresses a relationship between a person, interlocutor or addressee, and a linguistics expression, or a speech act; linguistic affordances picked up are relevant at the moment of speech; after being picked up, these affordances promote further action and higher levels of interaction. The concept of *affordance* applied by ecological linguistics indicates that the ecological perspective on language learning focuses on the ways individuals relate to each other and to the environment by means of linguistic and other sign systems.

*Interaction* is a central ingredient in the ecological perspective on language learning as

advanced by van Lier (2000), as it is in sociocultural theory. Among various interpretations of interaction, negotiation of meaning is always highlighted since it indicates a learning process of making an incomprehensible piece of language to become comprehensible. Triadic interaction proposed by ecological linguistics is a dynamic interaction between the sign, the object (which the sign stands for), and the meaning of the sign. By using triadic interaction as opposed to dyadic interaction which is common of the two-way communication tasks in second language classrooms, ecological linguistics emphasizes the role of sign in language transmission.

By using *quality*, van Lier (2004) cautions the distinction between educational standards and the quality of education. Compared to traditional education design and research which exclusively addresses the product, ecological linguistics advocates the value of research to investigate the quality of educational experience.

Ecological educators see language and learning as relationships among learners and between learners and the environment. Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers favoring ecological linguistics have a tendency to study L2 learning using a community to examine the interaction between L2 learners and other community members, and the influence of environments/social settings of the community on the learning process of L2 learners. Viewing second language learning through the lenses of ecological linguistics, the researcher of the present study picked up church as a special ESL learning space or environment with the dedication to study the relationships among immigrant or international adult learners in the church-based ESL learning community, and between the adult learners and the religious framework of the church environment. With the view that language is emergent and dynamic, the researcher observed how different kinds of affordances are emerged and picked up by language learners' participating activities in class, and how this made language points which were not

comprehensible before become comprehensible after negotiating of meaning among learners and between learners and teachers in the program. Rather than the learning outcomes which can be evaluated by ESL standards, the learning experiences of the immigrant or international adult learners in the church-based ESL program were the valued research emphasis of the present study.

#### *Summary of the Theoretical Framework for the Present Study*

All the theories listed above can be said to come from an ecological perspective in one sense or another. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and ecological linguistics, needless to say, are approaches referred to as ecological. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, according to the analysis of van Lier (2000, 2004), is an ecological approach to cognition, learning and language. Referring to Lave and Wenger's community of practice theory, a typical approach of viewing learning "as a process of becoming a member of a certain community" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6), Sfard would put it in the group PM (a new metaphor, participation) which he observes has newly emerged in the education literature. As summarized by Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), the distinctive feature between AM (the traditional learning as acquisition metaphor) and PM is that AM focuses on "the individual mind and the internalization of knowledge" while PM stresses "contextualization and engagement with others" (p. 156); in the field of SLA, AM is more about *what* in SLA while PM is about the *how*. According to Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), van Lier's ecological perspective on language learning is under the big umbrella of PM. Therefore, it leads to the conclusion that Lave and Wenger's theory of community of practice has some commonality with ecological linguistics. They share ecological perspective on learning with a focus on the relationships and interactions among people and between people and environment through people's social participation and active engagement in certain context.

Since the four theories share ecological perspective on learning and education, the present study, besides what has been elaborated in sections above of the connection and implication of each theory to it, chose to look at the church-based ESL program with ecological perspectives. It explored the dynamic interactions among immigrant or international adult learners, between learners and teachers, and between participants and the church environment during language teaching and learning in the church-based context.

### Significance and Limitations of the Study

Church has played a very important role in the history of education. Recognizing the contribution of faith communities in educating children, the Bush Government advocated for stronger allies of schools and religious organizations for better implementation of No Child Left Behind Act. George W Bush (<http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/faith/leaders.html>) once said that “the indispensable and transforming work of faith-based and other charitable service groups must be encouraged. Government cannot be replaced by charities, but it can and should welcome them as partners.” Besides what church or other faith-based organizations have done throughout history and are doing presently in educating children, they also provide their services to adult learners and contribute to integrating newcomers of immigrants by offering ESL classes to improve their English proficiency and social/cultural adaptation skills. Kristjánsson (2003) reports that 19% of all non-government sponsored English language services are provided by churches in the area of the Greater Vancouver Regional District in Canada. In addition, an online search can find quite a few church-based or church-sponsored ESL programs in every major city of USA.

Comparing to the great contribution of church-based programs to ESL education and the large number of these service providers, there is little in the existing literature that addresses the

role of church-based ESL programs in helping newcomers of immigrant or international adults in language learning and adjustment process; there is even less that explores the specific relations and interactions between learners, teachers, and the church environment within the learning community formed by adults learners and volunteer teachers in the unique church-based institutional contexts. The present study of a church-based ESL program in the southeastern region of USA is an attempt to begin to bridge the gap in the literature concerning church-based programs in the field of adult ESL education

Morgan (2002) recognizes that the ESL field is currently experiencing a period of experimentation and debate over methods, goals, and basic beliefs. With the growth of various perspectives, for example, spiritual, aesthetic, and ecological, he advocates that teacher educators and researchers should “consider the unique forms of expertise already developed by many teachers working in nonformal settings” (p. 157), specifically church. The present study addresses the context and form of expertise developed in one church-based program with the influence of the religious framework, discusses the reasons why the program can attract immigrant and international adult learners, and investigates the learners’ perspectives on their learning experiences in the program. In addition to contributing to the general discussion of ESL education in the USA, the study also makes a contribution to the discussion of expertise in nonformal programs as suggested by Morgan. The expertise is particularly referred to expertise in building a learning community with love and care, and in reducing the effect of affective factor of anxiety, which is a common problem with adult learners. Similar to what was proposed by Bush Government, the study intends more powerful allies between formal institutions, such as schools and universities, and nonformal education organizations, church-based or other community-based programs, to work towards the common goal of providing better services and

education to people in need.

The study has its limitations. Because it based on being a single case study, the features and characteristics of the present church-based ESL program are not representative of those of all church-based ESL programs. Therefore, what is observed and investigated of the program cannot be generalized to other similar ESL programs. However, this case study provides an in-depth description of one church-based ESL program, which will inform the academic field of what is taking place in the unique learning space and remind the field of the great potential of research beyond the walls of formal education institutions. In addition, the expertise found in the program provides a value of reference to other adult ESL programs.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 introduces the background and purpose of the study and gives an overview of the present study with general ideas and considerations. The theoretical framework provided is also meant to guide the study in a broad sense. Starting from this chapter, the writing is narrowed down with focus on the specific research questions proposed for the study. This chapter gives a literature review organized with related theories and studies to address each of the research questions. Therefore, it is necessary to review the three research questions before reviewing the literature. The three research questions are:

1. How does the religious framework of the institutional context mediate the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program?
2. How do the adult learners perceive their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program in regard to improvement of communicative language skills and social adaptation?
3. Given the adult language learners' experiences in the church-based ESL program, how do the adult learners involve themselves in their children's linguistic and academic development at home, in communication with their children's schools and teachers, and in the overall community activities?

Analytically speaking, the first question is concerned with the exploration of the relation between religion and language education with specific interest in the role of religion in forming a special language teaching and learning environment. Both the second and the third question are

about adult language learners' learning and social experiences in relation to the church-based ESL program. Accordingly, the chapter is composed of two main sections: one is religion and language education; the other is adult language learners and adult ESL programs.

### Religion and Language Education

This section on the connection of religion and language education is elaborated from three perspectives: the historical perspective of the contribution of Christianity in the history of education in general and foreign/second language education in particular, the theoretical perspective of the famous pedagogies in relation to their theological background, and the empirical perspective of the recent research on religion and language education.

#### *Historical Perspective: The Contribution of Christianity in the History of Education*

Christianity has played an important role in the history of education of the whole western world. Christians have been establishing schools for over 20 centuries. Those who sought to become members of the Christian Church went through a two to three year teaching program where they were catechized. According to Cubberley (2004), in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD, Justin Martyr established catechetical schools in Ephesus and Rome; and Titus Flavius Clemens (known as Clement of Alexandria) established an excellent school in Alexandria. In the school at Alexandria, besides theological study, there was instruction in philology, rhetoric, philosophy, and mathematics. By the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, church and cathedral schools, maintained by pastors, had taught Christian doctrine, grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy (Kemp, 1912). Christianity aimed at universal education, teaching both the rich and the poor, male and female. Kennedy & Newcombe documented in their book *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born* (1994) that the phenomenon of education for the masses has its roots in Christianity. From the fifth to the twelfth century the monastery was the dominant factor in the

education of Western Europe (Kemp, 1912). In this period of monastic education, Christianity exerted great influences. At the end of this time the modern university emerged. The first universities, such as Oxford, Yale, Cambridge, were all founded by Christian ministers.

In addition to the great contribution of Christianity to education in general, Christian faith has also played a significant role in the history of the specific field of foreign/second language education. Christians have always been interested in foreign language learning because they are involved in missionary work and they need to translate and interpret the Bible. Ramon Lull and Roger Bacon were two outstanding figures in the early middle ages for advocating the necessity of foreign languages for Christianity (Smith & Carvill, 2000). Lull, throughout his whole life, resolved to urge rulers and popes to found colleges for foreign language instruction as a prelude to sending out missionaries. Bacon insisted that the Western Church turn its attention to learning the languages of others and preaching in others' first languages. Since the time of the Reformation, Christian scholars and thinkers have made more direct contribution to the pedagogy of foreign/second language education. Comenius, known as one of the greatest figures in the history of education, was a language teacher who based his way of teaching on a consciously Christian philosophy. Comenius advocated learning vocabulary in content, and turning to the worldly things and everyday human activity in the pages of language textbooks. His ideas on how to teach languages laid the foundations for modern language education (Smith & Carvill, 2000).

#### *Theoretical Perspective: Curran and Freire's Pedagogies Derived from Theological Background*

Even though Christianity has made great contributions in foreign language education in history, there is little literature directly focusing on the role of religion in general or Christianity in particular in the academic field of foreign/second language education. However, a thorough

examination of the pedagogies proposed by some influential scholars and educators shows the connections of their pedagogies to their theological background. Charles A. Curran's pedagogy of Community Language Learning (CLL) and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000 [1970]) and *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994 [1992]) are outstanding examples. Both scholars emphasize the importance of relationships in the learning environment, which stemmed from their anthropologies rooted in their theologies (Kristjánsson, 2003). Though most published discussions of their works in language education literature make limited mention of explicit theological influences on their pedagogies, they both themselves make explicit mention of this influence. Since their pedagogical approaches have implications for second language educators who work with immigrants, a review of their pedagogies in relation to theological influences will serve the present study which will explore the influences of religious frameworks on the church-based ESL program providing services to immigrant and international adult learners.

*Curran's Pedagogical Perspectives.* Charles A. Curran was a Catholic priest and professor of psychology. He recognizes a complementary relationship between theology and psychology with focus on the influences of theology: "we can see this concept of 'correspondence' as theological or psychological depending on one's focus. Consequently, conceptions generally considered theological can also shed significant light on the nature of man himself and on the encounter between man" (1969, p. 175).

Curran put forward the pedagogy of CLL for the language teaching profession starting in the early seventies (Curran, 1972, 1976) and attained prominence in the field of linguistics and second language learning (Stevick 1976a, 1980). Departing from the overemphasis on the cognitive, and working towards the affective aspects of learners, Curran proposed CLL as a pedagogy that worked to combine and apply the emotions and personal experiences of the

student into the learning process (Smith & Carvill, 2000).

Realizing the destructive role some affective factors played in foreign/second language learning, such as conflict, hostility, anger and anxiety (Curran, 1983), Curran claims that the nonthreatening counseling relationship provided the optimal environment for learning. Adapting insights and skills from the counseling relationship to foreign/second language instruction, Curran created a learning situation with the characterization of security and group support and thus entitled it “Community Language Learning”. In CLL, the language instructor is empathic to each learner’s situation and feeling and facilitative of each learner’s acquisition process. The supportive relationship between instructor and learners is formed in the classroom with a warmly affirming sense of community. The learners are learning in an atmosphere of trust and support, and thus learners are more aware and articulate regarding their specific needs, which enables instructor and learners to be more efficient and effective in the task of acquiring the target foreign/second language (Samimy & Rardin, 1994). Therefore, it is most important in CLL to construct a deep relationship between instructor and learners basing on human belonging, worth and sharing (Curran, 1972).

Curran’s model of CLL is summarized by Stevick (1980) in the following way:

The learners sit in a closed circle, with the knower(s) outside. The learners say in their native language whatever they want to say to one another. As they do so, the knower stands behind the speaker and gives the corresponding expressions in the target language. During the conversation, the target language sentences of the learners, and nothing else, are recorded on tape. After 10 minutes or so of conversation, the tape is played back and used in various ways. (p. 115)

Learning proceeds through five stages in CLL (Curran, 1972). The first stage is called the

“embryonic stage” since the learner is totally dependent on the knower/language counselor/teacher to facilitate speech in the foreign/second language. The learner is in control of what and how he wants to speak. He expresses to the knower in his first language, and the knower provides the target-language equivalents in a warm, accepting tone. Then the learner speaks to the whole group in the target language, which is tape-recorded. The feeling of maximum security with full dependency on the knower and the knower’s non-directive and warm acceptance eases the learner’s anxiety. In stage two, the “self-assertion stage”, the learner begins to speak to the group using phrases learned in the first stage. With this beginning independence, the learner gains some confidence and ability. In the third stage, the “separate existence stage”, the learner has more independence in speaking in the target language to the group, and assistance by the knower is resented out of the growing confidence and ego. Stage four is called the “reversal stage” because there is the subtle transition of role/identity between the knower and the learner --- the knower becomes the client and the learner becomes the counselor. Smith (1997) explains the transition as “the learner is now responsible to create the accepting, affective conditions under which the knower can offer the rest of his or her knowledge” (p. 165). In the final stage, the “independent stage”, the learner is able to carry out independent and free communication in the target language and the knower’s role becomes silent presence with the purpose of reinforcing correctness of grammar and pronunciation.

In clarifying the differences between theories and procedures of language teaching, Anthony (1963) proposes a scheme with three levels of conceptualization and organization: approach, method, and technique. He defines approach as “a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning”, method as “an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material” and technique as “a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance

used to accomplish an immediate objective” (1963, p. 63-67). Based on these definitions, Richards & Rodgers (2001) analyzes that CLL is a method rather than an approach since Curran wrote little about his theory of language. Curran’s student La Forge (1983) makes effort to be more explicit about the theory/approach supporting CLL. He comes up with the theory referred as *Language as Social Process* which emphasizes the interactional nature of language communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

*Freire’s Pedagogical Perspectives.* Paulo Freire is an influential 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar in the field of education. His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, has been translated in several languages and published all over the world. In the preface of the book, he indirectly mentions his combined philosophy of Christianity and Marxism (2000 [1970] , p. 37). Though Marxism is more associated with his great works, Freire himself also emphasizes the spiritual influence of Christianity in his life and work (e.g. Freire, 1984, p. 547-548). Kristjánsson (2003) mentions that in the book published a year before Freire’s death, *Letters to Cristina*, Freire reiterates the importance of the theological underpinnings: “Something else explains my political pedagogical beliefs, something that cannot be underestimated, much less rejected...: my Christian upbringing” (Freire, 1996, p. 86). In addition, Freire frequently uses theological metaphors in his works (e.g. 2000; 1984), such as death and rebirth, incarnation, redemption, salvation, the Word, and the Exodus, and explicitly referred to the Church, Christ, the Gospels, and the Good News (1984; Kennedy, 1984). Therefore, it is important to take into account the influence of spiritual roots on his educational thought, especially in his understanding of the human being and horizontal relationships.

Freire (1973) positions people as transcendent relational historical beings. Instead of being dehumanized Objects acted upon by oppressive forces, people should try to be fully human. In

other words, human should try to be the Subjects of decision, who are able to reflect and act upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 2000). Humanization, or to be fully human, is the goal of liberating education. Kristjánsson (2003) gives an explanation of this key concept based on Elias (1994) translation of the omitted passage in the English translation of the first chapter of Freire's first book (1973):

Freire's notion of humanization includes two aspects. First, it presupposes an understanding of human beings in spiritual relationship with God. This relationship, represented by religious expression, is a relationship of love and liberation. Second, the liberating relationship which exists between people and their creator is to be the model for relationships between individuals and within society. (p. 44)

Freire's educational philosophy centers on humanization which stems from the love of God. According to Freire, true humanization occurs when people experience liberating relationships that are modeled after the relationship between people and God. This interaction is characterized by more than respect; it derives, in the aspect of education, from a teacher-student relationship rooted in radical self-giving on the part of the teacher. Referring to the Christian belief in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who as God, voluntarily took the form of a human so as to liberate human beings from spiritual alienation from God, Freire states that liberating relationships require a educator to give up his/her god-like position to more effectively relate to others. In an educational context, this kind of relationship will make the students interact better with the teacher, which produces the potential of transformation.

The theological underpinnings and rationale of Curran's CLL and Freire's educational proposals bring insights to the present study to examine the influence of the religious framework of the church-based institutional contexts on the construction of language teaching and learning.

Since the two pedagogical perspectives both emphasize teacher-student relationship in education, the study was inspired to explore the dynamic relationships between volunteer teachers and adult immigrant and international learners.

*Empirical Perspective: Recent Research on Religion and Language Education*

While there exist extensive discussions on the implications of Christian belief in particular or religion and spirituality more generally for some academic fields, say, natural science, psychology or literary theory, and the literature of the field of religion education or Christian education itself has proliferated, there are scarce scholarly studies addressing the connection between religion and language education (Smith, 2000a). Wherever the role of religion in language education has been discussed, the focus has tended to be on the relationship between language education and religious communication, such as teaching English abroad as a Christian mission (Smith, 2009). Among the results of related studies after a search on “religion and language education”, a high percentage of them are about intercultural encounters along with the teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language over the whole world for evangelistic purposes (Edge, 1996; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Pennycook & Makoni, 2005; Purgason, 2004; Snow, 2001). Snow’s book-length study, *English Teaching as Christian Mission: An Applied Theology* (2001) is a typical study in this aspect.

Snow begins the book by examining teaching English as a second/foreign language (TESL/TEFL) as a Christian vocation / Christian service. He then discusses the specific roles in missions that Christian English teachers (CETs) can play worldwide: that of reconciler between God and man, nation and nation, Western church and non-Western church. In the mean time, Snow encourages CETs to be humble and respectful learners of the customs and languages of their host culture. In answering the question of “what does it mean to teach English in the name

of Christ”, Snow subsequently makes a detailed discussion and illustration on how to bear witness, engage in ministry, serve the poor, contribute to peace and intercultural understanding, and bridge the communication between churches on the part of CETs. Snow’s way of addressing the question and the conclusions of the book is much inspired from his own years of overseas ESL teaching experiences

The aforementioned and reviewed studies on the connection between religion and language education are delimited by their discussion of language teaching as a Christian mission from the theological perspective and the attention on the role of religion in just the aims of language education. With the development of ecological perspective on language education which reconceptualizes the classroom as an ecology (Kramsch, 2002; Leather & van Dam, 2003) and understands language acquisition as a result of the interacting of a wide range of factors, religion, as one factor, is given more attention in the field of language education. There emerge studies exploring the roles of religion and spirituality in foreign or second language pedagogy (Smith, 2000a, 2000b, 2009). One work worth special attention is Smith & Carvill’s book-length study, *the Gift of the Stranger: Faith, Hospitality, and Language Learning* (2000). It explores the implications of the Christian faith on the goal, content and methods of foreign or second language education. It addresses the role of Christian faith in foreign language education in such directness and extensiveness that it is regarded as a landmark study in this aspect.

The book begins with an introduction of biblical and historical background of the study. After a study of biblical themes, most important of all, of “stranger” and “hospitality”, and a historical review on important contributions that Christians have made to the development of foreign language instruction over the past two thousand years, Smith and Carvill (2000) bring forward the central theme and proposal of the book that “foreign language education prepare

students for two related callings: to be a blessing as strangers in a foreign land, and to be hospitable to strangers in their own homeland” (p. 57-58). They give further explanation of the theme subsequently:

students who become strangers in a foreign land are called to be a blessing to the locals by speaking in the locals’ tongue, by listening to their stories and sharing their own, by asking good questions, by comparing and contrasting, by learning from them – in short, by using the special freedom and responsibility an educated stranger has in the host country for being a loving presence. Similarly, students also are called to become good hosts to the foreigner or alien in their own land, to receive the stranger graciously, and to practice a kind of hospitality that is a blessing to both the guest and the host. Both callings, we propose, make up the very heart of foreign language education. (p. 58)

The book next discusses how the twofold calling of foreign language education can be implemented in daily practice in the language classroom and reviews some teaching materials in foreign language classrooms examining their adequateness in preparing students to successfully reach the goal of hospitality to strangers. In the end, the book attends to the role religion/belief plays in the construction of teaching methods in foreign language instruction. It is stated that “although particular beliefs do not give rise to unique individual techniques, they do shape the overall pattern of teaching” (p. xiv).

Ecological and sociocultural perspective on language education emphasizes the situatedness of language teaching and learning. That is, classroom interactions and discursive practices are embedded within larger social structures and particular institutional contexts. In the literature on religion and language education, there have been some studies on the interaction between

religious institutional contexts and language education (Baquedano-López, 2003; De Vries, 2002; Farr, 2000; Foster, 1997; Pritchard & Loulidi, 1994; Reyes, 2002; Vos-Camy, 2005; Warschauer, 1998; Yorba-Gray, 2006). Smith (2007) has made a brief review of recent studies in this aspect. Since religious institutional contexts include generally faith-based schools/universities and churches, the present study reviewed the literature with the categorization of dividing the studies into two groups: one group of studies in faith-based schools/universities and the other in churches.

