

Elementary-Aged Melting Pot: Reflections on ESL Teachings A Western North Carolina Case Study

Hannah M. Sasser
Interdisciplinary Studies: International Studies
University of North Carolina at Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, NC 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Agya Boakye-Boaten, Ph.D.

Abstract

The United States is known as the melting pot of the world because of the unique culture created from the many immigrants that remained here over time, framing the America of today. As new immigrants move to the U.S., there is a growing need for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs; especially with 381 different languages spoken throughout the country, the need is becoming apparent to educators and employers alike.¹ There are many ways in which an ESL program can be set up, but it is necessary that the school has general knowledge of a child's background and the resources necessary to help them succeed. It has proven difficult to meet the necessities of the ESL students and requirements under the No Child Left Behind act because ESL students tend to struggle more so than their English-speaking peers and there are not enough resources to distribute to this population. In Buncombe County, North Carolina, an elementary school walks through how their ESL program is set up and what they have done to alleviate the challenges ESL students face in a way that keeps them moving successfully through their educational career. The methods used at this school, Emma Elementary, help to combat the main issues ESL students have when it comes to moving throughout the public school system in America. The importance of ESL courses in the public school system are outlined throughout the paper, with more precise emphasis in the localized case study of Emma Elementary.

Keywords: Elementary, ESL Western North Carolina

1. Introduction

The United States is known as a melting pot, and that is what gives America the character that it has today. There have been several mass migrations further adding to the diversity of language and cultural heritage. From “the 17th century through the early 21st century, women and men from around the world have opted for the American experience. They arrived as foreigners, bearers of languages, cultures and, religions.”² Though at the time, these attributes of the newly arrived seemed alien, as ideas about U.S. culture changed, the immigrants and their descendants simultaneously built ethnic communities and participated in American civic life, contributing to the nation as a whole.³

In the United States alone, an estimated 381 different languages are spoken,⁴ and in North Carolina at least 38 different languages other than English are spoken in households.⁵ There have to be ways in which the many different languages and cultures interact to create a sustainable society, and those are the challenges that the U.S. faces. The integration of cultures and languages in the U.S. continues with the implications of teaching children with a native language that is not English.

All over the United States, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have been created “to help students who are looking to learn English as their second, third, or in some cases, fourth language, to help students develop their: speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills” in a classroom setting.⁶ The courses are designed for students who are included in the age groups of “pre-kindergarten to high school, to colleges and universities, to private institutions.

Eligible students are those that do not speak English in their homes, international students, as well as students that genuinely have trouble with English.”⁷ Depending on location of the school and the demographics of that area, English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum can be set up in many different ways.

In this paper, examinations of what ESL programs are in the United States, the different manners in how they can be set up, and the main challenges that ESL classes face: three interrelated issues that are a huge part of the educational system. From there, a case study of a local elementary school to see how it compares to the standards of schools across the country. There are also examinations of previous research as it relates to ways to properly teach an English Language Learner in a public school classroom. Previously published works that encompass the most beneficial ways to teach ESL courses will be central to this research in addition to comparing with programs in place in an elementary school in Buncombe County, North Carolina.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What Is ESL?

“English as a Second Language is the teaching of English to speakers of other languages who live in a country where English is an official or important language.”⁸ ESL courses are set up in schools to provide English language acquisition to those who have no formal English background, have just immigrated to the United States, or are showing signs of difficulties with English acquisition and language skills. The ability to understand English, or the lack thereof, may affect their ability to participate fully in society, including their success in school and the mandatory state assessments.⁹ ESL programs originated during WWII, “when efforts were made to teach adults a foreign language within a short period of time,” and have continued on throughout history as an essential component of the bilingual education curriculum in the U.S.¹⁰ Under the No Child Left Behind Act, English Language Learners (ELLs) are required to reach standards by demonstrating proficiency in English language arts and mathematics, which proves its own challenges.¹¹ With increasing numbers of ESL students underperforming on standardized testing, having higher drop out rates, and being less likely to pursue secondary education, there is an increasing need for schools to have a well functioning ESL program.¹²

According to the United States Census, data recorded between 2009 and 2013 indicates that 20.7% of the American population over five years of age spoke a language other than English at home. This number recorded for North Carolina is 10.9%.¹³ The U.S. Census has also included a subcategory of those who speak a language other than English at home. This is the percentage of people who “speak English less than ‘very well,’” and the numbers according to 2013 directly correlate to those who do not speak a language other than English at home. Of the total population in the United States, 8.6% of the 20.7% that speaks another language at home speaks English less than very well. This is compared to NC, in which 4.8% of the 10.9% do not speak English very well.¹⁴ Since one-fifth of the American population speaks a language other than English at home, it is imperative that the school system is able to handle the growing numbers of the immigrant population and have an infrastructure in place for them in the school systems. In terms of Buncombe County, the percentage of people over five that speak a language other than English at home is 7.4%, slightly smaller than North Carolina as a whole.¹⁵ But there is still a predominant population in Buncombe County that speaks a language other than English at home, the necessity of English acquisition is important. It can be assumed that there is around a 4.8% or smaller population of Buncombe County residents that speak English less than very well, and this population is one that needs access to resources to grant