In the first group of studies concerning faith-based schools/universities, Foster (1997) writes a first person narrative on how she became a language educator. Foster recollects her memory of growing up and being educated in catholic school throughout her entire elementary and secondary school years, which influenced her teaching style and practice when she became a teacher and professor. What impresses Foster most is religious dedication of the nuns in Catholic school who take serious responsibility to teach all of their students. Pritchard & Loulidi (1994) conduct a study on a large scale examination of foreign language learning within the divided school system of Northern Ireland between Catholic and Protestant communities. They find that under the influence of attitudes and traditions of different churches, there is substantial variation in the importance given to different subjects: Protestant schools emphasize more on mathematics and science while Catholic schools on languages, art, and the Humanities. Besides the studies about elementary and secondary schools, more studies in this group have examined the educational issues in institutional contexts of higher education. Warschauer (1998) discusses the influence of sociocultural context on a computer-based ESL class in a conservative Christian college. Contrary to the claim that proponents of online learning can transform education by promoting student-centered learning, the class turns out to be quite conservative and

teacher-centered, under the influence of sociocultural constraints of the college, such as “the strict disciplinary atmosphere of the church and college, the role of the college as a training school for missionaries, the relationship between the college and the international students, and the conservative expectations of the colleagues in the English Language Program” (p. 83). It is a study addressing the negative influences of religious contexts in language education. Three individual projects are conducted by De Vries (2002), Vos-Camy (2005), and Yorba-Gray (2006) on specific language classroom practices in Christian colleges and universities. De Vries (2002) reports on one language department’s study of students’ motivations for and attitudes towards foreign language learning, focusing on students’ conceptions of a Christian view of foreign language learning. He then elaborates on the application of a project by integrating a prayer section and Bible Scripture reading into the language course curriculum, which was designed to inform students’ understanding of Scriptural foundations for foreign language learning. Finally, he presents the results of the project and discusses the benefits and pitfalls of integrating Bible Scriptures in the foreign language class. Vos-Camy (2005) discusses the pedagogical issues in the use of foreign-language films addressing universal human issues relevant to a Christian worldview in foreign language classes in a Christian college. Yorba-Gray (2006) examines the use of journaling in language classrooms and claims that journaling practices inspired by Saint Augustine’s use of personal narrative as a form of spiritual exploration can contribute to linguistics and critical thinking skills and students’ spiritual formation.

In the second group of studies on the institutional contexts of churches, Baquedano-López (2003) conducts a study on language socialization of Mexican children in relation to their religious education at a Catholic church in Los Angeles. By examining and comparing the classroom communicative practices in a class conducted in the language of Spanish called

doctrina and in a catechism class conducted in English and locating such practices in a larger context of interaction, the study explores the process of language socialization and the construction of social identity in subtle ways. The study also discusses the influences of the larger political context of the State of California on local parish language policies, which brings consequences on the socialization of Mexican children in their acquisition of language and formation of particular cultural worldviews. The role of Catholic church in relation to Hispanic identity and language experience is also discussed in Reyes (2002). Reyes proposes that learners of the language of Spanish engage in “authentic migratory” experiences which she defines as “interactions with and in immigrant communities” (p.171). She further suggests the religious institutions, where ethnic communities congregate, such as Catholic churches, as important contexts for authentic migratory experiences and macrocontextualization. Similarly, Farr (2000) examines the relationship between Catholic church settings and experience of literacy. Farr focuses on the empowering experiences of Mexican women living in Chicago in literacy improvement and in the changes of other aspects of their lives resulted from the reform of the Catholic Church.

In conclusion, this review of literature on religion and language education shows the inadequacies of literature in this field both in scale and scope: there are very limited studies on the connection of religion and language education; the existed ones are mostly on the single aspect of foreign language teaching abroad as a Christian mission. The development of ecological perspective on language teaching and learning opens a wider space on looking at the role of religion in language education. There emerges a group of studies examining how the faith-based institutional contexts intersect with language and literacy issues. However, the explored contexts are more in faith-based formal educational institutions than in churches; and

the few studies about churches are centering on Catholic churches. Therefore, the field of religion and language education is expecting more research on foreign/second language education in these faith-based institutional contexts, especially in churches of other Christian divisions. In view of the gap of literature in this aspect, the present study examined the ecology of an ESL program provided by a Southern Baptist church, with the focus to investigate the influences of the religious framework of the institutional context on the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program.

#### Adult Language Learners and Adult ESL Programs

Another focus of the present study was the perceptions of the immigrant and international adult learners in regard to their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program and the exploration of how their learning experiences interact with their lives outside of the classrooms, including their parental involvement in their children's education and their social participation in community activities. Therefore, this section of review centered on adult language learners and adult ESL programs. It was expatiated from 5 aspects: (a) the characteristics of immigrant adult language learners, (b) the affective factors in adults' second language learning, (c) research on immigrant parental involvement, (d) research on community-based ESL programs, and (e) research on church-based ESL programs.

#### *Immigrant Adult Language Learners*

Adult language acquisition is different from child language acquisition. With comparison to child language acquisition theory, Slobin (1993) identifies five areas of differences on the part of adult language acquisition:

1. Whatever may be the advantages of youth, these learners [adults] have begun with some degree of "biological handicap".

2. Their communicative need are vastly more complex and vital than are those of preschool-age children, and their communicative tools are inadequate to those tasks.
3. They cannot count on the world to provide them with food and shelter while they are learning how to communicate.
4. They cannot help but process the target language (TL) through filters that have developed for another purpose – to perceive and produce source language (SL) sound patterns and map them onto SL conceptual schemes.
5. They have learned to use language within a sociocultural matrix of norms and expectations different from those of the host society. (pp. 239-240)

Generally speaking, adult language learners are in a disadvantaged position in language acquisition. The last area points to an even more disadvantaged situation for immigrant adult learners.

In addition to those differences in language acquisition, adult learners also have different learning situations from child learners. Comings et al. (1999) states that “a key difference between adult and child learners is that adults choose to participate in educational programs while children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper ‘work’ of childhood ... Adults ... must take an active decision to participate in each class session and often must overcome significant barriers in order to attend classes” (p. 3). Although adult students make the initial decision to attend classes, they may have other difficulties to overcome to continue to attend classes. Beder (1990) identifies four factors that contribute to students’ nonattendance in adult basic education classes: (a) low perception of need, (b) perceived effort, (c) dislike for school, (d) situational barriers which include job times,

transportation, or child-care issues.

Adults use different methods to learn other than children or adolescents. Pascual-Leone & Irwin (1998) states:

Motivational, affective, and self-developmental factors are even more crucial [to adult learners] than in younger learners. More so than in childhood and adolescence, cognitive processes and motivation in adult learners have to be driven by affective goals and are more often served by self-mediated, perhaps conscious, plans (what we term executive processes). (p. 36)

Adult learning is a different metacognitive experience from learning in childhood or adolescence, and adults are more likely to be more self-directed and self-reflective. Adults also bring their own life experiences and how they learn to the learning situation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Adult learners are often experiencing life changes, which are the reason for a return to the classroom for most of them. Changes at this stage in life are mostly determined by contextual influences, such as social and economic factors, and these factors will have an influence on the individual learner's learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). As far as immigrant adult learners are concerned, they experience much bigger life changes out of the immigration. In addition to the difficulties and barriers all adult learners experience, immigrant adult learners also encounter the difficult task of learning a new language while at the same time having to use it to communicate with everyone in the new country. Perdue (1993) states that "adult immigrants find themselves in the seemingly paradoxical position of having to learn the language in order to communicate, and of having to communicate, often in difficult circumstances, in order to learn the language" (p. 9). The "difficult circumstances" Perdue alludes to include a necessity for adult immigrants to survive in what he termed the "hostile environments of highly industrialized

nations” (p. 9), the U.S. certainly included. He continues that adult immigrants “are disenfranchised from the outset by their lack of the language, and this in turn leads to difficulties in establishing and protecting their rights” (p. 55). Thus he further claims that immigrant must have considerable competence in the dominant language to survive.

The present study took into account the different learning situations of the immigrant and international adults and explored the church-based ESL program’s effectiveness in meeting immigrant and international adult learners’ social needs from the adult learners’ perspectives.

### *Affective Factor of Anxiety in Adults’ Learning L2*

After the previous section’s review of some general differences in learning situations and characteristics of adult language learning as compared to children’s language learning, a look at the affective factor of anxiety in adults’ second language learning is necessary since it is one of the hallmarks of the language learning classroom.

There have been extensive studies on the effects of anxiety on second/foreign language learning (Horwitz, et al, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Scovel, 1978; Stevick, 1976b; Young, 1991, 1992). Turula (2003) states that adult learners’ uneasiness in learning L2 is probably reinforced by barriers created by the mature nervous system of the adult learner. Students’ ego boundaries, fossilized intellectually and emotionally in the process of first language acquisition, become thicker with age, which may cause some adult learners to perceive their performance in the foreign language classroom as unnatural or ridiculous (Ehrman, 1999). These factors lead to feelings of “tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). In other words, adult learners suffer from language anxiety.

Anxiety can come from many sources (Horwitz & Young, 1991), such as the contrast

between being so limited in a target language and yet so fluent and adequate in the native language (Price, 1991). Some of the sources are related to individual personalities. Some people may be reluctant to speak, especially when they realize or assume that other students are more fluent. This also happens to adolescent or even younger learners, but with age the tension and anxiety associated with learning a new language become stronger and more difficult to overcome. Some other sources come from instructor-learner interactions, such as in an instructor's harsh manner of correcting students (Young, 1991).

Sources of language anxiety, in addition to those personal and interpersonal reasons, can be found in the learning environment. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) distinguish between trait anxiety, which is an individual's predisposition for feelings of tension and uneasiness, and situational anxiety, which appears only under certain circumstances. In a language classroom, these circumstances include what Hadfield (1992) has called classroom dynamics, that is, everything that happens in and between the participants. Heron (1989, p.33) labels these feeling of tension existential anxiety and defines three aspects of it that are related to classroom dynamics: acceptance anxiety ("Will I be accepted and liked?"), orientation anxiety ("Will I understand what is going on?"), and performance anxiety ("Will I be able to learn what I have come to learn?"). In order to help adult learners cope, it is important for teachers to consider how classroom dynamics can contribute to such anxiety.

Having realized the effect of anxiety on adults' foreign/second language learning and identified the sources of anxiety, some studies suggested ways to deal with anxiety of language learners (Scovel, 1978; Young, 1992). Krashen (1986) calls for a friendly environment in which learning can be relaxed and stress-free. Hadfield (1992) identifies traits of good classroom dynamics which make the learning environment more relaxed and learner-friendly. The present

study, examining the ecology of the language classrooms and the dynamics of learner-learner interactions, learner-teacher interactions and learner-church (as the learning environment) interactions in the church-based ESL program, looked at how a nurturing community formed in the program helps to ease adult learners' anxiety.

### *Immigrant Parental Involvement*

For the literature review on the part concerning parental involvement, it would be appropriate to start with the words uttered by Secretary of Education Riley that "I firmly believe that because much of what we learn and value comes from the home, parents and other family members are the most important resources with whom children can interact and learn" (Riley, 1994). Actually educators across the United States have extolled the value of parent involvement in schools for quite a long time. According to the studies on the subject, parental involvement is seen as an essential component in the restructuring of schools for more effective education (Rioux, 1993). It has been reported that the more comprehensive and long-lasting the parental involvement, the more effective the impact is likely to be on the children's level of achievement and the quality of schools. When parents participate in school activities, children tend to be more successful learners. Comer (1980) suggests that the process of learning does not happen by itself; good interactions among families and schools can provide a strong motivator for children's success.

Parent involvement is a complex issue, and it is profoundly more difficult for parents from ethnic minority backgrounds (usually parents in immigrant families) who are also limited in English proficiency. Researchers and educators have identified several factors as obstacles to active participation among these parents: linguistic and cultural differences, lack of knowledge about the American educational system, lack of time and resources, and parents' feelings regarding school (Huynh, 1994; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). Some studies in the field of

anthropology of education (Varenne, Goldman & McDermott, 1997; Wilcox, 1982) have reached the conclusion that the culture of schools differs from that of the home for many ethnic minority students. This difference can cause schooling to become a discontinuous process for various reasons, including language, values, and perspectives (Heath, 1982). The cultural differences between home and school adversely affect parents in their efforts to help their children. While a number of educators have attempted to bridge these differences, these attempts raise the question of whether the methods used are effective or sensitive and respectful toward the home cultures and values. Auerbach (1990) rejects the existing model of family literacy that views language minority parents as “literacy impoverished” who need support in remedial measures in the form of school-like activities that parents can engage in at home. She declares that family literacy programs must look for and build on strategies that take place naturally in the context of the home environment. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) draws attention to the need for focusing on the cultural practices used by language-minority parents to help their children adjust and achieve in a school environment and culture much different from that in their homes. A lot of researchers (Comer, 1980; Epstein, 1986) examine parent involvement in a more holistic and sensitive way and advocated for the integrity of the home language and culture.

However, some other studies come up with the conclusion that language, for parents from language minority background or parents with no/limited English proficiency, is one of the biggest barriers to parent involvement. Hodge (1999) describes that “at home, the language barrier is a critical impediment to parents as they conduct their roles. It presents a great deal of difficulty for them to respond to school communications when those are written only in English.” The language barrier also prevents parents from adequately assisting or monitoring their children’s homework assignments. He also claims that the most strikingly adverse effect of the

language barrier is the gradual erosion of effective communication and meaningful relationships between parents and their children. The generation gap is further complicated and intensified by cultural and linguistic chasms.

And specifically, some studies demonstrate that children of immigrants are at risk to perform poorly if they have parents who speak a non English language at home. In a study on children of immigrants using data from ten OECD countries, Schnepf (2004) consistently finds across countries that a non-English language spoken at home decreases students' educational achievement greatly. One Canadian study from Worswick (2004) finds that children of immigrants whose mother tongue is neither English nor French have lower vocabulary score. Lahaie (2006) in her dissertation research discovers that if both parents speak another language other than English, it has a significant negative effect on their young children's English proficiency and math results.

Noticing the discrepancy in the literature of parental involvement concerning the issue of the importance of mastering English language, the present study was devoted to investigating if English proficiency does matter in immigrant parent involvement and how these parents' English proficiency impact their children's schooling in the US.

#### *Community-based Adult ESL Programs*

There are various adult ESL programs in the US, which can be found in community-based organizations, community colleges, workplace settings, adult schools, and family literacy programs (Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Since the subject of the present study is a church-based ESL program which is under the category of community-based organizations, it is important to examine the characteristics of these programs and have a review of the research done on these programs.

Community-based organizations, defined by Sowa (2001), are grassroots organizations that have a participatory and learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Zachariadis (1986) states that there is no single model for community-based organizations rather there are several characteristics that shape most community-based literacy programs. Sowa (2001) lists seven criteria which are used by Ilsley (1985) to define community-based organizations:

1. They must have a community orientation, that is, the organization must serve a particular population or constituency.
2. Community-based literacy programs should be based locally.
3. These organizations must have staff from the community.
4. The programs must also be independent from larger organizations (such as the public school system) for managerial assistance and guidelines.
5. The populations that community-based organizations serve must also be groups that are typically hard to reach or under-served.
6. In addition, the organizations should have objectives that include self-empowerment, and effecting social change through community achievement.
7. Finally, the programs should have a participatory or learner-centered curriculum and methodology. (p. 10)

Research on community-based literacy programs tends to lean toward identifying various models of these organizations, describing their attributes, their history, and their needs (Heaney, 1989; Fingeret, 1984; Zacharidadis, 1986). Another strand of research consists of recommendations on how to conduct a community-based program, why it is crucial to have this type of program and how successful it can be (Beder, 1996; Jurmo, 1989; Lytle, 1996). In addition, one of the main factors that unites research on community-based literacy or ESL

programs is the emphasis on the learner and participatory approaches to programming. A high percentage of studies emphasize the need to take into consideration the realities of learner's lives and cultures. Velazquez (1996) stresses the need for teachers in such programs to be familiar not only with the values, beliefs and cultures of migrant workers but also their past schooling experiences. Fingeret et al. (1994) examine the impact of participation on two community-based adult education programs that focused on learner-centered instruction. The study finds that through the use of learner-centered participation students in both programs "improved in literacy and language skills and practices; developed new attitudes about their abilities and aspirations and ... enhanced their ability to negotiate new environments in ways that meet their needs" (p. 141).

Throughout the literature on community-based literacy or ESL programs, there is very little research that has actually been done on site at community-based ESL programs and few studies that have investigated or evaluated the community-based ESL programs from the perspectives of the adult learners. Buttaro (2004) studies the cultural, educational and linguistic experiences of eight adult Latinas in ESL programs in New York and how they applied such experiences to their lives as immigrants in the U. S. The participants in the study are mothers of children in elementary school and came from Central America and the Caribbean. For over a year and a half, Buttaro gathered data through questionnaires, academic records and classroom and home observations. She also interviewed the women about their attitudes and experiences related to their academic performance, and asked them to write an essay of their experiences. Buttaro's focal ESL programs serve low income students who need "survival skills" in order to help them acquire enough English language skills to work in New York. However, the study finds that participants' own initiative and drive to improve their skills leads them to display various

learning strategies and habits which are closely linked to their own cultural belief systems. Their needs for learning English are contextualized by their formal education and their personal experiences. Therefore, Buttaro's study concludes that adult ESL programs cannot be taught solely within the parameters of basic skills assessments. Rather, educators should be cognizant of the broader issues surrounding adult immigrants' lives, such as their family literacy needs, their personal and professional aspirations, their cultural beliefs and traditions of learning and teaching, and their access to resources (p. 37).

Of the few studies on program evaluation, Warhol (2004) emphasizes the importance of adult language learner participants' perspectives on evaluating efficacy of community-based ESL programs. After a two-year action research and six months of participation in an ESL program comprised of elderly female Liberian refugees, Warhol finds that the female learners' goals and outcome markers are different from those defined by the government. While the government relies primarily on predetermined goals and standardized test results, the learners consider program participation and task completion as more salient makers of academic success. Since as non-mandatory students, adults do not need to participate in ESL programs or practices that do not meet their needs. Therefore, learners' assessment measures as demonstrated by the participation rate and task completion offer a more practical way to evaluate program efficacy. The study calls for educators to acknowledge student-defined goals and outcomes and therefore to realize a more authentic measure of program success which integrates learners' perspectives. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) reaches the same conclusion that the most important way to evaluate the success of an adult ESL program is to see if it can keep students' continuous participation and investment, if it teaches what the students want to learn, and if it meets students' goal.

Realizing the paucity of research in the area of examining community-based ESL programs

from the perspectives of adult learners in relation to their living situations and needs, the present study investigated the adult learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the ESL program in regard to improvement of learners' communicative language skills and social adaptation. In addition, this study also looked at whether and how the learners can apply what they learn in the program to their daily lives, especially in their parental involvement in their children's home literacy practices and in the communication with schools and teachers, and in their social participation in community activities.

### *Church-based Adult ESL Programs*

Among community-based organizations which provide ESL programs, church is one of them. However, in the literature on community-based ESL programs, it is difficult to locate research on church-based ESL programs. McCrossan (1996) reports a family literacy program which included two adult ESL classes using resources of the school district, Adult Literacy Center of the Lehigh Valley, and a local church which provided child care facilities. Church only functions as an assisting resource in the program. Kristjánsson (2003) conducts a dissertation study that is totally and directly about church-based ESL programs. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) discourse analysis and using extensive classroom observations, videotapes, and audiotaped interviews with all participants (including administrators, teachers, and students), Kristjánsson examines a church-sponsored ESL program serving adult immigrants who needed support both in English language learning and social adjustment. Situating the study in the church-sponsored ESL program within which a nurturing community is formed, the study explores the perceptions of the participants in understanding the nurturing community from their different perspectives and examines the ways how their perceptions and actions might change as they become invested in this learning community.

Compared to Kristjánsson (2003), the present study delved into more of the role of Christian religion on the constructing of the learning and teaching community and explored more of the learner's perspectives of their learning outcomes and effects to their lives. It will enrich the literature on church-based ESL programs.

### Summary

The literature review of the two broader areas of research, religion and language education, and adult immigrant language learners and adult ESL programs, points to the importance of the present study. The historical review of the role of Christianity in language education demonstrates the great historical contribution of Christianity to foreign language education, which is in sharp contrast to the scarce literature on the role of religion in general, or Christianity in particular, in the academic field of foreign/second language education from the theoretical and empirical perspectives. Therefore, the present study, especially the part on answering the first research question on the influence of the religious framework of the institutional context on the construction of language teaching and learning, will enrich the literature in the area of the connection of religion and language education.

Similarly, even though community-based ESL programs (including church-based ESL programs) function as one of the main sources that provide English language learning opportunities to adult ELLs, there are not many studies on community-based ESL programs compared to those on formal language programs, even less on church-based programs. In addition, the review of the characteristics of adult immigrant learners and the effect of anxiety as an affective factor on adult learners points to the importance of looking at language programs from the perspectives of adult learners. Furthermore, the review on parental involvement shows the current focus on the issue of language choice of parents in communicating with children at

home. Therefore, the present study, especially the section on answering the second and third question, will contribute to the area of studies of adult immigrant language learners and adult ESL programs by examining the program with focus on the perceptions of the adult learners in their learning experiences and outcomes as well as on the impact of learning in the church-based program on their parental involvement and social lives.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

After the introduction of the background, purpose and theoretical framework of the present study and a literature review of related theories and research studies, starting from this chapter the focus will be on the study itself. This chapter of methodology describes the research methods and their utilization throughout the whole research process, which is composed of the following sections: research design, research site and participants, data collection, data analysis, researcher's role and biases, and research trustworthiness.

#### Research Design

##### *Qualitative Study*

The present study chose the qualitative research method to serve the purpose of the study and to answer the three research questions. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Merriam (1998) summarizes that all qualitative research shares 5 characteristics, and the present study accords with all of them. Derived from the philosophical assumption that “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6), the first characteristic states that “qualitative researchers are interested in

understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Accordingly, the researcher of the present study was interested in investigating the immigrant and international adult learners’ perceptions of their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program.

A second characteristic is that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). In contrast to quantitative research with data generated through the use of various instruments, the principal data for qualitative research are gathered directly by the researchers themselves (Hatch, 2002). In addition, after data are collected, it is the researchers who make sense of and give life to the data through data processing and analyzing. The researcher of the present study gathered field notes from classroom and home observation, notes from and transcriptions of interviews with adult learners, the children of adult learners, volunteering teachers, and coordinator of the church-based ESL program, and documents including curriculum, placement test, textbooks and teaching materials. With these data, the research used inductive analysis to obtain the emerging themes in the findings of the study.

A third characteristic is that “it usually involves fieldwork” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). The qualitative researcher must go to the people and the field to do observations in the natural setting. At first the researcher of the present study gained access to the site of the church-based ESL program and then established relationships with the participants and employed fieldwork to do classroom and home observations.

A fourth characteristic is that qualitative research “primarily employs an inductive research strategy” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Contrary to most quantitative research which uses

a deductive method to test existing theories, qualitative research begins with open questions and builds towards themes, concepts, or even theories grounded in the data collected and analyzed. It is an inductive process. The present study undertook inductive analysis to arrive at the final conclusions based on observations, interviews and document analysis.

The last characteristic is that “the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive” (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). In contrast to quantitative research which is precise and numerical, qualitative research uses words and pictures to convey what the researchers have learned about their studies. The present study intended to conduct a detailed descriptive study of the church-based ESL program, focusing on the role of Christianity in the construction of learning and teaching and the perspectives of adult learners in their learning experiences.

The characteristics of qualitative research are congruent with the present study’s theoretical framework of the ecological perspective on language learning. Ecology is the study of organisms and their relations with one other and their environment. A key characteristic of ecological approach is its contextualized/situative character (van Lier, 2004). Therefore, the ecological perspective requires research done in natural/social settings, which is in accord with the settings of most qualitative research. Van Lier (2004) states that ecological research, as contextual study, discards the usual scientific reductions or idealizations of context and complexity employed by experimental quantitative research; instead, it employs contextualized forms of research, such as narrative, discursive methods and interpretive methods.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) proposes a type of ecological research he calls PPCT: process, person, context, and time. It is the learning process, instead of product, that is under

investigation; persons are conceived as active co-researchers, instead of just being passive subjects of research; research should study the environment/context that is relevant to the actions and words of persons under study; ecological research is research over time since processes and changes need to be documented longitudinally. Van Lier (2004) lists that action research, case studies and ethnographies are the most suitable forms of ecological research guided by the PPCT model, which are all qualitative research methods.

### *Case Study*

The research design utilized in the present qualitative study was a case study. Case studies are well-suited to take into account the contextual and interpersonal nature of complex issues (Yin, 2009) and to illustrate the different perspectives regarding the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2007). Case study design allows the researcher in this study to explore and describe the dynamic interpersonal interactions among immigrant and international adult learners themselves and between learners and volunteering teachers under the context of the church as a learning space, and the mediations between parents and children under the context of immigrant families and the families of international people. Furthermore, a case study has a distinct advantage when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 1989, p. 20). A case study was chosen as an appropriate approach since all the research questions of the present study were “how” questions which the researcher had no control over and needed the researcher to conduct thorough investigation.

A qualitative case study consists of an in-depth exploration of one or multiple cases, bounded by time and place. Case studies are generally divided into single-case and multiple-case studies. A case can be an event, an activity, a person or a program (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 1989). In

the present study the method of single-case study was employed and one church-based ESL program was selected as the case under study. The program was chosen for its richness of information. It is a well-organized ESL program which has seven classes divided by different levels of English proficiency and serves many immigrant and international people in the local community.

In discussing the research procedure for case studies, Creswell (1998) states that a case study involves “in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” through which a detailed description of the case can emerge” (p. 26). He continues by listing interviewing, documents, audiovisual materials, archival record and observations as multiple sources of information for case studies. The present study employed most of the listed research methods to get a detailed description and understanding of the case under study — the church-based ESL program.

#### *Embedded Single Case Design*

Among single case studies, there is one type which is called an *embedded case study*. Yin (2009) introduces it in the following way “the same single-case study may involve more than one unit of analysis. This occurs when, within a single case, attention is also given to a subunit or subunits.” (p. 50). Merriam (1998) also mentions this kind of single case study that has “subunits or subcases embedded within (such as students within a school)” (p. 40).

An embedded single case study includes multiple units of analysis: main and smaller units on different levels. It looks for consistent patterns of evidence across units, but within a case. Yin (2009) lists Union Democracy (1956) as an example of a highly regarded case study using an embedded single case design. It is a study about the inside politics of the International Typographical Union, which involves several units of analysis: the main unit was the

organization as a whole; and the smallest unit was the individual member, and several intermediary units. Following this example, the present study employed embedded single case study design with the church-based ESL program as a whole as the main unit and individual adult learners as smaller units. This study was interested in studying the program as a whole focusing on the role of religion on the constructing of learning and teaching. At the same time, it was also interested in exploring the individual learners' perspectives on their learning experiences and impacts of the experiences on their daily lives.

#### Researcher's Role and Biases

When the research began, especially with classroom observation, one of the first things the researcher had to do was to balance the role between an observer and a participant in the classroom. Patton (1990) states that there is no "simple choice between participation and non participation" and that the "extent of participation is a continuum that varies from complete immersion in the setting as full participant to complete separation from the setting as spectator" (p. 207).

The researcher at the beginning wanted to take the role as an onlooker. However, this did not turn out to be possible. The researcher found that the level and degree of her participation changed over time and between different classes. Before the data collection process began, the researcher had visited and participated in the classes as a learner many times in the past two years. She had told some of the teachers and students her status as an international Ph. D. student in second language education in the university and her interest of conducting some research of this church-based ESL program in the near future.

When the research proposal was approved and the research process began, teachers and students in some of the classes still treated her as a student learner and asked her to participate in

some of the classroom activities, even though the researcher had announced the launch of her research to all participants. In the meantime, the researcher volunteered to help the program out of her appreciation of the cooperation of the coordinator and teachers. She worked as a substitute teacher for a few times and helped several times as a translator for the communication between the teacher and two newly arrived non-English-proficiency Chinese learners in the beginning level class. Therefore, the researcher was known as a combination of a researcher, a student learner, and a volunteer to some of the participants in the program.

In classroom observation, the researcher was not a full participant observer in the sense that she did not complete worksheets, do homework, and did not answer or say anything in class unless she was asked. However, there were many times that she did get involved in classroom activities by answering questions or taking her turns in playing a language game. According to Gold's (1958) classic typology of the four stances as an observer, the researcher's stance in the present study was "observer as participant," which is described by Merriam (1998) in the following way: "the researcher's observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer" (p. 101).

Creswell (1998) states that in a qualitative study the researcher presents and represents the data based on the perspectives of participants and partly on the researcher's own interpretation of events. In other words, the researcher can never reach complete subjectivity. Ely et al (1997) suggest that a researcher be aware of biases and whatever else he/she might bring to a study. Therefore it is important for a researcher to be reflexive on his/her positionality.

The researcher is an international Ph. D. student majoring in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching at a southeastern university in the college town where the study took place. Originally coming from China, she obtained her B. A. degree in English and M. A. degree in

Applied Linguistics in the universities of China. Before she came to the U.S., she has learned English over ten years and worked as a part-time English instructor for 4 years during her M.A. study and continually after graduation. One year after she lived in the college town located in the Bible Belt region, she became a Christian and baptized in an Baptist church. It is through a bible study fellowship she heard about the church-based ESL program and.

As the researcher was conducting this study, she tried to assess continually what she brought to the study in terms of her educational background, personal and professional experiences, as well as her Christian identity. While these led to her choice of the topic and launch of the project, she also realized that they were bound to influence her perceptions and interpretations of what she was examining. For example, she realized that she identified and perhaps empathized with the students in the program, mainly because of the similarities between the researcher and the student participants: they are “foreigners”, they are from developing countries, and they are trying to understand, adapt, and work in a different culture. She also understands the difficulties in learning a second language because of her own experience of learning English as a foreign language.

The researcher also identified with the teachers because of her own working experience of teaching English as a foreign language in her own country. She identified with how passionately committed the teachers in the program were to helping students learn English, and she appreciated their devotion as volunteers expecting no repayment. While collecting data, the researcher realized that her experiences, particularly her educational and professional experiences, might lead to biases with respect to her perspectives on ESL teaching and learning. Her educational background in second language acquisition and teaching has given her very strong notions of how ESL should be taught. In light of this, she had to make an effort of not

being too critical of the pedagogical approaches the teachers of the program used. It was difficult to find a balance between being critical on the one hand and not critical or honest of what she was observing on the other. In addition, being a Christian made her feel attached to the program provided by a Christian church and view it with favor. However, the researcher realized that thinking about and being aware of her stance and biases helped her in conducting this study. Actually, as stated by Ely et al (1997), a researcher being reflexive on his/her biases serves to enhance rather than hinder the research process.

### Research Site and Participants

#### *Research Site*

Creswell (1998) states that the context of a case involves situating the case in an economic, historical, physical or social setting. The main research site for this study is a southern Baptist church which is located in a downtown area of a medium-sized town in the southeastern US. This is a university town which contains a famous Layer One research-centered university. Among the 80,000 residents in town, 30,000 of them are students of the university.

The church provides an ESL program with Conversational English classes for people who have a need to learn English. The ESL program has been offered in this church for over 20 years. It originated from one of the Sunday school classes, the international Sunday school class, with a membership of only one Chinese woman, one Japanese woman, and one Spanish family. At that time, the international ministry of the church found that it was difficult to conduct the Bible study in English since the students at the international Sunday school class had never learned English before. Therefore, it was necessary to teach English to them before they could read the Bible. Gradually the one class developed into four to five classes with four to five teachers, and the ESL program became independent of the Sunday school. At present the program has seven

classes with seven teachers for seven levels of English proficiency, ranging from basic to advanced level. The majority of the student population in the program is newly-arrived immigrants and international people who want to improve their opportunities at the university or opportunities for employment through learning English. The coordinator of the program is the international ministry pastor who also teaches one class. The other teachers are all volunteers and most of them are members of the church. Some of the teachers are retired university professors and local school teachers.

Following the university calendar, the ESL program has a fall and spring semester each academic year. The conversational English classes are held from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. every Thursday with a half-hour break in the middle from 10:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. All classes of the church-based ESL program are held in the basement area of the main building of the church, beneath the Chapel and Sanctuary. In each classroom, there is a whiteboard in the front and four tables in the middle in the shape of a rectangle with seats on the outside. The tables and seats are arranged in a way that the teacher and students can face each other during classes, which promotes classroom discussions and serves the purpose of conversational English classes. There are some paintings and maps on the walls. Besides the seven classrooms in the basement area, there is a “leveling room” for the first-time students to register and take a placement test; there is a room for preparing and laying out the refreshments for the break time; and there is a big meeting room for all students’ gathering and socializing during the break time. The classroom observations, all the teacher interviews and some of the students’ interviews (except those in main student participants’ homes), and the student questionnaires were conducted in the rooms in the basement area of the church.

The main student participants’ homes were also research sites of the present study. The home

observations, interviews of the main student participants, and interview of the children of the main student participants were conducted in those main student participants' homes.

### *Research Participants*

All of the teachers and students were research participants of the study although not all of them participated in every step of the data collection process. Because of the nature of the program and the composition of the student body, the student population is quite fluid. The students attend and leave the program frequently during the semesters. According to the enrollment lists, over 80 students were enrolled in the program in the semester when the research began. However, the researcher observed that less than half of the students frequently attended the classes, which is common with most community-based ESL/literacy programs (Development Associates, 1994). The researcher observed classes of all of the seven proficiency levels in turns. In the day when the student questionnaires were given out, all students present participated and finished the questionnaires in class. The researcher interviewed five teachers who were willing to take part in the interview. A summary of the teachers participated in interviewing is provided in Table 1 below. While for student interviews the researcher used purposeful sampling. Maxwell (1996) describes purposeful sampling as “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can't be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 70). Because students in basic and beginner level classes do not have the English proficiency sufficient for interviews to express their opinions and ideas, only students in class levels no lower than lower intermediate were selected for the interviews. In addition, Patton (1990) states the purpose of purposeful sampling is to “select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 169). The purpose of the student interviews was to obtain students' perspectives in regard to their learning experiences and

outcomes. Therefore, students who had consistently attended the program for at least two semesters were selected because they would be information-rich cases since they had more learning time and would be more able to assess their learning outcomes. Finally, 12 students were selected for interviewing. Table 2 includes a list of student participants for interviewing. Pseudonyms have been used.

Table 1

*Teacher Interview Participants*

Teacher	Gender	Age	Class in Charge
Teacher N	F	Around 50s	Advanced
Teacher M	F	Around 70s	Intermediate
Teacher K	F	Around 60s	Lower Intermediate
Teacher C	F	Around 60s	Basic
Teacher A	F	Around 30s	Beginner

Table 2

*Student Interview Participants*

Student	Gender	English Level	Ethnicity
Anshu	F	Advanced	Asian
Abera	F	Intermediate	Asian
Heeju	F	Upper Intermediate	Asian
Hong	F	Lower Intermediate	Asian
Gala	F	Advanced	Hispanic
Gezana	F	Upper Intermediate	Hispanic
Isabel	F	Lower Intermediate	Hispanic
Marisa	F	Intermediate	Hispanic
Fabio	M	Upper Intermediate	Hispanic
Pirro	M	Intermediate	Hispanic
Taiho	F	Advanced	African
Rayda	F	Intermediate	African

*Sampling Method for Selecting Main Student Participants:*

With an embedded single case study design, the present study looked at the church-based ESL program as a main unit and some main student participants as subunits embedded within. Therefore, it is necessary to have a section on the sampling method for selecting these main student participants who were regarded as subcases within the single case. Compared to student participants who were selected for interviews, these main student participants played more important roles by participating in more steps of the research process. In addition to the questions which were consistent with the other student interviews, they were asked extra questions related to parental involvement issues. Furthermore, they opened their apartments or houses to the researcher and were involved in home observations. Their children became children participants in the study and were observed and interviewed by the researcher.

Purposeful sampling was employed again as the sampling method for selecting the main student participants. In addition to choosing information-rich cases, the criterion of

representativeness was also applied. That is, the subcases of individual learners should be able to represent most of the learners in the program. Since the three largest ethnic groups of student population in the program are Asian, Spanish, and African-American, the main student participants should represent the three ethnic groups. In addition, for the purpose of the study, the following criteria were used to select the subcases:

1. immigration time or time of staying in the US: the ideal subcases are newly arrived (1-5 years) immigrant or international people who are in the process of English improvement and social adjustment;
2. parents of school-aged children: the subcases must have children who are studying in k-12 US schools;
3. English proficiency: the ideal subcases are from different English proficiency level classes, one advanced level, one lower level, one in the middle;

The researcher designed a Participant Information Form (see Appendix A) to gather the student participants' basic background information in ethnicity, country of origin, time in the U.S., time in the program, class level, and children information. The gathered background information provided by the form helped the researcher to select the main student participant according to the above criteria. In the end, three individual learners met the criteria and became the main student participants of the study. A summary of each participant is provided in Table 3. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 3

*Main Student Participants*

Student	Ethnicity	Time in the U.S.	Number of school-aged children	English proficiency
Ana	Spanish	5 years	2 sons	Advanced
Tabia	African	2 years and a half	1 daughter and 1 son	Upper Intermediate
Paula	Asian	4 years	1 son	Lower Intermediate

Data Collection

Merriam (1998) lists interviews, observations, and documents as three qualitative data collection methods. Interviews are used to obtain “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge”; observations can be employed to record “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions”; and various types of documents can be examined to extract “excerpts, quotations, or entire passages” (Patton, 1990, p. 10). The researcher employed all the three methods in data collection, with interviews and observations as primary sources of data and documents as secondary data. In addition, questionnaires with both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions were used to get a whole picture of the program’s effectiveness from the students’ perspectives. These methods provided opportunities to generate rich and detailed data embedded in context as well as the various sources of information needed to answer the research questions.

*Observation*

Observation in qualitative research consists of entering the world of the participants of a study, getting to know and be known by them and systematically writing a record of what is observed and heard (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Patton (1990) goes further to state that the

purpose of observational data is not only to record the activities and people who participate in a setting, but also to describe “the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed” (p. 202). Observation plays a very important role in a case study because it enables the researcher to gain insight through a firsthand encounter with the case and verify a second account of the information obtained in interviews (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher of this study observed the classes of the church-based ESL program and the homes of the main student participants. The researcher spent a whole semester in observing classes of all seven levels, with particular interest in the interactions between teacher and students and among students themselves. The researcher also paid attention to the topic of each class, the teaching methods and materials, the class content and process, and students’ attendance and participation. The physical environment of the church and the basement area were also included in the observation focus. In addition, the researcher took a note on the all participants gathering during the half-hour break between classes in the meeting room.

In addition to classroom observation, the researcher employed home observation to study the main student participants as parents. After making appointments with each individual, the researcher visited their apartments/houses and did home observation three times for each participant. The home environment, family member interactions, and home literacy activities were the main focuses of observation. To be more specific, the researcher observed: 1) the physical settings where literacy, teaching and learning events occurred; 2) the nature of the activities; 3) the conversations and interactions between parents and children and between siblings. The researcher also paid attention to what languages, tools and methods were used within the home.

The researcher took field notes to collect observational data. Field notes consist of

descriptive notes, which describe what is observed and heard, and reflective notes, which consist of the experiences, reflections and learning of the researcher (Creswell, 1998). The researcher of the present study took descriptive notes during each observation, and recorded in detail and added impressions and reflections after the observation. The field notes became “the crucial data log” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 89) which the data analysis based on after the data-collection process.

### *Interview*

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is not easily or directly observed and to access the interviewee’s perspective on issues that are being examined (Patton, 1990). Interview is the most important data collection method for the present study and it was used in answering all the three research questions.

Basing on the recent studies of adult ESL programs (Buttaro, 2004; Chung, 2006; Kristjánsson, 2003; Sowa, 2001), the researcher of the present study designed five interview protocols (see Appendix B) for interviewing the program coordinator, teacher participants, the three main student participants, other student participants, and main student participants’ children respectively. The protocol for interviewing the coordinator is composed of three sections. The first section includes general questions about the demographic information of the church. The second section consists of questions specifically targeted at the ESL program, such as the history of the program, the educational goals. And the third section includes questions concerning various aspects of the management of the program, such as teacher qualifications, the source of funding, curriculum design, student enrollment and placement. For the teacher interview, the researcher intended to investigate the reasons why the teachers volunteer to work with immigrant adult language learners, how they understand language learning and teaching, how they prepare

their lessons, what curriculum they rely on, whether their religious beliefs affect their teaching. The interview protocol for main student participants and the protocol for other student participants are similar except that the protocol for main student participants has extra questions on parental involvement and home literacy activities. The common questions shared by the two protocols inquire information of students' background in religion, education, profession, and prior English learning; the reasons and purposes of attending the program; students' perspectives on their learning experiences and outcomes; students' evaluation of the program; and the influences of the program on their lives. The interview protocol for the children of the main student participants includes questions on children's school experiences, home learning experiences, and children's attitudes and perceptions to their parents' attending English classes in the church-based program.

All the interviews were carried out in a format between standardized type and semistructured type (Merriam, 1998). They were standardized in the sense that all the interviews followed the pre-designed protocol to ensure all the questions in the protocols were covered during interviewing, which made it possible to compare the interviews and in turn make the data analysis easier. They were semistructured in the sense that most of the questions were open-ended and therefore left room for emerging ideas and situations, which enabled the researcher to pursue "topics and issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written" (Patton, 1990, P. 286).

The participants were interviewed on a one-on-one basis. The interview of the program coordinator was taken at the beginning stage of the research in the coordinator's office. It took about one hour and a half. Five out of seven teachers who were observed were willing to participate in the interviews. The teacher interviews were conducted after class in their

classrooms and they took about 30 to 45 minutes. The three main student participants were interviewed twice (each about 30 minutes) and in their homes during home visits. Other student participants for interviewing were selected based on their English proficiency and time in the program. The 12 students who met the criteria of having no lower than lower-intermediate English proficiency level and having attended the program consistently for over 2 semesters were interviewed about 30 minutes, some in the classrooms after class, some in their homes. The children interviews (each about 20 minutes) were carried out in their homes.

All the interviews were audio taped by a digital recorder and transcribed by the researcher. Mantero (2002) summarizes the transcription conventions developed by Brown & Yule (1983) and clarifies them with the use of examples by Johnson (1995). Adapting Mantero's (2002, p. 79-80) list of transcription method, the researcher used the following table of symbols (see Table 4) throughout the transcriptions to assist in data analysis.

Table 4

*Transcription Symbols*

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Indication</b>	<b>Example</b>
/	the next speaker overlaps at this point	A: but they are at / school B: / aren't they at school?
//	two speakers start simultaneously	A: // but they are at school B: // aren't they at school?
*	the point where the overlap ends	A: but they are at / school B: / aren't they at school? * A: I think so.
=	"latching" where there is no gap between utterances	A: but they are at school = B: = why are they at school?
+ ++ +++ ( )	a pause a longer pause a pause between utterances is five or more seconds	A: but they are at school? B: no +++ (6 seconds) they are at home, or A: but they are at + school? B: no ++ they are at home.
( ) (( ))	the researcher is not sure of the accuracy nonverbal sounds	A: they are at school B: ((cough)) no they are at home.

*Questionnaire*

The purpose of the questionnaire was to add depth to the present study and make the

exploration of the church-based ESL program more holistic. The questionnaire was a small scale survey that was personally administered. Lofland and Lofland (1995) state that adding quantitative data in the form of a small survey is essential for a case study of an organization and it is the most efficient way of grasping a “cast of characters” (p. 21). Because only some of the student participants were selected to take the interviews, the questionnaire was given out to all students in order to obtain a complete picture of student demographics, background information, reasons for and purposes of learning English and choosing this program, and their opinions of the effectiveness of the program. At the same time, the questionnaire also served the triangulation purpose to supplement and validate information obtained from other methods in answering the research questions, especially the second question on students’ perspectives of their learning experiences and outcomes.

The questionnaire (see Appendix C) was adapted from the Ministry of Advanced Education (2007), which was reduced to three sections to serve the purpose of the present study. Section One has questions which sought to gather demographic information. The questions ask about students’ ethnicity, country of origin, number of years in the United States, time in the program, English proficiency level, gender, age, marriage/parenting status, level of education, whether they have studied English before, and whether they take English classes in other organizations. Section Two is composed of eleven Likert-type questions asking students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the program, which are categorized in the following three groups: 1) how important the program is for improving the employment situation, for using English in daily life, and for preparing for further study at college level; 2) how helpful the program is in achieving their goals, in improving their reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills, respectively; 3) how the students would rate the program. In the end, there are two open-ended questions asking

for students' suggestions to improve the program, and the reasons of their ratings. Section Three consists of seven Likert-type questions on the program's helpfulness in students' social adaptation in using English in various ways, including using English in varied settings, such as work, further education, social settings, community; and using English for different purposes, such as using services, understanding English media, and involving themselves in children's education.

Before administering the survey to all the students, the researcher tested it in a pilot study with seven students who are attending Wednesday night classes offered by the church. There are only two level classes on Wednesday night and only a few adults attend the classes, usually around three to seven. The students in Wednesday night classes usually have to work in the daytime and they are different from students attending Thursday morning classes who are mostly housewives. Because of the small scale in the number of classes and the number of students, the Wednesday night classes and students were not included in the study. However, they were very adequate for the questionnaire pilot study. The pilot study was done to make sure that the questions were clear and understood by students and it did not take a long time to complete.

The formal questionnaire was done at the end of the semester, which is the time when the program will usually do a survey to get students' reflections on teaching and to summarize the semester. The teachers helped to administer the questionnaire in every step. They assisted in handing out the copies of the questionnaire to all students in each class at the beginning, explaining the questions whenever students had confusions during the process, and collecting the questionnaires at the end. The questionnaire was arranged to begin after the break and thus it was given half-an-hour time period (from 11 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.). Whenever students finished filling the questionnaire out, they could leave before the end of the class.

## *Documents*

Merriam (1998) uses *document* to refer to “a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 112). Even though documents are not as frequently used as interviews and observations, and usually function as secondary data, they play a special role in qualitative research. In the present study, they were employed in addressing all the three research questions.

The first important document that was used in data collection was the program guidance, *Literacy Missions Conversational English Workshop Manual* (Leininger & Moore, 1997) by North American Mission Board, which is also their teacher training manual. The manual states clearly at the beginning the purpose of conversational English ministries and includes various sections on organizational plan, student placement, lesson planning for different levels, teaching drills, communication practice and supplementary activities, and witnessing. It provides valuable information about the foundation of the program.

Another important type of document was the teaching materials which were collected in each classroom observation by the researcher. The program does not have specified textbooks and the teachers are free to choose teaching materials that are adequate for the English proficiency level they are teaching. The various teaching materials gave the researcher more information of how the teachers planned their lessons and what their focuses were in teaching ESL. The researcher also collected program brochures, the students’ placement interview/test, prior program evaluation surveys, and student registration forms as other types of documents for further understanding of the program. For better examination of adult learners’ parental involvement in home literacy activities, the researcher took a note on the home literacy materials the parents use with their children at home.

In addition to these documents which were already present in the setting, the researcher also used researcher-generated documents, such as a researcher journal and field notes. The researcher kept a journal from beginning till the end of this dissertation study, on which the researcher documented any ideas, concerns, feelings, and problems that came up during the study. The researcher also used the journal to keep track of dates of each step/ procedure of each method of data collection, and of numerical information such as the number of students present and absent in each class, which facilitated data analysis later on. In addition, the researcher took field notes for observations. The researcher journal and field notes became important documents for data analysis.

The study with its methodology was approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix D for the IRB Approval Notice).

### *Triangulation*

Originally used as a method in land surveying (Patton, 2002), *triangulation* in qualitative studies refers to the process of using multiple data collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories in research (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). The varied perspectives of triangulated data help reduce threats to internal validity as termed by positivist research (Morgan, 2000). Lynch (1996) states triangulation is a means of better understanding and reconciling convergences and discrepancies in one's research. Patton (2002) lists four kinds of triangulation that can contribute to "verification and validation of qualitative analysis" (p. 556): methods triangulation, triangulation of sources (or data triangulation), analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. Method triangulation means the researcher uses more than one method in the study. "Method" here refers to both method of research and method of data collection. Data triangulation means the researcher uses multiple data sources. For example, the researcher can

interview both teachers and students in employing interviews to collect data. Analyst triangulation refers to using multiple analysts to review findings. Theory/perspective triangulation refers to using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data.

The researcher of the present study employed both methods triangulation and data triangulation in the data collection process to address each research question. For the first research question on the influence of the religious framework on the construction of learning and teaching in the program, the researcher used methods triangulation by simultaneously employing classroom observation, interview, and documents, and data triangulation by interviewing various participant groups, the program coordinator, teachers, and students. For the second research question on students' perspectives on their learning experiences, the researcher used methods triangulation in both research methods and data collection methods. Qualitative data from interviews and documents were triangulated with quantitative data from the questionnaire. For the third question on the impact of students' ESL learning experience on their daily lives, the researcher again combined methods triangulation and data triangulation. The multiple methods include home observation, interviewing, and documents, and the multiple sources include data from both parent interviews and child interviews. Table 5 exhibits the methods and data sources used in addressing each of the three research questions.

Table 5

*Methods and Data Sources Used in Addressing Each Research Question*

	Observation		Interview				Questionnaire	Documents
	classroom observation	home observation	coordinator interview	teachers interview	students interview	children interview		
Q1	√		√	√	√		√	
Q2					√	√	√	
Q3		√			√	√	√	

(Q1: How does the religious framework of the institutional context mediate the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program?

Q2: How do the adult learners perceive their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program in regard to improvement of communicative language skills and social adaptation?

Q3: Given the adult language learners’ experiences in the church-based ESL program, how do the adult learners involve themselves in their children’s linguistic and academic development at home, in communication with their children’s schools and teachers, and in the overall community activities?)

### Data Analysis

This study combined the use of inductive analysis and constant comparative method for data analysis.

Based on some decidedly inductive approaches in the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which mostly originated from grounded theory, Hatch (2002) develops a model of inductive analysis which is more general and flexible and can

be utilized in varied qualitative studies beyond grounded theory. Hatch (2002) exhibits his model of inductive analysis in the following steps:

1. read the data and identify frames of analysis
2. create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis
3. identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside
4. reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data
5. decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains
6. complete an analysis within domains
7. search for themes across domains
8. create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains
9. select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline (p. 162)

Hatch's (2002) model of inductive analysis was applicable for the present study and was used as the main method throughout the whole process of data analysis. Following Hatch's model, the researcher used the three research questions as the "frames of analysis". Referring to Table 2 *methods and data sources used in addressing each research question*, the researcher allocated data collected from various methods and sources to each research question. Then the researcher found domains within each frame of analysis, that is, domains within each question. The next step was to identify salient domains which were categories that had more included terms or categories that had terms important to understanding the issues under study. Once the salient domains were identified, the researcher created codes to keep track of the domains. Following

Hatch's (2002) suggestion, the researcher assigned a Roman numeral to each domain and a capital letter to each included term. After completing an analysis within domains, the researcher searched for themes across domains within each frame of analysis to deepen the analysis. When the relationships within and among domains were explored, the researcher created a master outline to make a comprehensive representation of the overall analysis. The last step was filling in data excerpts to support elements in the outline. After reading all the data again, the researcher starred prescient quotes in the data and on the domain sheets, which helped to give a closure to the analysis and prepare for the writing up.

In addition to inductive analysis, the researcher also applied the constant comparative method as a supplementary tool of data analysis. The constant comparative method of data analysis was originally developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) as the means of development grounded theory. Because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is well-suited with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research, this method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers in various qualitative studies including those which are not seeking substantive theory-building as in grounded theory studies (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) states this kind of comparative analysis can be used to deepen the understanding of unique cases.

Accordingly, in the present study on addressing the third research question of the impacts of students' learning experiences on their parental involvement and social adaptation, the constant comparative method was selected for data analysis in comparing and contrasting the situations of the subcases of the three main student participants. The main student participants' personal backgrounds, home environments, learning experiences in the church-based ESL program, parental involvement in home literacy activities and communication with their children's schools/teachers, and community participation were all constantly compared during the data

analysis for answering the third research question.

### Research Trustworthiness

There have been extensive debates as to which criteria should be used in judging a qualitative study (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998; Seale, 1999), which partly originated from the discussion on the differences between qualitative research and positivist research. Guba & Lincoln (1982) state that unlike positivist researchers who search for the single “truth” in reality, qualitative researchers

...focus upon the multiple realities that, like the layers of an onion, nest within or complement one another. Each layer provides a different perspective of reality, and none can be considered more ‘true’ than any other. Phenomena do not converge into a single form, a single “truth,” but diverge into many forms, multiple “truths.”

(p. 57)

Therefore, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest replacing the traditional mandate of *objectivity* with an emphasis on *trustworthiness* by taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities. They further demonstrate that the conventional standards of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity are inappropriate for qualitative research. Instead, they argue that credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability should be used to judge the trustworthiness of a qualitative research.

Accordingly, Creswell (1998), based on a review of major qualitative studies, proposes the following eight procedures that may operationalize the trustworthiness criteria as argued by Lincoln & Guba (1985).

- prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field
- triangulation

- peer review or debriefing
- negative case analysis
- clarifying researcher bias
- member checking
- rich, thick description
- external audits (p. 207-208)

Cresswell (1998) recommends that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of the eight procedures in any given study. In the present study the researcher engaged in six of them:

1. prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field: The researcher has spent a long time in the research site and attended the English classes years ago before the research officially began. Therefore the researcher has established good and trusting relationships with the program coordinator, most teachers and students. When the observation is employed, the researcher will conduct it consistently over the whole research semester.
2. triangulation: The researcher will employ methods triangulation and data triangulation in addressing each research question.
3. peer review or debriefing: The researcher and another two colleagues formed a “Dissertation Writing” group and meet regularly to share their feelings and findings of their research. They also read each other’s chapters and provided suggestions. The peer review functions as an extra external check on the research.
4. clarifying researcher bias: The researcher has clarified her biases at the beginning of the research and will make consistent reflections on her positionality during the whole process.

5. member checking: The researcher will have each participant member check the transcription of his/her interview and ask all participants' views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations.
6. Rich, thick description: The researcher will conduct a detailed descriptive study of the program with rich, thick description of each step of the research procedure. This approach will enable readers to establish the credibility of the analysis and determine whether insights from this church-based ESL program can be applied to other settings with shared characteristics.

The integrated application of the six procedures ensured the trustworthiness of the present study.

## CHAPTER IV:

### RESULTS

After a whole semester's data collection, the researcher divided the data into groups for the three research questions and began the analysis process. In this chapter, the findings of the study are organized by research question. The researcher begins with question one in exploring the influence of religious framework of the church on the construction of learning and teaching in the program. The researcher then moves to question two by presenting the students' perspectives of their learning experience in the church-based ESL program. Finally, the researcher addresses question three on students' application of their learning into practices of parental involvement and community participation.

In this chapter, pseudonyms were used for participants (refer to Table 1 to 3 in the prior chapter for the name lists), and the quotes of their words were taken directly from interview transcriptions.

#### Findings for Research Question One

In addressing the first research question (*How does the religious framework of the institutional context mediate the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program?*), the researcher applied both method triangulation and data triangulation to ensure trustworthiness. First of all, the researcher used three data-collection methods: classroom observation, interview, and document analysis. At the same time, the researcher carried out interviews with multiple groups of participants: the program coordinator, teachers, and students.

Before focusing on this specific aspect of the program – religious framework of the church context – it is necessary to give a brief description of the church-based ESL program as a whole.

### *Overview of the Program*

*Program guidance:* The program has its overall guidance from *Literacy Missions Conversational English Workshop Manual* (Leininger and Moore, 1997) by the *North American Mission Board*, which is also its teacher training manual. The program is focused on conversational English. In the purpose statement of the manual, it clearly claims that the purpose of establishing conversational English classes is to help non-English speaking or limited-English speaking people (adult immigrants included) to learn English to meet their economic need for employment and social needs for adaptation.

*Curriculum and supplemental teaching materials:* The program does not have a formal curriculum, but it applies the Lado English Series for its organized set of learning goals and divides those goals into classes with 7 levels. In this way, students are grouped together by levels of oral (and to a lesser degree written) proficiency to provide focused instruction.

In terms of teaching materials, the teachers of the program are free to choose from various sources. Some of the materials are the textbooks from the Lado Series; some of them are from outside resources, such as newspapers, ESL materials, or online materials. Varied as they are, most materials are situation based and focused on practical communication, such as, reading road signs, going shopping, using public transportation, and making small talk. Classrooms are conversation-centered and topics are related to daily life. These materials and classroom practices focus on practical communication skills and help students adjust to local community activities.

*Placement test and student assessment:* The program conducts a placement test for students

when they enroll in the program. The placement test focuses on oral proficiency, but it also includes a supplemental writing test for students with higher level proficiencies. For student assessment during classes, the teachers use formative assessments such as observing students' ability to successfully complete classroom activities in the format of discussion, role play, etc.

*Teacher evaluation:* The program has teacher evaluations at the end of each year. In the form of a survey, the students are given opportunities to evaluate their teacher's instruction in various aspects. It is also a way for the program to hear students' voices which they may not express openly in class. It helps the program know more about students' expectations to better meet their needs.

*Facility:* In order to facilitate student participation, the program offers child care services in consideration that most students are women with young children. The program also provides transportation services for the convenience of students' participation. These extra services are provided out of concern for its students' real life situations. They relieve students' burdens and provide more opportunities for students to go outside and take part in language learning in the church, which is also a local community activity.

*Break time:* There is a thirty-minute break time between the morning classes. During the break time, all students and teachers gather together and have some refreshments provided by the church. The coordinator first introduces new students to the whole group. Subsequently, he shares what their ministry has done recently or makes announcements that directly concern students about upcoming events, news about other students or teachers, changes in classes or other organizational news. The break time usually ends up with a prayer led by the coordinator.

The break time is really a good time for socialization. Students make new friends with student from other classes, and they talk to people from different cultural backgrounds. The

break time gathering becomes a small community, and students get involved to develop their relationships and practice their language skills.

*Special events and activities:* The program holds special events, particularly on American holidays, to encourage the students' involvement in local community events and activities. For example, in the spring semester the program usually holds an Easter celebration for the ESL students and their families, which includes face painting, egg dyeing, and Easter egg hunt as well as lunch. The last part of the event includes a Bible story about Easter. The program also has a big class at Halloween by gathering all students to do pumpkin carving together. During Christmas season, the program gives away tickets to ESL students as well as their families and friends to attend various events at the church, such as the Christmas Banquet and Christmas Concert. Some of the classes sometimes take students to go on field trips to the local community, such as hospitals, fire stations, police stations, and nursing homes. For example, during the hospital trip in this semester the teacher introduced different specialists, talked about different symptoms, and told students which doctor to visit for those symptoms. The holiday special events and field trips bring students into real communities and use real life as examples to teach them language skills.

In summary, the program calls itself Conversational English Classes. It tries to accommodate its students' linguistic and social needs by focusing on teaching communicative language skills and practicing conversational English. It is also working hard to help its students, mostly new immigrants, to include themselves into the local community.

#### *Outstanding Themes of the Church-based ESL Program*

During the process of extensive data collection and analysis by different methods and from various sources, the researcher noticed some emerging themes capturing the characteristics of the

ESL program, which made the program so outstanding from programs in other educational institutions. These themes are closely associated with the program's special learning space and institutional context, a Baptist church.

*Love, care, and help.* From a whole semester's classroom observations, the researcher intensively felt an atmosphere of love permeating in every corner of the program. Teachers care about students' English learning and their personal problems. They offer sincere help in every aspect of students' lives. Students love their teachers and offer to help fetch anything for teachers or to assist elderly teachers move about. Love, care, and help are the keynotes of the program.

During student interviews, almost every student expressed their strong feelings of their teachers' love for them. Gala shared, "I like it here. Since I get here, everybody is kind. They offer you some kind of help." She described her teacher as "always trying to help, always smiling, make you feel comfortable to come to the classes to make you just have a good time during the two hours." Similarly, Rayda said, "My teacher is loving, fascinating. She's kind too. She speaks with good word, never make fun of me. She's gentle with you." Ana also thinks that the teachers in the program, besides having wonderful teaching experience, care for all aspects of the students' lives. Some students connected the teachers' love for students with their Christian religion. Rayda claimed, "It (religion) is very important. Being Christians, the essence is love. Showing the love, that's just their religion tells them what to do, we cannot rule out the role of religion in the program." All of the students speak highly of their teachers' personality and some of them realize the role of religion in the teachers' loving nature.

During teacher interviews, when asked why they volunteer to teach in the program, Teacher M said her love for students is the one of the reasons. She stated, "Most important thing (for becoming a volunteer teacher) is that I love students, I love people, I am always fascinated about

knowing that, learning other cultures, just so interested in.” Teacher C added that love helping people is her personal makeup and she feels great satisfaction when she sees students make progress and become more confident. Students’ smile is her “payback” and source of strength.

Quite a few teachers claimed that their love for students is from the love of God. Teacher N said,

- 1 I feel the reason why I teach is the direct response to the love of God who shine to me
- 2 and me wanting to do something to help someone else to develop skills they need and
- 3 also for them to come to an understanding of God’s love for them.... You can help to
- 4 provide that to meet the need of someone’s life. The motivation is out of my love for
- 5 God. That’s where I’m coming from. That’s kind of my perspective.

Teacher K added that Christ showed to her love by dying for her sins and this lets her show her love for international students. She also said that the international students in the program are a group of lovable people who are gracious, willing to learn, and polite. She wants them to be her sisters and brothers in Christ. The originality of Christian teachers’ love for students is the love of God. They volunteer to teach English to help immigrants and international people who have this linguistic need, and by doing this they hope students can realize God’s love to them.

*Relationship/friendship.* Relationship is another key term for the program. The program guidance states that one of the program’s purposes is to meet international people’s emotional need of friendship and relationship with local community. This directive can be found in the following statement:

The classes also meet the emotional needs of friendship. Many nonnative English speakers isolate themselves in their homes. They speak only to their families or others who speak their languages. Conversational English classes provide a nonthreatening

opportunity to build friendships and develop emotional support. (Leininger and Moore, 1997, p1.3)

Teachers and students have built a close relationship with each other. Besides classroom discussion and sharing related to English learning, teachers and students share their personal stories and concerns after class. Moreover, they keep in contact with each other even during the non-class days.

During interviews some students stated that what fascinate them most about the program are the close students-teachers relationships and friendships among students themselves. Isabel said that the teachers are like friends to them and care about their personal lives beyond classrooms. Tabia was touched by the caring and companionship between teachers, students and among other students in the program; teachers care for students, and students become good friends who share each other's happiness and sorrow. Taiho claimed that one of her achievements gained through the program is friendship with many students in and out of her class. She said, "If I didn't go to the program, I would not have made so many friends, so many people to call upon. My friends helped me a lot. That changed my life. I can communicate with people, I feel less lonely." She continued that because the program provides opportunity for students to try different classes that she makes friend with students in other classes as well.

Teacher N showed her excitement about the relationships developed through the program. She said, "It's been wonderful to me because I've been reached to know people that I would never have known ... through developing relationships here through the English classes. It's great fun to be a part of people's learning." During the interview with the program coordinator, he stated from a Christian perspective on relationship, "We try very hard to respect the relations we have with people who may not be Christians in our teaching. That is part of being a Christian

teacher.” These teachers’ Christianity faith brings them desire to build deep relationships with their students.

*Service.* This theme emerged mostly from teacher interviews when responding to the questions on their volunteering. Teacher C said that other people have helped her throughout her foreign language learning process and career development and she has always been in service to other people at the same time. She sees teaching in the ESL program as a chance to help somebody else. Most Christian teachers regarded teaching international people in the program as their service to God. Teacher N stated,

- 1 Part of this comes from my religious conviction as a Christian is to do something to meet
- 2 people from other cultures, and through serving them by teaching is to show the love of
- 3 God. We want to provide the classes as reflection of providing services to students. Our
- 4 motivation may come from our Christian faith.

Teacher M added that they are God’s arms and legs, and they serve him through serving the others. These teachers’ faith brings them to volunteer to teaching and commit to teach well.

*Openness and being pressure-free.* Additionally, open and pressure-free is also frequently used by students in describing the program’s learning atmosphere.

Openness has three meanings when referring to the learning environment. Firstly, the program is open to anyone who wants to learn English. Pirro stated, “Everyone can come here, everyone has free minds, everybody has chance of practice, the church provides classes for everybody.” Secondly, the program is open and flexible in classroom content and discussion topics. Some of the teachers let students choose what they want to learn. Heeju said that her teacher always asks students’ opinions and inquiries their preference of lesson topics. Teacher K shared a story about her class’s working together on choosing a topic:

1 I let the student's tell me if there is something they like to learn ... one of them suggested  
2 this one about the emergency, or how to report an emergency, or what to say at the  
3 doctor's office, and we'll go into that more another time too, but we worked on doctor's  
4 forms. We had forms from a doctor's office last week, and I showed them the information  
5 they needed to have when they went to a doctor's office... and words that they would  
6 hear from the doctor or the nurse that may be unfamiliar to them, so they would know  
7 what to say to get the best help for their family.

She negotiated with her students to choose the best topic for the class. Thirdly, the program is open to different cultures and religions. Fabio stated, “(We) learn different religion, (and this) open up your mind. You know, sometimes we are very close minded. When you come here, you open your mind, talking about culture and other religions.” Teacher M said that the program has prepared her to be very accepting of others’ ideas and other faiths. No matter what the students bring to classes, she would work with them and get the most from the class.

Being pressure-free refers to two aspects of the program. First of all, students feel no pressure in studying. Anshu said that she enjoys learning in the ESL classes where she feels no pressure and anxiety as she used to feel in other educational institutions. Being pressure-free is also used specifically to refer to religious pressure. Quite a few students talked about their experiences in this aspect. Ana stated that the program has the pure purpose of helping immigrants and international people learn English without religious infiltration. She believes this way of carrying out the program will help students, especially non-Christian students, learn in a free environment without religious obligation. When asked how she feels about the influence of religious context on the program, Anshu said she does not feel any religious compulsion studying in the classroom. She believes it is the good nature of the teachers that motivates them to

volunteer to teach immigrants for free; the teachers and the program do not push the students to Christianity, though the program is provided by a Christian church. Gala shared, “It is really kind for them to do this to many people. They already know that we have different religions; they don’t care about this.... Maybe they are doing this because of their Bible but we don’t see it that way.” Gezana claimed the teachers show respect to other religions and they don’t force the religion on their students.

In regard to the topic of free religion, teachers shared their opinions during interviews. Teacher C claimed, “I want to keep it strictly neutral. This is neutral ground. We will have no bigotry and no prejudice of any kind in my classroom.” Teacher N shared her Christian perspective:

- 1 It is just as we understand that we personally choose to raise the faith and everyone else
- 2 has the same right to do that. We are very respectful of that but yet want to give
- 3 opportunity to anyone who wants to understand more and wants to understand why we
- 4 believe in Christ.... It is never presented in a way that it’s conditional for someone to be
- 5 able to partake in class...as a respect that God created all of us and we can communicate
- 6 that in ways that would draw people to God.

These efforts from teachers have created an open and pressure-free learning environment in which students can grow.

*Community.* All of the elements, love, care, help, relationship/friendship, service, and openness and being pressure-free, work together to form a foundation of community. This theme emerged from interview and classroom observation. Teacher C said that everyone in the class is so closely related emotionally and the whole class becomes a community. Rayda claimed, “So many international people get together, like a family.” Gezana even compared the international

people from all over the world gathered through the program to “a big international family.”

It is a harmonious picture on every Thursday morning when the program has its classes. Before classes begin, students and teachers greet each other on the hallway enthusiastically with smiles, kisses, and hugs. They show sincere concern and ask each other how they were doing in the past week. During the first several minutes of the classes, teachers and students catch up with each other and share something interesting or important happened recently in their lives. The break between classes is a fellowship time. Students and teachers from every class gather together in the big meeting room, enjoying refreshments and socializing. They together welcome newly enrolled students and sing birthday songs for someone who have had or will have their birthday within the week. The coordinator shares pictures or videos recording their church’s recent missionary trips over the world, and at the end he prays for anyone or anything the students request for a prayer. The people in the program have formed a community within it.

#### *Religious Framework of the Church*

The church that provides the ESL program is a Christian Baptist church in the southeastern region of the U.S. It is a church within the Christian denomination of Southern Baptist Convention, which recognizes evangelism as its core and commits to deliver gospel to the whole world. From the church’s official website, the mission statement reads, “The church meets to magnify Jesus Christ and multiply His Kingdom, to mature believers into effective Christ-followers, and to minister to other’s in Jesus’ name.” The statement demonstrates the church’s evangelical disposition.

The ESL program is one of the international programs established by the church’s International Ministry. The program is named Conversational English Ministry and is under the umbrella of Literacy Missions Ministries. The NAMB has assisted southern Baptist churches to

begin these ministries for over 50 years (Leininger and Moore). The NAMB states the purpose of Conversational English Ministries in the following way:

To involve Southern Baptist churches and associations in witnessing through meeting the needs of adults who are functional nonreaders, people who need to learn to speak English, and school-aged children and youth who need help with school. Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ is our primary objective. This witnessing is done through and within the context of meeting specific human needs. (Leininger and Moore, 1997, p1.1)

It is obvious that Conversational English Ministries have two objectives: teaching English and proclaiming the gospel. During the interview with the church's ESL program coordinator who is the Minister of Missions & Ministry, he said there are two goals for the program: a "basic" goal "to teach as much as English as we can to people here as long as they remain" and an intermediate goal "to bring people along in their faith if they want to have their faith to be developed." This statement coincides with that from the NAMB about the objectives of Conversational English Ministries.

After stating the purpose of Conversational English Ministries, the NAMB manual suggests ways for providing effective witnessing opportunities to share God's love and deliver his messages. One of them is to build relationships, which is explained below:

Through conversational English classes, you will meet many individuals you would not meet in any other setting. ... Working with students weekly over an extended time and demonstrating genuine concern for them will build positive relationships and trust. Your students will be more open to listen and carefully weigh the words and opinions of someone they know and trust. Because of this, sharing your experience with Jesus Christ will have a greater impact. (Leininger and Moore, 1997, p1.3)

It suggests that positive relationships and trust help with witnessing. After studying the church, the researcher noticed that the church also emphasizes the importance of relationships in doing God's work. By meeting various needs of and building relationships with people over the world, the church's International Ministry states that its mission is to reach the International community for Christ.

Furthermore, relational evangelism is listed as one of the church's key core values. Relational evangelism refers to building trusting relationships and showing genuine concern to people in order to let them see God's love from Christians around them. The discussions on the themes of the program in the prior section, especially the themes of love, care, and help, relationship/friendship, and community, show how relational evangelism functions in forming these.

Another outstanding feature of the church is its servant attitude in delivering God's messages. Its Ministry states that they are "called to serve." In addition, the church calls upon each member to use whatever gift he or she has received to serve others. In the ESL program, servant evangelism is applied into real action, though the term itself is not used in any written statement. Servant evangelism is a comparatively new term in the field of church studies. It is coined by Steve Sjogren in his book *Conspiracy of Kindness*. Sjogren defines it as "demonstrating the kindness of God by offering to do some act of humble service with no strings attached" (2003, p. 18). That is, serving people without expecting financial return or immediate religious commitment. The free classes and free services provided by the program are the products of the church's servant attitude. Servant evangelism also exhibits its function in forming the program's theme of service and theme of openness and being pressure-free. Table 6 lists the definition of the methods of evangelism and their relation to the five themes of the program.

Table 6

*Evangelical Methods and Their Relation to the Themes of the Program*

<b>Evangelical Method</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Related Themes</b>
relational evangelism	building trusting relationships and showing genuine concern to people in order to let them see God’s love from Christians around them	<u>love, care, and help</u> <u>relationship/friendship</u> <u>community</u>
servant evangelism	“demonstrating the kindness of God by offering to do some act of humble service with no strings attached”	<u>service</u> <u>openness and being pressure-free</u>

In summary, the formation of the outstanding themes of the program, love, care, and help, relationship/friendship, service, openness and being pressure-free, and community, is closely associated with the two methods of evangelism: relational evangelism and servant evangelism. This relation shows how the evangelism-oriented religious framework of the church mediates the construction of learning and teaching in the program.

Findings for Research Question Two

The second research question is: *how do the adult learners perceive their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program in regard to improvement of communicative language skills and social adaptation?* It was addressed by data collected by the methods of interview, questionnaire, and some documents. The researcher interviewed 12 students (excluding the three main participants), distributed 37 questionnaires, and collected documents mainly consisting of prior program evaluation surveys and student registration forms. This section of findings was analyzed by the three data-collection methods.

*Findings from Student Interview*

Through questions inquiring about students’ background information, their reasons and

purposes of attending the program, students' perspectives on their learning experiences and outcomes, their evaluation of the program, and the influences of the program on their lives, the researcher gathered from interviews the following categories of data for addressing the second research question.

*Reasons and goals for enrolling.* The interviewed students listed several reasons and goals for enrolling in the ESL program. One of the most frequently stated goals was to improve English language proficiency, especially communicative language skills. Almost all of the students recalled the difficulty in communicating with the local people when they had just arrived in the U.S. Hong said, "When I just came, I can't speak well, I am afraid of talking with people. I stayed at home for one year, afraid of going out to buy something... to talk something with other people. I feel very lonely. The second year someone told me I can go to church to learn English. Then I came to learn English. I hope that I can live in American and communicate with people."

Some students' purposes of enrolling were related to their jobs or plans of further study in colleges. Fabio said, "I learned English in Columbia as a course, learn basic. Here you have to learn English, for job... you know, for everything. The reason I came here because I need to learn grammar, vocabulary. In my work as a waiter I need to speak English everyday all the time." Abera attended English classes of the program seeking help with her preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) for enrolling in the university.

Some students included cultural learning as one of their goals for enrolling. Rayda said that besides the goal of learning English to communicate with American people, she also wanted to learn about American lifestyles and customs. She said, "We learned about Thanksgiving and

Christmas (in the ESL classes), I didn't know before. We live here, we need to know.”

Quite a few students mentioned that the provision of free lessons and free services of transportation and childcare were the preliminary attractions that interested them to attend the English classes at the very beginning.

*Classroom learning experiences.* Most students expressed a positive attitude towards their classroom learning experiences and strong approval of every aspect of the program.

First of all, they spoke highly of teachers' instruction and personality. The words “kind,” “good,” and “nice” almost used by every student in describing their teachers. Marisa even said, “I think everything here, the teachers, is not just good, is excellent.” Pirro said, “I like their straightforward instruction, they know what we need. Thus they design class for our level and need.” Quite a few students mentioned that the teachers speak slowly and use simple language to cater to their' English proficiency. In Heeju's words, “They speak the English everyone can understand.” Isabel added, “The teachers do not ignore us, always help, patient, motivating, encouraging, always teach us good things.”

Some students expressed their appreciation of the program's relaxing and free learning environment. Gala said her teacher “(is) always smiling, make you feel comfortable to come to the classes, make you just have a good time during the two hours.” Anshu said that she enjoys learning in the ESL classes where she feels no pressure, and she is not anxious or nervous as she used to be in other educational institutions. In addition, the free environment makes students willing to participate in discussions and share their opinions. Rayda said, “I feel excited in the class. The teachers choose the discussion topics related to our lives and we can say a lot.”

Most students think the class content and learning materials are very useful and practical. Taiho said that the teachers choose content that is closely related to their daily lives and they can

apply what they have learned in the classroom into practice right after class. Some of the teachers let students choose what they want to learn. Heeju said, “My teacher worry about what everyone thinks in the classroom. ... what everything concerns of each student, feelings, feedbacks, she’s always asking, ‘What do you want to learn for the next class?’ ‘What are your goals?’ ‘What are your concerns?’ ... I like that kind of teacher because she’s always pushing you to speak out your thoughts.”

Besides the class time, the half-hour break time between classes is also a positive experience for the students. Gezana called it “a social time” and she said, “The break time helps us to talk with people from our own country and people from other countries.” Fabio claimed that the break time is “an information time” when students and teachers gather together to share and exchange information to help one another.

Some students stated that what fascinates them most about the program is the close relationship between students and teachers and among students themselves. Isabel said that the teachers are like friends to them and care about their personal lives beyond classrooms. Taiho claimed that one of her achievements gained through the program is friendship with many students in and out of her class. She said, “If I didn’t go to the program, I would not have made so many friends, so many people to call upon. My friends helped me a lot. That changed my life. I can communicate with people, I feel less lonely.” Gezana even compared the international people from all over the world gathered through the program to “a big international family.”

*Improvement in communicative language skills and social adaptation.* During interviews, most students shared their happiness in English language proficiency improvement. Gala said, “I feel more confident about my English.” Comparing their improvement in different areas of language skills, the researcher noted that the students mentioned a lot about their achievements

in speaking, listening, and communicative language skills. Anshu said, “I now understand (local) accent. (My) speaking and listening improved a lot.” Abera claimed that the English classes help her to open her mouth and speak more English. Heeju shared that she has made progress in reading, speaking, and pronunciation because the ESL classes encourage conversation. Isabel also expressed her appreciation of the program in emphasizing conversational skills. She said, “Back in my country, I learned English, I know reading and writing. But when I came here, I just cannot start a conversation. This ESL program teaches conversation, that’s what I need.” Compared to their achievements in speaking and listening, improvement in writing skills was seldom mentioned. Some students even pointed out the lack of writing instruction and practice as one of the drawbacks of the program.

Besides sharing improvement in communicative skills, the students also noted their improvement in social adaptation and other positive changes in their lives after learning in the program. Gezana stated that the classes teach skills for living. Fabio claimed his job as a waiter benefited from English learning. He said, “What I learned in class help outside classroom lives, for a waiter like me, we can attend people and talk with them better.” Taiho talked about the change of her life through a little story: “When I came here, I had no idea of the different coins. When I go to the grocery I just bring all the coins and to let the cashier to get what is needed. When I get to the program we learned American money, (I learned) what is a dime, a quarter,... I can distinguish and do not depend on others now.” Marisa stated the program helped her relationship with American people. She said, “The first year I didn’t have American friends, and now because I am learning English I can ...have conversation with them.” Heeju summarized that the program is meeting her social needs and goals and her sees herself improving.

Some students stated that learning in the ESL program brings them something beyond the

mere improvement in communicative skills and social adaptation. Abera said that she became self-sufficient and independent after studying in the program. She claimed that she has changed from a housewife who used to depend on her husband to interact with the outside English speaking world to a woman who can do everything by herself. Hong shared that her learning experience in the program has become an important source of pride for her. She said, “I am so proud of myself right now. I become independent, and I can even help others. I sometimes help my husband with some paperwork he brings home.”

In summary, all interviewed students expressed their enjoyment in learning in the program. They perceive the program has helped them with improvement in communicative language skill and social adaptation.

#### *Findings from Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was carried out to supplement the method of interview by being distributed to all students in order to obtain a complete picture of student demographics, background information, reasons for and purposes of learning English and choosing this program, and their perspectives on their learning experiences in the program in regard to language proficiency development and social adaptation.

The questionnaire has three sections. Section One has questions inquiring demographic information about students’ ethnicity, country of origin, number of years in the U.S., time in the program, English proficiency level, gender, age, marriage/parenting status, level of education, whether they have studied English before, and whether they take English classes in other organizations. Section Two is composed of eleven Likert-type questions and two open-ended questions asking students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the program, mainly in three aspects: (a) the importance of the program in reaching personal, academic and professional

aspirations, (b) the helpfulness of the program in achieving language proficiency goals, and (c) students' overall evaluation. Section Three consists of seven Likert-type questions on the program's helpfulness with students' social adaptation by using English in various ways, including using English in varied settings and for different purposes.

The questionnaire was distributed in one class at the end of the semester. All students present that day finished the questionnaire, and the researcher collected 37 copies at the end of the class. As mentioned earlier, though over 80 students were enrolled in the program, less than half were regularly attended. The attendance of 37 on the day of questionnaire distribution is within the range of the program's normal attendance.

*Demographics of attending students.* The questionnaire first of all helped the researcher to have a clearer idea of the demographics of attending students of the program. The students who participated in the questionnaire came from 15 countries all over the world. Table 6 provides a list of the home countries of these students. Note that among all the 37 students, 10 are from Mexico and seven are from South Korea, which makes Mexico and South Korea outstanding in the list. It is noted that there are big Mexican and South Korean communities in the college town.

Table 7

*Students' Country of Origin*

Country of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Camerouh	2	5.4%
Columbia	1	2.7%
Cuba	3	8.1%
Egypt	1	2.7%
Ethiopia	2	5.4%
General West Africa	1	2.7%
India	2	5.4%
Iraq	1	2.7%
North Korea	1	2.7%
Mexico	10	2.7%
Nepal	1	27%
South Korea	2	5.4%
Syria	7	18.9%
Venezuela	1	2.7%
Vietnam	1	2.7%

Except one missing answer, the students identified themselves into three ethnic groups, with 15 Hispanic, 15 Asian, and six African. A few students enrolled in the program who were absent on the day of questionnaire distribution are not from the three ethnic backgrounds. However, most students attending the program are from the three biggest ethnic groups.

Of all the 37 students, 28% have been in the U.S. for less than one year, 26% have been here for one to two years, 23% two to five years, and 23% more than five years. When asked how long they have been studying in the church-based ESL program, 26% responded one to three months, 11% four to six months, 23% seven to twelve months, 29% one to two years, and 11% three to five years. Four of the 37 students are at the basic English proficiency levels (Level 1 & 2), 17 at the intermediate levels (Level 3 & 4), seven at the upper intermediate/advanced levels (Level 5 & 6), and nine at the advanced level (Level 7). Only three students are male, and the rest are female. Most students are in the age range of 21-30 (22%) and 31-40 (39%). Only two

students under 20, four fall between 41-50 and eight over 50. More than half of them chose the marital status of “part of a couple with children” (62%). The students’ educational background is mixed: 16 students have university graduate or undergraduate degrees, 10 some level of college education, and the other 10 have high school diplomas or lower. Generally speaking, two thirds of these students have some higher education. It is noted that the program is located in a college town with a high percentage of attending students coming from the university community composed of international students, visiting scholars, and their spouses. This may be the reason that a large percentage of the students have higher educational background. It may also explain the responses for the next question on English training experience: two thirds of the students have had English training previous. Table 7 lists attending students’ demographics in the above areas.

Table 8

*Students' Demographics*

Area	Choice	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Time in the U.S.	0-6 Months	6	17%
	7-12 Months	4	11%
	1-2 Years	9	26%
	2-5 Years	8	23%
	More than 5 Years	8	23%
Time in the program	1-3 months	9	26%
	4-6 months	4	11%
	7-12 months	8	23%
	1-2 years	10	29%
	3-5 years	4	11%
Class level	basic (1-2)	4	11%
	intermediate (3-4)	17	46%
	upper intermediate/advanced (5-6)	7	19%
	advanced (7)	9	24%
Gender	male	4	11%
	female	33	89%
Age	10-20	2	6%
	21-30	8	22%
	31-40	14	39%
	41-50	4	11%
	over 50	8	22%
Marital status	single person with no children	5	14%
	part of a couple with no children	3	8%
	part of a couple with children	23	62%
	a single parent	4	11%
	other	2	5%
Educational background	Undergrad or Graduate	10	33%
	Some College	10	33%
	Some High School	9	30%
	Less than High School	1	3%
Previous English training	yes	23	66%
	no	12	34%

Students' demographics tell some features of the program's attending students: mainly from

three ethnic background: Hispanics, Asian, and African; mostly women with children; higher education background.

After questions on investigating students' demographics, the main part of the questionnaire focuses on the following four areas: (a) how important the program is to help students reach their goals of enrolling, (b) how helpful the program is in improving students' English language proficiency, (c) how helpful the program is in students' social adaptation, and (d) the students' overall evaluation of the program.

*Achieving goals for enrolling.* Among the four choices under the question, "When you enrolled in the program, what was your most important reason or goal for enrolling?" 77% of students chose "to be able to use English in daily life," 11% chose "employment-related," and 9% "to prepare for further study at a college or university." It is clear that most attending students think the most important goal for attending the program is to use English in their lives.

For the following questions on the importance of the program in achieving the three specific goals, over two thirds of students selected "very important" for each question. It is interesting that the "very important" gained higher percentage (94%) under the question regarding the importance in achieving the goal of using English in daily life. The choice of "very important" under the questions addressing the other two goals had only 77% each. It seems students are more certain of the importance of the program in helping with English use in daily lives than its importance in improving employment and preparing for further study. It is in accordance with what the researcher has observed: the focus of the class content is conversational English for daily life, rather than academic English for further study or employment-related topics.

In summarizing how helpful the program is with achieving their most important goal, most students responded "very helpful" (81%) and the rest "somewhat helpful" (19%).

*English Language proficiency improvement.* There are four questions addressing the helpfulness of the English language training at the program with improving students' English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing respectively. Among the four choices, all the students preferred "very helpful" and "somewhat helpful" to the choices of "not very helpful" and "not at all helpful." The percentage range of "very helpful" for the four questions is from 60% to 83%, and that of "somewhat helpful" is from 17% to 34%. Most students believe that English learning at the program has helped a lot with improving their English language proficiency in all the four skills, but the percentage for writing is comparatively lower. Comparing the difference of percentage of "very helpful" among the four questions, it is noticed that improvement of listening (83%) and reading (71%) gained higher percentages than speaking (69%) and writing (60%). Attending students feel they have gained more receptive skills than productive skills. The findings from classroom observations and student interviews explained this result. Through observations the researcher found that there were much more classroom exercises in reading and comprehension than writing, and during interviews some students expressed their expectations to have more writing lessons and exercises in the program. Figure 1 provides a comparative chart showing the percentages of responses to the four questions about language proficiency improvement.

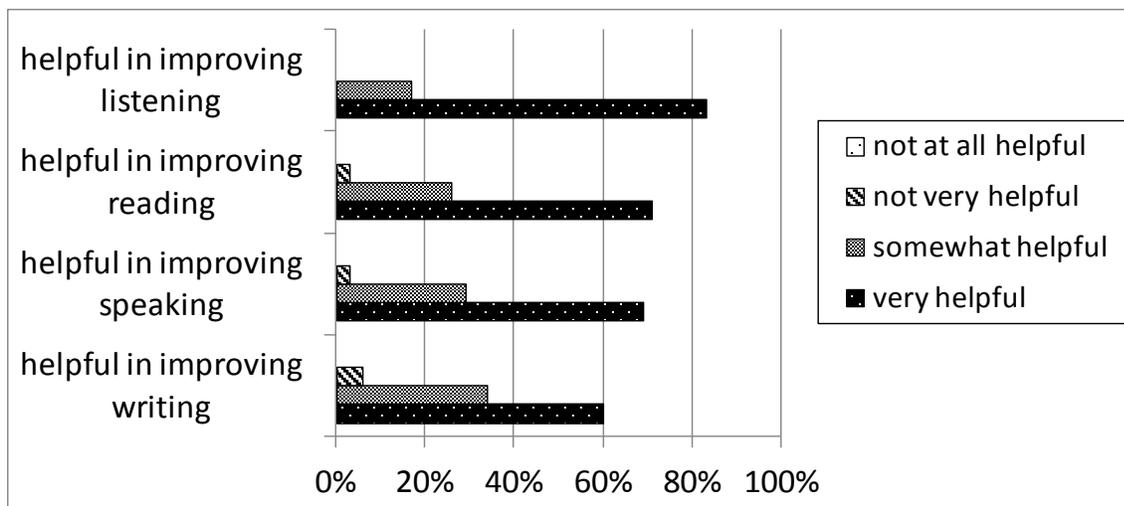


Figure 1. Responses for Questions on How Helpful the English Training at the Program in Improving Students' Four Language Skills

*Social adaptation.* There are seven questions in Section Three about social adaptation, four of which apply to every student. These questions asked how much students' English language training at the program helped them in the following four aspects: (a) using English to use services (such as medical, police, library, employment centre, or government services); (b) using English in social settings (for example, while shopping, at parties, or in restaurants); (c) using English to understand English media (such as radio, TV, newspapers, or the Internet); (d) using English in the community (for example, volunteering, joining a club, or going to a recreation centre). Among the four choices, most students preferred "very helpful" and "somewhat helpful" to the choices of "not very helpful" and "not at all helpful." However, comparing the percentages, only the question on using English in social settings had higher percentage in "very helpful" than "somewhat helpful," more students responded "somewhat helpful" for the other three questions. This is different from the result of students' responses to questions on English proficiency improvement: the percentage of "very helpful" is higher than "somewhat helpful" for all the four skills of English proficiency. There is one more difference: the percentage of "not very helpful" is higher on average for the social adaptation questions than that for English language skill

questions. Some percentage of “not at all helpful” even appeared for the question on using English to use services. Figure 2 provides a comparative chart of the percentages of responses to the four questions on social adaptation.

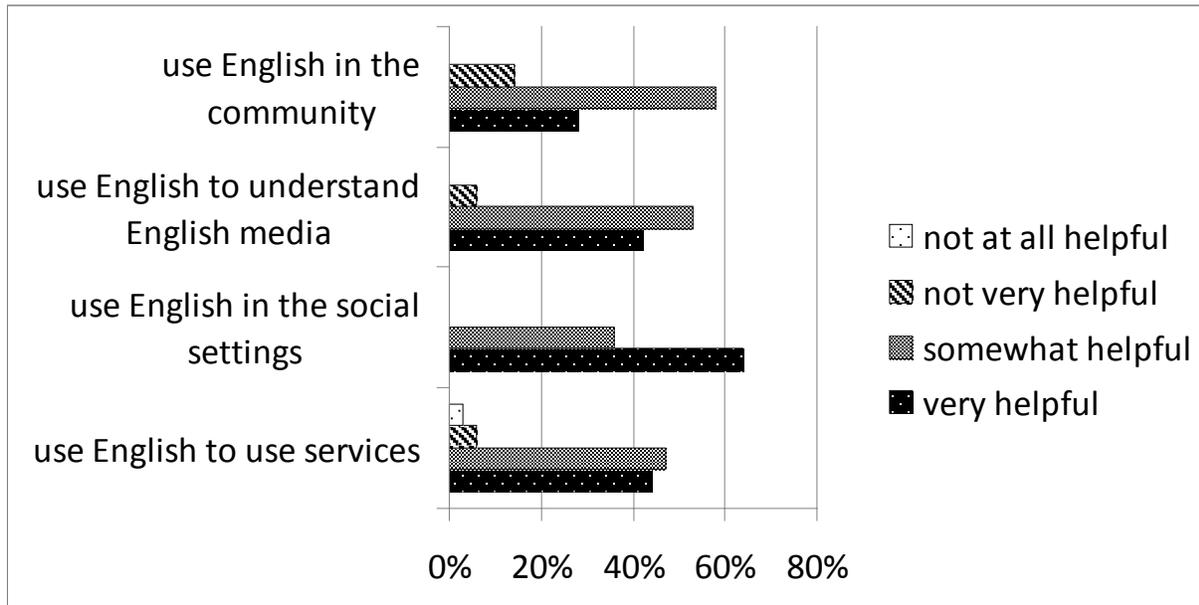


Figure 2. Responses for Questions on How Helpful the English Training at the Program in Students’ Social Adaptation

Based on the result for social adaptation questions, it is clear that most students think their training in the program helps with their social adaptation in various aspects, especially when using English in social settings. However, compared to students’ strong affirmation of the improvement in English language skills, they showed slightly weaker affirmation to the helpfulness of the program with improving their social adaptation.

*Overall evaluation of the program.* In the question, “How would you rate the overall quality of instruction in your English language training classes here?” 86% of the students chose “good” and 14% “adequate.” No one chose “poor” or “very poor.” In the next question, “How satisfied are you with the English language training you are taking here?” 20 students responded “completely satisfied,” 14 students “mainly satisfied,” only one “partially satisfied,” and no “not

satisfied at all.” Most students rated the program’s instruction highly and felt satisfied with their learning experience in the program.

### *Findings from Documents*

The documents collected for addressing this research question are mainly composed of previous evaluation surveys initiated by the program which were distributed to all attending students at the end of each academic year. The survey is very simple, with 10 multiple choice questions asking students’ opinions of their classes and teachers and two open-ended questions for students to propose suggestions. Like the result of the questionnaire distributed by the researcher, students rated the instructions of the program very highly and expressed satisfaction with the whole program.

### *Summary*

The students enroll in the church-based ESL program with both linguistic and social needs. They want to improve their English proficiency; they also seek help with job advancement and further education. Furthermore, they hope English learning can help them with social and cultural adaptation.

Data gathered by the three research methods consistently reveals students’ opinions on achievements in communicative language skills and social adaptation. Students stated that through the English classes provided by the church they have improved English language proficiency, especially in communicative language skills. Since the program focuses on conversational English, they have made more progress in speaking and listening than writing. In addition, the students think the program is successful in meeting their social needs. They appreciate that the English classes put extra effort in teaching practical English and cultural knowledge which help significantly in their social adaptation.

Moreover, the students reported that they have gained more than improvement in communicative language skills and social adaptation. They have also developed personality through learning in the program. They have become self-sufficient, confident, and independent. They are proud of the progress they have achieved and appreciate what the program has done in bringing positive changes in their lives.

### Findings for Research Question Three

The third research question (*Given the adult language learners' experiences in the church-based ESL program, how do the adult learners involve themselves in their children's linguistic and academic development at home, in communication with their children's schools and teachers, and in the overall community activities?*), was addressed through the study on the selected subcases. Ana, Tabia, and Paula (pseudonyms) were selected as the subcases of the study through the method of purposeful sampling out of their representativeness. They are from the ethnic background of Hispanic, African, and Asian respectively, which can represent most students attending the program from the three main ethnic groups; they are from classes of advanced Level, lower level, and a level in between, which can represent students in different English proficiency classes. A detailed comparative study of the three subcases fulfilled the task to answer the third research question.

#### *Subcase One: Ana*

Ana is the oldest mother among the three adult students chosen as the subcases of the study. She is 39 years old, tall and dark-haired, and displays a vivacious and cheerful demeanor. She always dresses elegantly and wears delicate make-up.

Ana was born in Mexico. She obtained a bachelor's degree in accounting and worked as an accountant for several years before she met her husband who works with the big international

company --- Cement. Because of the constant transferring of her husband's job, the whole family moved to the U.S. five years ago when her older son was 8 years old and the younger son 5 years old. After transferring between several cities in the U.S., the family settled down in this small college town four years ago. They live in a big house her husband bought for the family. Because her husband makes good money from his job, there was no need for Ana to do a regular job to support the family expenses. In addition, because of the different tax systems of the two countries, it is difficult for Ana to find an accountant job with a degree in accounting earned in Mexico. Therefore, she did not try to find any job and became a housewife since the family moved to the U.S.

However, Ana always wanted to do something for the Latino community in the U.S. She took some courses on social work in a nearby university and got the certificate for social working. Afterwards, she began to work as a volunteer for the local Latino immigrant community to help with their daily life issues, especially to help those Latinos with no English proficiency to communicate with the English speaking world. Though Ana began to learn English since middle school in Mexico, she still felt difficulty in speaking English. After an introduction by a Mexican friend, Ana began to attend this church-based ESL program to learn English and began to love it soon.

She attends the English classes regularly and befriends the teachers and students in the program because of her extroverted personality and helping heart. She introduced Latino community activities to the Latino students in the program and provides a lot of services from her job facilities for the students here.

Ana thinks the program helps her a lot in English proficiency improvement. She said, "I learned English in Mexico...in middle and high school...but just basic English words. When I

came here, I did not know how to speak...and I did not want to speak English. ...People also did not understand my English when I speak.” After studying in the program for three years, she got more confident in speaking English and she felt her life was changed with the improvement in English proficiency. Daily life became much easier and convenient; she can understand native speakers, and her English is easily understood by others in whatever she does and wherever she goes, no matter in shopping or visiting a doctor. Her volunteer job representing the Latino community also benefits a lot from her English improvement because during her work she needs to communicate in English with all kinds of organizations or government bureaus.

Besides English proficiency improvement, the program also teaches American culture and culture of different countries, which helps Ana understand American people and peoples from other countries better and make friends with them. The cultural learning and discussion in the ESL classes strengthens her knowledge base and widens her horizons of the world. All these help Ana fulfill her aspiration to serve people in need.

Ana spoke very highly of the teachers’ instruction, teaching style, and personal character. She said,

- 1 Our teacher, Ms. M, had a lot of learning experiences. ...she taught in the university
- 2 before she came here. She is an excellent teacher. ...always notice my mistakes in
- 3 speaking and design some lessons about those mistakes for us to practice. I am right
- 4 now... can speak with less mistakes. She is so nice... talk with us like friend.

Ana thinks that the teachers in the program, besides having wonderful teaching experience, care for all aspects of students’ lives. The teachers cater to each student’s needs and design class content to work on students’ weak points in English. After three years’ learning in the program, Ana is in the highest English proficiency level class. She owes all her achievements to the

teachers' instruction and help.

Ana mentioned another good point that makes her so fond of the program: the pure purpose of helping immigrants and international people learn English without religious infiltration. She said, "The program never asks if you believe in God and it never pushes students to its Christian religion." There is very little content in Bible or Bible-related learning in classes. Even though Ana is a Catholic and shares the core belief with Christianity, she likes the way the program runs classes without religious intention on attending students. She believes this way of carrying out the program will help students, especially non-Christian students, learn in a free environment without pressure.

Ana cares a lot for her children's education. Saving more time and energy with her children is also one of the reasons why she chose to be a stay-at-home mother. When the family just settled down here, both of her sons enrolled in public schools. But after an occasional chance to get information about a Catholic private school from a friend, she investigated more about the school and got to know that the school has good academic standing, scientific content arrangement, and various intellectual activities. Then she transferred her children to this school even though its education costs much more.

Learning in the program helps her get more involved in her children's education. Having more confidence in speaking English, she actively involves in school-initiated activities and helps with school stuff as a parent volunteer. During the classes in the program, she learned some American ways of parenting from teachers and applied them at home. For the most part she sticks to her own way of parenting, such as a strict time limit on video game on weekdays. Ana identifies herself and her family as Mexicans, even though they are living in US right now. She wants her children to master both English and Spanish so that they can have free choice to

develop either in Mexico or in the U.S. when they grow up. She puts extra effort in helping her children learn Spanish and insists on Spanish only at home to maintain and advance her children's proficiency of Spanish. In addition to fostering her children's Spanish literacy, she also teaches them Mexican culture and history, after realizing that they have no knowledge of Spanish culture at all. Upon home visits, the researcher found stacks of books, both textbooks and light reading books, and videos in Spanish in the children's study room. Ana said that every time they go back to visit Mexico she brings back Spanish literature. The TV at home also has Spanish channels. As said by the younger son: "half day in school all English, half day at home all Spanish," the children are raised bilingually and biculturally. Both of her sons are now masters of both Spanish and English, in speaking or writing, and they are proud of it. They are fond of language learning and even planning to learn other foreign languages. They appreciate their mother's insistence on their maintenance and mastering of their first language, Spanish.

When interviewed on their point of view on Ana's English learning at the church-based ESL program, both children showed very positive and supporting attitudes. They think it is very good for their mother to attend English classes at the church and they have noticed great improvement in her English. Her older son said, "It is interesting that mom helped us with our homework and Spanish learning when we were young while right now we help her with her homework from the ESL classes and her English learning." Ana takes pleasure in having her children correct and teach her vocabulary or pronunciation in English. For her, this represents mutual learning, where both mother and child can learn from each other and participate in each other's learning experiences at home.

#### *Subcase Two: Tabia*

Tabia is a little bit younger than Ana and she is the second youngest mother among the three.

Her hometown is in Ethiopia, Africa where she was born to be a Christian. Her husband is currently a Ph. D. student in the university. After her husband lived in the U.S. and studied in the university for one year, Tabia and their two children came to accompany him two and a half years ago. Then they bore the third child, after they settled down. Right now, the elder daughter is 9 years old, the son 6, and the younger daughter just 1.

Just like Ana, Tabia also had a bachelor's degree in Accounting. She had a decent job in her hometown. However, when the family moved to the U.S. because of her husband's pursuit of further study, she quit her job and became a housewife to take care of the whole family. According to Tabia's description, when they were in their hometown, they were an upper-class family. With her husband working as a university professor and she as an accountant of a big company, they lived an affluent life, even having a servant in the house to take care of the domestic work. But right now her family depends on her husband's small salary as a teaching assistant at the university and their prior savings, their life quality is much lower than before. The situation worsened when they had their third child. Together with the difficulty in speaking English and communicating with local American people, she felt life in the U.S. was so hard. However, her life gradually changed after she heard about the church-based ESL program from her neighbor.

It was free English classes and provision of transportation and child care services that interested Tabia to initially attend the classes. She said, "It is just for us. I do not have a car to go there ... They offer to pick up us and send us home. They also take care of my little baby. I do not worry about her when I take class in church." She thought the program was so considerate to mothers like her who have young children and to learners like her who do not own a car. She thought she would enjoy a peaceful morning being liberated from her crying little baby. She

didn't expect that it was much more than a peaceful morning; it was a productive and rewarding morning. She learned quite a few useful and practical new words and usages in her first class.

The pressure-free classroom atmosphere and the welcoming environment of the whole ESL program attracted her to attend the classes time and again. In the classroom, the teacher welcomes all kinds of questions from students. Tabia once shared her embarrassing experience of filling in new-patient forms in her daughter's doctor's office. Because she didn't recognize half of the words on the forms, she had great difficulty in filling out the forms. Tabia's teacher used this story as a topic for a whole class lesson. After collecting different forms from a lot of doctors' office, the teacher listed words that frequently appeared on these forms and taught the whole class what these words mean and how to fill in forms. Tabia was thankful for this lesson because it was applicable to her situation and would be helpful the next time she visits a doctor. She said that other students had also brought forward issues that became topics for vocabulary learning and cultural discussion.

Tabia is touched by the caring and close relationship between teachers, students and among other students in the program. Teachers care for every student's development in English as well as life situations. Students become good friends and share each other's happiness and sorrow. The break time becomes a social time. Teachers and students from different classes gather together to welcome new students and sing birthday songs to celebrate anyone who has a birthday that day. Teachers and students exchange information and provide help for the students who are having trouble in their lives.

As for her own English progress, Tabia considers the program valuable for learning pronunciation and vocabulary, which she views as important linguistic skills because they can help her with daily activities. She said,

- 1 I am so glad... I learn a lot of new words and they teach me to say it correctly. I was
- 2 embarrassed before and people can not understand what I am speaking...right now, I am
- 3 fine. I can speak better English and people can understand me. I can use my English to go
- 4 shopping...buy the things I want. It's great.

With better pronunciation and more vocabulary, she can avoid embarrassment from incorrect pronunciation and lack of vocabulary; she can interact with English speakers smoothly and successfully in various situations, such as, shopping, asking for directions, booking seats in a restaurant, etc. Another asset she gets from the program is skill in English conversation. She is no longer afraid of either face-to-face communication or telephone communication. Furthermore, Tabia believes that the program's effective English instruction is complemented by the lessons about the U.S. culture. The accumulated cultural knowledge of the U.S., class by class, helps her understand America and American people better. Now she can have an easy and relaxing chat with American friends following the topics they choose or even contributing new topics.

All her achievements from the program benefit her parental involvement in her children's education. With improved pronunciation and enlarged vocabulary, she can read aloud to her children with proper diction and understand the content of what she is reading. The English conversational skills she learned from the program are particularly important in dealing with her children's schools, when interacting with school staff, or when participating in school meetings. Her improved English proficiency lessened her dependence on interpreters assigned to assist non English speaking parents at school events, meetings, and conferences. Learning cultural facts about the U.S. from the ESL classes helps her understand the context within which her children are growing up, and the knowledge about American educational system makes her have better cooperation with the school to educate her children.

From the home visits, the researcher noticed that Tabia's family lives in a two-bedroom apartment close to the university campus. The apartment is small with very simple and basic furniture. There is a small TV set, a breakfast table, and an old sofa in the living room and two mattresses lying directly on the floor of each bedroom. There is no desk in the whole apartment. During the interview of her elder daughter, when asked where she does her homework, she said, "I do my homework anywhere: On the mats in my bedroom or some other places, sometimes even in kitchen." Even though Tabia cares for the children's education, she and her husband have to be thrifty because of the tight economic situation of the family. When asked about her home literacy material, her elder daughter showed me a mathematics book her father bought for her after they saw a TV advertisement about it. The book looks like new. She said she didn't write or mark anything on the book --- Instead, she wrote on a notebook--- because her father wanted the book to be passed down to younger children one after another.

Though quite aware of the importance of English in helping with her children's education, Tabia is cognizant that her duties as parent include maintaining her children's L1 of Amharic and teach her children about their African roots and the culture of their home country. She does not intentionally speak English at home except teaching them new words when they are watching TV cartoons; she keeps speaking to her children in their mother tongue. However, because she is occupied by cooking for the whole family and taking care of the youngest child, she does not have time to maintain and teach the school-aged children Amharic literacy. The researcher did not see any Amharic literacy book in their apartment. Her elder daughter said she can understand Amharic well and speak it, but she gradually forgot Amharic literacy skills she mastered before she came to the U.S. Right now she can't read or write Amharic at all. The literacy activities the children do mostly are writing homework, sometimes with parents' help, and reading books

borrowed from the university library.

When asked how she feels about her mother's church English learning, she thinks Tabia's English has improved a lot, especially in grammar. She said, "When Mom just came she didn't use the correct grammar and I was laughing all the time; now she makes fewer mistakes and sometimes teach me new things." She thinks it is good for her mother to going to church to learn English and communicate with other people.

Tabia summarizes the program is important particularly for mothers, because it provides the double benefit of teaching English and providing child care services. She views the program as a blessing for the mothers. It is also important for her as a woman, because it has helped her become more independent, meet other women, be less shy, and feel more confident. She appreciates what the program has taught her to read, write, and say in English. But what seems more important to her about the program is being in a stimulating social environment outside her home that can promote interactions with other people and help her progress. She has upgraded from Lower Intermediate class to Upper Intermediate class during the two years in the program, and she is working hard towards Advanced Level. She is considering preparing for the GRE and TOEFL in order to apply further education in the university.

#### *Subcase Three: Paula*

Paula is the youngest of the three mothers. She is 30 years old and looks energetic. Carrying a smile all the time, she greets everyone she meets on the way. She is a very polite and considerate woman.

Paula and her family came to the U.S. from Nepal four years ago. Her family's story of immigration is quite dramatic. In Nepal, people are drawn from the lottery to win the limited chance to obtain a U.S. green card. Paula's husband was chosen. To better their children's future

thinking that the U.S. has the most advanced education, Paula and her husband decided to move to the U.S. and gave up all the things they had in Nepal: steady jobs, well-established social connections, and extended family support. Even though Paula's husband has a bachelor's degree he earned in Nepal, it was difficult for him to find a matching job. He now works as a full-time waiter in an Indian restaurant. Paula has a high school degree and worked as a kindergarten teacher in Nepal. It was even harder for her to find a job here. Soon after the family settled down in the town, they had their second son. So Paula stopped job hunting and stayed at home to take care of the new baby and the whole family. When her little son grew bigger, she began to search for a job again. After some effort she finally found a part-time waitress job working two mornings per week to supplement the family income. Right now their elder son is 7, and the younger son is 3. Both children are educated in public schools, with the first son in Grade 2 and the younger one in a head-start program.

After they moved to the U.S., especially during the process of job hunting, Paula realized the importance of English language proficiency. Though Paula began to learn English as a subject starting from elementary school, she felt the form of English she learned in Nepal did not function here. She explained, "What we learned in school is British English, not American English; and we were taught how to take tests, not how to speak." When she heard about the free church-based ESL program from a Nepalese friend, she happily began to attend its classes every week.

Paula thinks that the teachers of the program are very nice. They intentionally use a slower speed of speaking to cater to the students' English proficiency. Paula said,

- 1 My teacher are so nice...she speak very slowly so I can follow her all the time. ... She is
- 2 patient...listen to my poor English and help me to correct them. Teachers here are not

- 3 like some other Americans I meets outside class. They are impatient when I speak...even
- 4 very rude sometimes ... they do not like us... people from other countries

She loves the classes. She thinks the class content is practical, with the focus on conversational English, which is very helpful for newly immigrated adults. She loves the break time as well. It is a social time when students and teachers can talk about their lives outside the classroom and share important information of various kinds, such as when there will be promotions in the mall with great discounts, where there are job openings, etc. It is by this occasion after getting information about a job opening that she found her part-time job. Paula thinks the church-based ESL program is an important place to learn and socialize.

When talking about religion, Paula said she likes Christianity. She believed in Hinduism in her country, but she is open to every religion. Right now she thinks her faith is “in the middle of Hinduism and Christianity.” When asked how she feels about the influence of religious context on the program, she said that she does not feel any religious pressure studying in the classroom. She believes it is the good nature of the teachers that motivates them to volunteer to teach immigrants for free. The teachers and the program do not push the students to Christianity, though the program is provided by a Christian church.

Paula considers her children’s education as the most important matter in her family. Her passion of learning English is closely connected to her personal aspirations for her children. She wanted to know more words in order to help her sons with schoolwork, and to be able to understand the English language books she reads to her children. She views English language skills as tools that can enable her to read school notes, to be able to communicate with her sons’ school staff and teachers, and to be actively involved in her children’s education. She used to depend on her husband on most occasions when English was needed. She studies English in the

program with aims for self-reliance and independence, mainly for the purpose of being able to access, interpret, evaluate and use school related information at any time anywhere freely and on her own. More importantly, the English learning experience has strengthened her confidence to become an active participant in her younger son's Head Start program. She has been able to fulfill her child's teachers' requests to read aloud to the children in English on a couple of occasions. Prior to attending the program, she did not want to participate in her children's schools because she was afraid that she would not be able to understand what was being said to her. After being in the program, she no longer has to bring her husband to attend school meetings or parent-teacher conferences to translate for her. She finds this independence to be a crucial consequence of her own learning, and an invaluable aspect of her own life. She also finds satisfaction in being able to understand and respond to her son's teacher's questions without having to resort to the services of a secondary source such as an interpreter, her husband, or her older child.

Paula's family lives in an apartment close to the business center of the town where the restaurant her husband works at is located. The apartment is small, but clean and well-organized. Upon home visits, the researcher found that the language they use at home is mostly Nepali, while sometimes conversations initiated by the children are in English. Paula said,

- 1 My sons go to school, their English is good. But they learn from me some
- 2 vocabulary. They ask me something, I ask the teachers in the church the correct use
- 3 of some vocabulary. So it's good. My sons learn from me vocabulary. And I can
- 4 learn something from my sons since they speak better than me.

Paula believes it is important for her sons to learn their mother tongue of Nepali. But she has not put extra effort to teach them Nepali nor required them to speak only Nepali at

home. She believes it is better to give her sons free choice. She identifies herself and her family as Nepalese, but she thinks their family's future, especially her children's, is in the U.S. Both of her sons can speak Nepali well and like to speak it at home, but they can not read Nepali. Her elder son, showed one Nepali storybook her mother used to read to him. He told the researcher what the story was about, but he could not recognize most of the words in the book.

In weekdays, Paula helps her sons with their homework from school, and she also downloads some academic exercises from the Internet for her elder son to work on. She often reads books to her younger son, including some in Nepali. The elder son likes to read by himself. During the weekends, Paula usually brings her sons to the public library to borrow books and children's movies, and play video games for a while.

Her elder son believes it is a great thing for his mother to attend the program to learn English. After learning in the program, Paula's English has improved, and she is much happier. He even said, "Mom becomes better friends with us, since we have much more to share, both in Nepali and English."

Paula has upgraded from the class of Beginner Level to Lower Intermediate in the last year. Since she now has the part-time job, she can not attend every class. She always tries to change her shift in order to attend the class every Thursday morning. She appreciates what the program has done in helping immigrant adult students participate in mainstream society and providing tools for students to become more confident about the use of their language skills in real situations. What makes her most thankful is that the program helps her get more involved in her children's education and establish a closer friendship with her sons like friends; furthermore, the program makes her children have pride in their mother.

*Summary of the Three Subcases*

Ana, Tabia, and Paula were selected as the main student participants of the study out of their differences in various aspects to represent students of a wide range of differences in the church-based ESL Program. Table 8 makes a comparison of them from various aspects.

Table 8

*Comparison of the Three Main Student Participants as Subcases*

	<b>Ana</b>	<b>Tabia</b>	<b>Paula</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Hispanic	African	Asian
<b>Country of origin</b>	Mexico	Ethiopia	Nepal
<b>Mother tongue</b>	Spanish	Amharic	Nepali
<b>Faith</b>	Catholicism	Christianity	Hinduism
<b>Education</b>	College	College	High school
<b>Time in the U.S.</b>	5 years	2 years and a half	4 years
<b>English proficiency</b>	Advanced	Upper Intermediate	Lower Intermediate
<b>Work</b>	Housewife, with a volunteering job serving the Latino community	housewife	Housewife, working part-time as a waitress
<b>Husband's income</b>	Employee of a big company	Graduate assistant in the university	Full-time waiter
<b>Family economic situation</b>	affluent	tight	fair

<b>Influence of the program on their daily lives and community participation</b>	More confident in speaking English; life improved: daily life easier and more convenient; understand native speakers, English easily understood by others. Her volunteering job benefits from English improvement; has better cultural understanding of American people and peoples from other countries better and easier to make friends with them. All these help her fulfill her aspiration to serve people in need.	Considers linguistics and conversational skills learned in the program help her with daily activities: less embarrassment from incorrect pronunciation and lack of vocabulary; smooth and successful interaction with English speakers in various situations; no longer fears face-to-face or telephone conversation. has an relaxing relationships with American friends because of cultural learning. The program is a life savior to her.	Thinks class content practical, with focus on conversational English, helpful for newly immigrated adults; break time between classes a social time when students and teachers talk about their lives outside classroom and share important information of various kinds. It is by this occasion that she got information about a job opening and she found her part-time job. She thinks the program is an important place to learn and socialize.
<b>Children</b>	Elder son 13 Younger son 10	Elder daughter 9 Son 6 Younger daughter 1	Elder son 9 Younger son 4
<b>Home language</b>	L1 only	Mostly L1	Mostly L1
<b>Home literacy</b>	Helps children with school homework; reads books, watches movie/video in both languages with children; teach children Hispanic literacy	Helps with school homework; reads books mostly in English and watches American TV with children	Helps with school homework & homework downloaded from Internet; read books mostly in English and bring them to library to read

<b>Influence of the program on their parental involvement</b>	More confident in speaking English, actively involves herself in school-initiated activities and helps with school stuff as a parent volunteer; have learned some American ways of parenting from teachers and applied them at home	With improved pronunciation and enlarged vocabulary, can read aloud to children and understand the content of the readings. conversational skills and knowledge about American educational system helps to better cooperate with the school to educate her children; less dependent on interpreters at school events	Strengthens her confidence to become an active participant in her sons' education; able to fulfill her child's teachers' requests to read aloud to the children in English; more independent, no need translating from her husband, or her older child in communication with schools; finds satisfaction in her own improvement of parental involvement
<b>Children's perception of their mother's English learning in the program</b>	Have positive attitudes and support Mom's ESL learning; think it is good for Mom and be glad that they can help her with her homework from English classes	Think Mom's English has improved a lot, especially in grammar; think it is good for Mom to go to church to learn English and communicate with other people.	Believe it is a great thing for Mom to go to the program to learn English; feel her English has improved, and she is much happier; becomes better friends with children

Even though the three students have so many differences in ethnicity, country of origin, first language, religion, educational background, time in the U.S., work experience, and family economic situation, they share many similarities in their views of the importance of English learning, children's education, and parental involvement. They also reached a consensus when talking about the importance of the church-based ESL program in their lives, and how their English learning experiences in the program influence their parental involvement and community participation.

The three mothers view studying English as an important part of their lives as mothers and as women living in the U.S. They shared the common feeling that attending the program and learning English helped them attain their own personal goals. They became more independent and self-confident when dealing with people outside the safety zone of their homes and their classroom. Their lives have become much easier and have fewer obstacles since they have improved their English proficiency after learning in the program. Comparing each mother's responses during the twice interviews, the researcher also noticed that in the second interviews all the three mothers spoke English more fluently and expressed their ideas more clearly than their first interviews which were taken four months earlier.

Supporting their children's learning and schooling was another primary reason for attending the program because the mothers deeply cherish their children's education and view it as instrumental in bringing positive outcomes for their children. All the mothers help their children with homework, read to them, and participate in school events such as parent-teacher conferences. In addition to what most American mothers do, they also maintain their first language use at home and try to teach their children L1 literacy. The learning experience in the program helps them better involve themselves in their children's education at home, communicate more successfully with their children's schools and teachers, and more actively participate in school events. Furthermore, they are enabled and willing to contribute more in community activities.

All three students appreciate what the program has brought to them: English improvement, self-confidence and independence in life, better communication with the English-speaking world, social adaptation, active participation in community activities, and more successful parental involvement in their children's education.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine a church-based ESL program for adult immigrant and international people. In view that the program is carried out in the special context of a church and that there are a lack of studies exploring perceptions of adult immigrant learners in the literature, the researcher posited the program's context and the students' perspectives as the focuses of the study. The researcher, first, examined the religious framework of the church and its interaction with learning and teaching in the church-based ESL program. Then, the perceptions of adult language learners were investigated concerning their learning experiences and improvement in English proficiency and social adaptation. Finally, this study explored how immigrant and international adults apply their learning to parental involvement in their children's education and social participation in their local community. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How does the religious framework of the institutional context mediate the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program?
2. How do the adult learners perceive their learning experiences in the church-based ESL program in regard to improvement of communicative language skills and social adaptation?
3. Given the adult language learners' experiences in the church-based ESL program, how do the adult learners involve themselves in their children's linguistic and academic development at home, in communication with their children's schools and teachers, and

in the overall community activities?

To conclude this study, this chapter will provide a summary of findings, ecological interpretations of the case and subcases of the study, findings in relation to the literature review of past studies, implications for researchers and educators, and a conclusion with a critical pedagogy of space.

### Summary of Findings

In this section, a summary of findings for each research question will be followed by a summary of findings of the study as a whole.

#### *Summary of Findings for Research Question One*

The first research question is: How does the religious framework of the institutional context mediate the construction of language teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program? Based on the data analysis from page 85 to 98, the researcher concludes that Christian evangelism functions in forming a nurturing community among the people in the program.

The church that provides the ESL program is a southern Baptist church. Within the Christian denomination of Southern Baptist Convention, it holds evangelism as the central theme. Relational evangelism and servant evangelism are the two approaches that the church uses to carry out its missions, which include this ESL program for local immigrant and international people. These two evangelical approaches intertwine with the formation of the five outstanding themes: love, care, and help; relationship/friendship; service; openness and being pressure-free; and community. These themes capture the characteristics of the program and lead to the establishment of a nurturing community of learning in the program.

Relational evangelism helps form the themes of love/care/help and relationship/friendship. The program is filled with the mutual love and care between teachers and students. Teachers are

devoted to helping students learn English and deal with personal issues. These volunteer teachers, mostly members of the church, claimed that their love for their students is from the love of God. The teachers hope that through their acts of love and help, students would come to an understanding of God's love for them. Furthermore, teachers and students have built close relationships with each other. They have become friends. The program's guidance clearly states that the classes are established to "meet the emotional needs of friendship" and "develop emotional support" (Leininger and Moore, 1997, p1.3). The teachers' Christian faith brings them a desire to build deep relationships with their students.

At the same time, servant evangelism contributes to constructing the themes of service and openness/being pressure-free. Christian teachers regard teaching immigrant and international people in the program as their service to God. Through serving people in need, these teachers hope students can feel God's love for them. In addition, the program opens their classes to anyone who wants to learn English regardless of their cultural and religious background. The teachers respect that students have free choice of religion and do not push students to Christianity. They are committed to providing a pressure-free learning environment for students. The teachers' servant attitude and devotion to teaching exemplify the appeal of Christianity and have brought some students to Christianity by their free choice.

Finally, a nurturing learning community has formed in the program with the functioning of relational and servant evangelism and the foundation built upon the above four themes.

#### *Summary of Findings for Research Question Two*

The second research question focuses on adult language learner's perspectives on their learning experiences in regard to the improvement of communicative language skills and social adaptation. The two main research methods used for addressing this question, student interview

and questionnaire, bring forward results consistent with one another. The data presented from page 98 to 112 show that students reached a consensus view that the program has played an important role in helping them improve communicative language skills and social adaptation.

One of the common themes shared by the two methods is the program's importance in helping students achieve their goals for enrolling. The most frequently stated goals and purposes for enrolling include using English in daily life, helping with job-hunting or improving employment situations, and preparing for further study at higher educational institutions. Almost all students claimed that the program has played a very important role in helping them achieve their goal of using English in daily life. In comparison, students were less satisfied with how the program helps achieve the goal for job-related issues, and least satisfied with its role in preparing for further study. These results were reached because the focus of the program is conversational English for daily life, rather than academic English for further study or employment-related topics.

In regard to improvement of English language proficiency, especially communicative language skills, students expressed their happiness of achievement in chorus. Among the four language skills, students claimed that they have made more progress in speaking and listening than reading and writing. Since the classes put extra emphasis on conversational skills, students have more chances to practice speaking than writing. With the mastered communicative language skills, students become more confident in communicating with the English-speaking world outside their home.

Students held a consensus view in the program's helpfulness in meeting their social needs and assisting their social adaptation. Specifically, the program has helped the students to use English in the community, to understand English media, in social settings, and to use services.

Furthermore, the teaching of American cultural knowledge helps significantly in their cultural adaptation.

In addition to improvement in communicative language skills and social adaptation, students have also gained personality growth, which becomes a valuable treasure in their whole lives.

### *Summary of Findings for Research Question Three*

Built upon the prior question investigating students' perceptions, the third research question moves a step forward to explore the interactions of students' learning experiences in the ESL program with their parental involvement and community participation in real life situations. To address this question, the researcher purposefully chose three mother students as subcases of the study and carried out a comparative analysis of them. The Data analysis from page 112 to 129 demonstrates that students' English learning experiences in the program has helped them play more active roles in parental involvement and community participation.

Varied as they are in ethnic, economic, educational, and linguistic background, the three mothers have commonalities in sharing the changes of their lives in the aspects of parental involvement and community participation after learning in the church-based ESL program. With improved English proficiency and acquired knowledge about American educational systems, the mothers play a more active role in involving themselves in their children's education. They have become more independent in communicating with English-speaking school faculties to exchange their children's situation at school and at home. They are more confident to read aloud to their children, help with their homework, and conduct other home literacy activities with their children. They even actively participate in school-initiated activities and help as parent volunteers.

These mothers' learning experiences in the ESL program also benefit their community

participatory activities. Conversational skills and cultural knowledge learned in the program help them to have a better understanding and communication with native speakers in the local community. Furthermore, the program has supported Ana to carry out her volunteering job serving the Latino community, helped Tabia develop relationships with American friends, and assisted Paula search for her part-time job (from information sharing time between classes in the program). The program has broadened immigrant and international people's scale of participation in the local community and in the larger societal context.

All three mothers appreciate the positive changes in their lives brought forth by their participation in the church-based ESL program.

#### *Summary of Findings for the Study as a Whole*

In the process of studying how the religious framework functions in constructing the teaching and learning in the special educational context in church, the researcher found five themes that characterize the features of the program: love/care/help, relationship, service, openness & being pressure-free, and community. A thorough examination shows these themes also appeared in the findings for the other two research questions.

In the findings for the second research question, esp. in findings from the method of interview, students elaborated on their perceptions of learning experiences in the program in various aspects in addition to improvement in communicative skills and social adaptation. For instance, all students are deeply impressed with teachers' personality of loving and caring; they said that the teachers are concerned with their English learning and their personal problems as well, and they are offering all kinds of help all the time. Some students claimed that what they like most about the program is the close relationship between students and teachers; teachers are like friends to them. Some students said that everyone in the program are so closely related and

the program becomes a community; two of them use “family” to compare to the close relationships between people in the program. Some students expressed their appreciation of the programs’ relaxing and free learning environment. Therefore, it’s noted that the themes of love/care/help, relationship/friendship, community, and openness & being pressure-free surfaced when students reflected upon their learning experiences during student interviews.

Similarly, during the study of the three subcases for addressing the third research question, some of these themes reappeared in the findings. In Subcase One, Ana stated that the teachers in the program cater to each student’s needs and care about all aspects of students’ lives. She also mentioned that the program runs English classes without religious compulsion, which helps students learn in a free environment without pressure. In Subcase Two, Tabia shared the same opinion and said she loves the pressure-free classroom atmosphere and the welcoming environment of the whole program. In addition, she is deeply touched by the caring and close relationship between teachers and students. In Subcase Three, Paula specifically mentioned the program’s considerate services of transportation and child-care and the teachers’ humble attitude in serving the students. Thus, it’s apparent that the themes of love/care/help, relationship/friendship, openness & being pressure-free, and service emerged in the findings of the third research question.

Therefore, it comes to the conclusion that the five themes of the program are the threads that tie the findings for each research question together. That is, the common findings shared by all the three research questions, or the most important findings for the study as a whole, are that people (including both teachers and students) in the church-based ESL program has formed a learning community with characteristics of love/care/help, friendly relationship between members, service commitment, and open and pressure-free environment.

## Ecological Interpretations of the Case and Subcases of the Study

The theoretical framework of the study is ecological perspectives on learning and education, which includes Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Lave and Wenger's community of practice, and ecological linguistics. These theories, by pointing to the social aspect of the learning process, emphasize the importance of examining how contextual factors mediate the significance of learning.

In the field of educational research, ecological metaphors have been advanced by a growing group of studies (Kramsch, 2003; Tudor, 2003). Smith (2009) points out that the metaphor of the classroom as an ecology suggests researchers "examine learners' interactions with all facets of their environment," and encourages an attention to "a wider range of contextual factors, including power, identity, and spirituality" (p. 244). Viewing the case of the ESL program as a particular ecology, the researcher put extra effort in examining the factor of religion, a neglected facet in the field of language educational research. It's noted that in the context of a Christian Baptist church, even though the program is established with the main purpose to provide conversational English classes for immigrant and international people, it inevitably has an evangelical goal to proclaim the gospel as its intermediate purpose. In addition, the findings show that the two evangelical approaches, relational evangelism and servant evangelism, play an important role in forming the five themes that characterize the outstanding features of the ESL program.

In terms of the subcases of the study, the various factors of these three mother learners' personal background, including ethnicity, economic situation, prior job, faith, time in the U.S., education, English proficiency, and immigration story, as well as their motivation and purpose for enrolling in the program, were all examined as contextual facets which mediate their learning

experiences in the program. Simultaneously, each mother's learning experiences in the community of the ESL program interact with her parental involvement in the community of her family and with her social participation in the local community.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) proposes a model of development in context with four levels of systems or four environmental layers: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. Shaffer (2000) explains the theory in a simple way: the developing person is said to be "at the center of and embedded in several environmental systems, ranging from immediate settings such as family to more remote contexts such as broader culture" (p. 87). Applying this model, the researcher viewed each mother learner of the subcases as situated at the center of the four ecological systems and examined her activities within each system and the interactions between layers of systems as well. The researcher first investigated the dynamic social interactions between the mother learner and her children during home literacy activities in the context of immigrant family (in the microsystem), then between the mother learner and other adults learners and teachers in the program within the context of the ESL learning community (in the exosystem), and between the mother learner and the U.S. schools where her children are educated within the context of the local community (in the mesosystem), and finally between the mother learner and people from various communities within the American context (in the macrosystem). At the same time, the interactions among different contexts were explored. It was found that these mother learners' experiences of learning in the ESL program helped with their home literacy activities with their children, communication with their children's schools, and social participation in the local community.

#### Findings in Relation to the Literature Review of Past Studies

The findings from this study add to the body of research on religion and education, adult

language learners and adult ESL programs, and immigrants' parental involvement. While some findings support existing research, some other findings provide new perspectives.

### *Religion and Education*

From a theoretical perspective, Curran's pedagogy of Community Language Learning (CLL) and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000 [1970]) and *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994 [1992]) are considered to stem from the two scholars' theological background ((Kristjánsson, 2003). The findings of this study illustrate that the features of the church-based ESL program share similarities with what have been proposed in their pedagogies.

Curran's pedagogy of CLL is based on his Judeo-Greco-Christian view of man as "a unitary being, caught midway in a complex operational mosaic of spirit and flesh, of knowing and feeling" (1968, p. 58-59). He understands personhood as an integrated whole of spiritual, physical, mental and emotional dimensions. Therefore, he uses a "whole person" approach to focus on the total self-investment of the learner in the learning process. What he advocates is warm and intimate relationships in the classroom in which both teacher and learners exhibit total openness of self in the group. The desired learning situation is that teacher and learners form a community of learning with care, love, and openness. The findings of the study outline a learning community formed within the church-based program with similar characteristics: love/care/help, friendly relationship, and openness. Since the church-based ESL program does not run its classes following Curran's five-stage model (see descriptions of the model in Chapter II), the findings of the study can not prove the effectiveness of CLL. However, the desired learning environment as community proposed by CLL is welcomed by immigrant and international adult learners of this ESL program and has attracted their continuous participation. Some students stated during interview that they enjoy learning in the ESL classes where they feel no pressure and anxiety as

they used to feel in other educational institutions. This supports Samimy & Rardin's (1994) conclusion that the community learning environment proposed by CLL is facilitative in alleviating emotional barriers that hinder language acquisition.

Concerning Freire's pedagogies, it's noted that his educational proposals have an important concept: liberating dialogue. Freire introduces the concept in the following way: "existence is a dynamic concept, implying eternal dialogue between man and man, between man and the world, between man and his Creator. It is this dialogue which makes of man an historical being" (1973, p. 17-18). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000, p. 89-93) lists six elements which complete Freirean framework on dialogue: love, humility, faith, mutual trust, hope, and critical thinking. He attributes vital importance to the role of love in dialogue: "love is ... the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (p. 89). Love in Freirean pedagogy has its special meaning of commitment to the cause of liberation of the oppressed people. In education, love refers to the teacher's commitment to set the oppressed students free. Humility is significant to dialogue, too. As opposed to arrogance and ignorance, humility is openness to acknowledge that one does not hold absolute truth and openness to learn from the other, students included. Faith in people is "a priori requirement for dialogue" (p.90). Faith in humankind refers to belief in humankind's vocation to become more fully human. Applied to the scenario of education, it means a priori belief of teacher in student's potential and ability to learn. With love, humility, and faith as the foundations of dialogue, mutual trust is established between dialoguers. Contrary to the banking method of education, the education with dialogue will create horizontal relationships. Hope is "rooted in men's incompleteness" (p.91). The dehumanization resulting from injustice can become a cause for hope and lead to continuous pursuit for humanity. Hope is belief in change in the world and belief in student's ability to fight for change on the part of the teacher. Last but not

least, critical thinking is a kind of thinking which perceives reality as process and transformation, and it also admits solidarity between the world and the people.

Derived from the concern for the oppressed people in Brazil, Freirean educational pedagogy has been widely applied to the oppressed people all over the world. In the present study, immigrant adults are in a disadvantaged position and under the oppression partly out of their low English proficiency. Volunteer teachers in the church, out of their Christian belief to serve the poor and people in need, provide free English classes for this group of people in the community. The six elements in Freirean pedagogy were found to be implemented in the teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program:

1. Love: All students in the program feel the teachers' love for them and appreciate their teachers' devotion to improving their English communicative skills. Teacher C stated that her purpose for teaching is to help students to "get to the point where they can function in our society on a level that makes them feel confident and proud." Teachers in the program are concerned with adult immigrants' difficulty in living in the new country because of low English proficiency. They are committed to the English teaching profession to set them free from their disadvantaged situation and transit to a successful life in the U.S.
2. Humility: Teachers in the program hold a humble attitude in teaching and perceive teaching ESL as a job of cooperation with students. Teacher M said that she has prepared "to be very accepting of the others' ideas, to be accepting of other faiths, whatever students bring to classes ... to work with them and get the most from the class." During classroom observation, the researcher noticed that teachers often ask students' opinions and their preference of lesson topics. In addition, the teachers interact

with students with an attitude of service. Teacher N said, “We want to provide the classes as reflection of providing services to students. Our motivation may come from our Christian faith.” Christian teachers regard teaching international people in the program as their service to God.

3. Faith: Teachers have faith in the adult immigrant and international students’ ability to learn English. Teacher M said that the students are “receptive to learning English.” Teacher K mentioned that some of her students have a college degree and adequate learning skills. Teachers believe that their students can master conversational English skills if they attend classes regularly.
4. Mutual trust: Teachers and students in the program have built a relationship of mutual respect. They trust each other and exhibit openness of self in the program. They are open to each other about their religious background and standing. They share their personal stories and concerns. It is noted that during holiday seasons teachers introduce American holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, with special emphasis on their religious origins and meanings. During conversational time teachers often encourage discussions of different religions during lessons about cultures, and the teachers always share their Christian perspectives on different issues during lessons about policies or social phenomena. Students are interested in these lessons and actively participate in the discussions to share their own opinions.
5. Hope: The teachers in the program believe that their teaching can bring changes in the students’s physical lives and spiritual growth. Teacher N claimed that she is on her way to achieving the goal of helping students be “better equipped to survive and function in a different culture in a different language.” She mentioned that the reason for her

teaching in the program is a “direct response to the love of God,” and she hopes through her volunteer work students can “come to an understanding of God’s love for them.” Other Christian teachers have the same expectation for their students to achieve both English improvement and faith development.

6. Critical thinking: Teachers in the program use different methods, materials, and resources in their instruction in order to help students critically view their learning process and take independent actions outside classrooms. In the basic level class, with students who have little or no English proficiency, Teacher C applies kinesthetic and visual methods to help students learn new words. For example, in teaching the word “fall”, she demonstrated by making the movement of falling down to the floor. Some teachers use field trips to put students in real situations for them to apply their learning. The teachers take all the efforts to teach practical English in order for students to function independently and successfully in the society.

It is noted that the liberating dialogue developed in the ESL program provided by a Baptist church has a unique evangelical feature. The elements the Christian teachers have completed for liberating adult immigrant and international students—love, humility, faith, mutual trust, hope, and critical thinking—are originated from the teachers’ evangelical commission to spread the gospel. The church-based ESL program develops in students a dialogue of faith as well as a dialogue of language learning.

Besides corresponding with pedagogies based on theology, the findings of the study contribute to empirical research in the field of religion and language education. After a survey of the existing studies exploring the interaction of religion/spirituality with language education, Smith (2007) comments that studies in the field are limited and sparse. He also points out “a

series of broad questions as yet answered only in fragmentary and partial ways” (2007, p. 23). One of these questions listed by him is: How does the religious or secular framework of particular institutional contexts for learning influence the construction of language teaching and learning in the classroom? Inspired by this question, the researcher was committed to find the answer to it by examining the ESL program in the particular context of a church within the Christian denomination of Southern Baptist Convention. The findings show the evangelical disposition of the church mediates the construction of learning and teaching in the program. Specifically, the two evangelical approaches, relational evangelism and servant evangelism, function in the formation of the ESL program’s five characteristics—love/care/help, relationship/friendship, service, openness & being pressure-free, and community—and contribute to the establishment of a nurturing community of learning in the program. The findings of this study address Smith’s question in a direct and complete way through a particular case and enrich the field of research on religion and education.

#### *Adult Language Learners and Adult ESL Programs*

In studying adult language learners and adult ESL programs, Larsen-Freeman (1991) states that social communication is one of the main reasons for immigrant adult learners to seek to acquire a second language. The social needs of the students will have a bearing on the educational process taking place in the classroom. This study found that adult immigrant and international students list social communication as the most important reason for enrolling in the ESL program. In the questionnaire under the question, “When you enrolled in the program, what was your most important reason or goal for enrolling?” among the four choices 77% of students chose “to be able to use English in daily life.” The percentage of this choice is much higher than that of others. This statistic reinforces the main goal of the program as improving communicative

skills. During classes, students are interested in learning lessons based on social situations and propose the issues they meet in their lives as topics for discussion or for the whole lesson. In the program evaluation survey at the end of each academic year, students base their evaluation on the program's effectiveness in meeting their social needs. In a word, the findings of the study indicate that social communication is the goal of the ESL program, the focus of its educational process, and the criterion of evaluating its educational outcomes.

In the field of research on second language learning, anxiety has been paid intensive attention since it is one of the outstanding traits of language learners, especially adult learners. Among the suggested ways to deal with anxiety of language learners (Hadfield, 1992; Scovel, 1978), quite a few target the role of classroom dynamics. Krashen brings forward the concept of "club membership" (Young, 1992): If educators or teachers can contribute to a student's feeling like a "member of the club," the student may experience less inhibitions and less anxiety and become a better language learner. Turula (2003) states that a "collaborative spirit" (caring and sharing in the foreign language classroom) is one of the most important traits of good classroom dynamics. The findings of this study show adult immigrant and international students in the church-based ESL program have low or no anxiety in the conversational English classes. With the characteristics of love/care/help, friendly relationships, openness & being pressure-free, and teachers' servant attitudes, it is found that a learning community formed in the program helps to ease adult learners' anxieties and enhance the effectiveness of language learning and teaching.

#### *Immigrants' Parental Involvement*

In the literature on parental involvement, there exist discrepancies on the issue of home language choice with the importance of English proficiency in terms of immigrants' parental involvement in their children's education in the U.S. Some studies (Comer, 1980; Epstein, 1986)

advocate the intactness of mother tongues while others (Hodge, 1999; Lahaie, 2006; Schnepf, 2004; Worswick, 2004) conclude that parents' speaking non-English languages at home has a negative effect on children's academic achievements. This study with the section on the subcases of immigrant mothers participates in the discussion on this issue and comes up with contributive findings.

First, the findings from the subcases illustrate that English proficiency plays an important role in immigrants' parental involvement in their children's learning at home, and in communication with their children's schools and teachers. In Subcase One, Ana has become more confident in speaking English with improved English proficiency after learning in the ESL program. She actively involves herself in school-initiated activities and helps with school events as a parent volunteer. In Subcase Two, Tabia claimed that after studying in the program she has improved pronunciation and enlarged vocabulary. This has enabled her to read aloud to her children with proper diction and understand the content of what she is reading. Her improved English proficiency has lessened her dependence on interpreters assigned to assist non-English-speaking parents at school events, meetings, and conferences, helped her communicate with the school staff and faculty or participate in school meetings, and enabled her to have better cooperation with schools to educate her children. In Subcase Three, improved English proficiency has strengthened Paula's confidence to become an active participant in her sons' education. She is able to fulfill her younger son's teachers' requests to read aloud to him in English. She has become more independent and does not need translating in communication with schools from her husband or her older son. All three mothers find satisfaction in their own improvement in parental involvement.

Second, the findings show all three mothers choose their first language as their home

language. This choice does not affect their children's linguistic and academic development. Rather, the integrity of home language and culture help the children grow bilingually and biculturally. For example, Ana puts extra effort in helping her children learn Spanish and insists on Spanish only at home to maintain and improve her children's proficiency of their mother tongue. In addition to fostering her children's Spanish literacy, she also teaches them Mexican culture and history. Both of her sons are now masters of both Spanish and English and have developed strong interests in learning other foreign languages.

Third, the three mothers share a similarity in their attitudes towards their children's education. All of them care about their children's education and try their best to involve themselves in it. Their levels of English proficiency are different, and the extent of their persistency in L1 maintenance varies. However, the school-aged children of the three mothers all have high academic performance at school. Rather than their levels of English proficiency or home language choice, it proves that parents' attitudes towards their children's education and extent of involvement in it matter most in children's educational success.

The study provides fresh perspectives on immigrant parental involvement research by connecting immigrant adults' learning experience in the church-based program to their involvement in their children's education.

### Implications

This study is an attempt to bridge the gap in the literature in terms of studies investigating church-based ESL programs and studies exploring the relation between religion and education and. The findings of it have implications for both researchers and educators.

#### *Implications for Researchers*

*Religion and education.* The study examined the interaction of Christianity and language

education with the focus on the institutional context. By delving into the particular context of a Southern Baptist church, the researcher found that the evangelism-oriented religious framework impacts the construction of teaching and learning in the church-based ESL program. The field of religion and education is expecting a diversity of experiences and perspectives that develop discussions on the philosophies, purposes, practices and theories of the interrelationship of religion and language education. Future research may examine other Christian denominations in addition to Southern Baptist, or other religions in addition to Christianity. Furthermore, in addition to focusing on institutional context, researchers may examine the issue with other focuses, such as the focuses on spiritual identity, classroom dynamics, and intercultural encounters. To be specific, researchers may consider studies that deal with religious aspects of teacher or learner identity, studies that focus on classroom interactions, and studies that investigate the relationship of religion and language education to encounters between cultures.

*Church-based ESL programs.* The study focused on the perspectives of students in a church-based ESL program. It investigated perceptions of adult immigrant and international learners concerning their learning experiences, and explored how they now apply their learning to parental involvement in their children's education and social participation in their local community. Future research is encouraged to examine teachers' perspectives by addressing the following questions: What are the reasons for teachers to choose the profession of teaching English in church-based ESL programs? How do teachers' faith beliefs impact their decisions to become language teachers? What strategies or approaches teachers demonstrate in the church-based ESL programs as they interact with English language learners?

#### *Implications for Educators*

Morgan (2002) suggests teacher educators pay attention to the forms of expertise developed

by teachers working in nonformal educational settings. The study addressed the form of expertise developed in a church-based program, and discussed the reasons why the program can attract adult immigrant and international learners.

Through the examination of the program as a whole, the researcher found some special features from the program guidance, curriculum and teaching material, placement test and student assessment, teacher evaluation, facility, and special events and activities. The program is guided by *Literacy Missions Conversational English Workshop Manual* which emphasizes conversational English. It builds its curriculum on Lado English Series for its organized set of learning goals and divides those goals into classes with 7 levels. In this way, students are placed by levels of oral proficiency to provide focused instruction. Teachers are encouraged to use supplemental teaching materials which are mostly situation-based for students to learn practical English. The program conducts a teacher evaluation survey each year for students to evaluate the teachers and the program in order to better meet students' needs and expectations. Considering the students' situations, the program provides free transportation and child care services for the convenience of students' attending classes. Besides regular classes each week, there are some special events during holidays and field trips arranged for students to practice English in real life situations. Generally speaking, the program puts students' linguistic and social needs as its primary concern and works hard to help students improve communicative skills and ease their social adaptation process.

At the same time, five themes are found to capture the characteristics of the ESL program: love, care and help; relationship/friendship; service; openness and being pressure-free; community. Students are immersed in the environment of love and care. Teachers help their students in every aspect of their English learning and personal lives. Everyone is deeply

impressed by the friendly relationships between students and teachers. The teachers are trying their best to serve the students' needs and requirements. The program is open to everyone who wants to learn English, to various classroom content and activities, and to different cultures and religions. Students feel no pressure in studying or religious compulsion. These elements work together to form a nurturing learning community that attracted students' continuous attendance and motivation to learn English.

The investigation on learners' perspectives indicates that students appreciate all the efforts of the program and enjoyed their learning process. They spoke highly of teachers' instruction and personality. They expressed their appreciation of the program's relaxing and free learning environment, and some of them especially mentioned that they do not have the anxiety as they used to have learning in other institutions. Most of them think the class content and learning materials are very useful and practical. Besides the class time, the half-hour break time between classes is also a positive experience for the students. Most important of all, the students acknowledged that they have made great progress in the improvement of English language proficiency and social adaptation.

In summary, the expertise of the program is how to create good program dynamics by building a nurturing learning community, which is proved to be successful in reducing the effect of the affective factor of anxiety, in maintaining students' regular attendance, and in improving students' communicative language skills and social adaptation. The expertise is unique since it is developed in the special context of a church. However, it has referential values for teacher educators considering ways to implement the expertise in various educational institutions.

#### Conclusion: A Critical Pedagogy of Space

The study was titled *A Unique Ecology of Language and Space*. Throughout the whole study,

*ecology* and *language* have been intensively discussed while there leaves some unfilled space for *space*. Morgan (2000) advocates a critical pedagogy of space, encouraging an interpretation of space as social text. This critical view of space is well-fitted in explaining the work of the church-based ESL program in the study. Through running the ESL program, the church provides, both physically and socially, an open space for immigrant and international people. First, the church opens its door and provides a physical space for free English classes to the immigrant and international people in need of English learning opportunities. Furthermore, the volunteer teachers in the program build close relationships with the students and open up interpersonal space. In addition, with the emphasis on both linguistic and cultural knowledge, the conversational English classes help immigrant and international people gain their social space in the local community as well as in the larger context of the society.

The study is the researcher's first step in examining a unique space for English learning in church-based ESL programs. She is interested in continuing this journey in the future with wider and deeper explorations in this space by studying the following questions:

- In what ways does faith enter the language classroom and what role does it play in non-Christian faith-based ESL programs?
- How do teachers' faith beliefs impact their decisions to become language teachers, the pedagogy they use, and the interactions they have with students?
- How do volunteer teachers perceive their teaching experiences in church-based ESL programs in regard to their personal and educational goals?
- How is language teaching within the church viewed and received by the community?

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the study: *A Unique Ecology of Language and Space: Exploring the Learning Context and Adult Learners' Perspectives of a Church-based ESL Program in the Southeast.*

Please provide the background information below. Please be assured that all the information provided will be kept confidential.

**1. Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Country of origin** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Do you consider yourself (circle your choice):**

A. Hispanic

B. African-American

C. Caucasian/Anglo-American

D. Asian

E. Native-American

F. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. How long have you been in this ESL program provided by this church (circle your choice)?**

A. 0-3 months

B. 4-6 months

C. 7-12 months

D. 1-2 years

E. 3-5 years

F. more than 5 years

**5. What is the class level you are in right now (circle your choice)?**

A. Basic (Level 1-2)

B. intermediate (Level 3-4)

C. Upper intermediate/Advanced (Level 5-6)

D. advanced (Level 7)

**6. Do you have any children?** \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

**If yes, how many children do you have?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How old are they?** (Please list the age of each of your children.) \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### FIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PARTICIPANTS

#### **I. Interview Protocol for the Program Coordinator**

1. What is the original intention in establishing an ESL program in your church?
2. Can you tell me something about the history of your ESL program? Such as, when did your church start the program? How many teachers/students and classes you have at the beginning, etc?
3. What is the source of funding of your ESL program? Do you have any assistance from or cooperation with the schools or governmental agency?
4. Where do your teachers come from? What is your requirement for teacher qualifications?
5. Do you have any form of teacher evaluation? If yes, what are they?
6. What are the educational goals of your ESL program?
7. What is the curriculum of your ESL program? Can you describe a little bit in detail of your curriculum?
8. Where do your students come from? Can you give me more of their demographic information?
9. How many classes or how many language levels you have in your program? What is your way of students' placement when they enroll in the program?
10. Do you have any form of evaluation on students' outcomes after each semester? If yes, what is it?
11. What do you think is the role of religion/Christian belief in the program?

## **II. Interview protocol for Teachers of the Church-based ESL Program**

1. Do you speak a language other than English?
2. Have you taught in some other capacity?
3. How long have you been teaching English with the church?
4. Why do you volunteer to teach English as an additional language?
5. How long do you think it takes to speak/listen, read/write another language proficiently?
6. Do you think you can learn an additional language like a young child would learn his/her first language? Would there be any differences? If so, what would they be?
7. When you teach your class, what activities do you rely on most? Why?
8. How do you know that your students are learning the lessons you are teaching?
9. What is your goal for your students' language learning?
10. What do you think about immigrant adult language learners?
11. What are your personal and professional goals as an adult ESL teacher?
12. What do you do to prepare for lessons?
13. Does your church provide you with materials or a textbook?
14. What level(s) do you teach?
15. Which level(s) do you like the best, why?
16. Have you received any training or guidance to teach English as an additional language?
17. Is religion/God/morality ever discussed in your English classes? Are these discussions a planned event or do they just occur?

### **III. Interview Protocol for Main Student Participants**

1. Please tell me about yourself. (Background: religion, education, English learning, work experience/profession)
2. Why do you choose church based ESL program, instead of ELI or other community based ESL program?
3. What do you want to learn from the program?
4. What is your goal of learning English in the program?
5. What do you think about your learning experience in the program so far?
6. How do you feel about the teacher's instruction?
7. In what ways, does the program help you to learn the English?
8. How do you feel about using English in the classroom?
9. What are you learning other than English, e.g. culture, socialization in the classes?
10. Does the class help you to use the English outside of the classroom?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the language program?
12. Do you see changes in your lives because of the program?
13. What do you think about the role of religion in the program?
14. How (where and why) is language (English or L1) used in different contexts?
15. What are the literacy activities and materials you do with your children at home?
16. How has the program influenced your family literacy practices?
17. What is the literacy and learning/teaching role of each member of this family? (e.g. translators, interpreters, readers, writers, etc.)
18. How does the program help with your parental involvement (help with homework, language learning/practice, communicate with school...), social adaptation?

#### **IV. Interview Protocol for Other Student Participants**

1. Please tell me about yourself. (Background: religion, education, English learning, work experience/profession)
2. Why do you choose church based ESL program, instead of ELI or other community based ESL program?
3. What do you want to learn from the program?
4. What is your goal of learning English in the program?
5. What do you think about your learning experience in the program so far?
6. How do you feel about the teacher's instruction?
7. In what ways, does the program help you to learn the English?
8. How do you feel about using English in the classroom?
9. What are you learning other than English, e.g. culture, socialization in the classes?
10. Does the class help you to use the English outside of the classroom?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the language program?
12. Do you see changes in your lives because of the program?
13. What do you think about the role of religion in the program?
14. How (where and why) is language (English or L1) used in different contexts?

## **V. Interview Protocol for Children of the Main Student Participants**

1. What do you learn at school? What kind of language and literacy activities do you do?
2. When do you use a particular language at school?
3. What are your favorite subjects?
4. What are some of the things you like to do at home?
5. What do you learn at home? What kinds of learning activities do you do at home with your family?
6. What language(s) do you use at home? Which one(s) do you prefer? Why? When do you use a particular language at home?
7. What do your parents teach you at home? Do your parents help with your homework? Do your parents do other learning activities with you at home?
8. Which way do you prefer to learn, your parents' or your teacher's?
9. What language(s) do you use and where? Which one(s) do you prefer?
10. What do you think of your mother attending English classes?

## APPENDIX C

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ALL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

#### **Introduction**

This questionnaire is for you, as an ESL student, to reflect on your outcomes during/after English training in ESL program provided by this church. At the same time, it is also a questionnaire for you to evaluate the program and help the church to improve it.

It is composed of 3 sections. Section A is about your personal information; Section B is your evaluation of the ESL program; and Section C is about the effects of the program to your life. There are altogether **29** questions. Please **CIRCLE** the number before your choice (**one choice for each question**) under the questions and/or fill in the blanks. Please choose the choice which is truthful to your heart. Your answer will be held at strict confidence. Thank you for your support.

## SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

**A1** What is your country of origin?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**A2** Do you consider yourself:

1. Hispanic
2. African-American
3. Caucasian/Anglo-American
4. Asian
5. Native-American
6. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**A3** How long have you been in USA?

1. 0-6 months
2. 7-12 months
3. 1-2 years
4. 2-5 years
5. more than 5 years

**A4** How long have you been in this ESL program provided by this Church?

1. 0-3 months
2. 4-6 months
3. 7-12 months
4. 1-2 years
5. 3-5 years
6. more than 5 years

**A5** What is the class level you are in right now?

1. Basic (1-2)
2. intermediate (3-4)
3. Upper intermediate/Advanced (5-6)
4. advanced (7)

**A6** Your gender is:

1. male
2. female

**A7** How old are you?

1. 10-20
2. 21-30
3. 31-40
4. 41-50
5. over 50

**A8** Which of the following best describes you?

1. Single person with no children
2. Part of a couple with no children
3. Part of a couple with children
4. A single parent
5. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**A9** What is your highest level of formal education before taking these English classes here?

1. University graduate degree (e.g., masters, Ph.D.)
2. University undergraduate degree
3. Some university
4. College or technical institute with diploma/certificate
5. Some college or technical institute
6. High school with diploma
7. Some high school
8. Elementary school
9. No formal education
10. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**A10** Did you take any English training before you came to English classes here? If yes, where were they?

1. Yes. \_\_\_\_\_
2. No.

**A11** Do you take any other English classes besides the English classes provided here? If yes, where are they?

1. Yes. \_\_\_\_\_
2. No.

## SECTION B: EVALUATION OF THE ESL PROGRAM

**B1** How important is it (ESL program provided by this Church) to improve your employment situation (to get or to improve your job)?

1. Very important
2. Moderately important
3. Slightly important
4. Not at all important

**B2** How important is it to improve your ability to use English in daily life?

1. Very important
2. Moderately important
3. Slightly important
4. Not at all important

**B3** How important is it to prepare for further study at a college or university?

1. Very important
2. Moderately important
3. Slightly important
4. Not at all important

**B4** When you enrolled in the program, what was your most important reason or goal for enrolling?

1. Employment-related
2. To be able to use English in daily life
3. To go on to Adult Basic Education (high school)
4. To prepare for further study at a college or university
5. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**B5** How helpful is the program in achieving your most important goal?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**B6** How helpful is your English language training at the program in improving your English **writing** skills?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful

3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**B7** How about in improving your English **reading** skills?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**B8** How about in improving your English **listening** skills?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**B9** How about in improving your English **speaking** skills?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**B10** How would you rate the overall quality of instruction in your English language training classes here?

1. Good
2. Adequate
3. Poor
4. Very poor

**B11** How satisfied are you with the English language training you are taking here?

1. Completely satisfied
2. Mainly satisfied
3. Partially satisfied
4. Not satisfied at all

If you choose 1 or 2, please give some suggestions to make the program even better?  
If you choose 3 or 4, please tell why you are only partially satisfied or not satisfied at all with the English language training here:\_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION C: SOCIAL ADAPTATION

**C1** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English at work?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. I don't know. I don't work.

**C2** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English in your further education?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. I don't know. I don't have further education (plan).

**C3** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English to use services (such as medical, police, library, employment centre, or government services)?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**C4** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English in social settings (for example, while shopping, at parties, or in restaurants)?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful

3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**C5** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English to understand English media (such as radio, TV, newspapers, or the Internet)?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**C6** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English in the community (for example, volunteering, joining a club, or going to a recreation centre)?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

**C7** How much has your English language training at the program helped you to use English to involve in your children's education (for example, parent-teacher meeting, volunteering for school activities, help with your children's study)?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. I don't know. I don't have children

APPENDIX D  
IRB APPROVAL NOTICE

August 19, 2011

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

Qihui Jiang  
Curriculum & Instruction  
Box 870232  
College of Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
R E S E A R C H

Re: IRB# 11-OR-261: "A Unique Ecology of Language and Space:  
Exploring the Learning Context and Adult Learners' Perspectives of a  
Church-based ESL Program in the Southeast"

Dear Ms. Jiang:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval  
for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part  
46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined  
below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including,  
but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity,  
language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior)  
or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program  
evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on August 18, 2012. If the study continues  
beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you  
modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved  
Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB  
approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to  
participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study  
Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this  
application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM  
Director & Research Compliance Officer  
Office for Research Compliance  
The University of Alabama



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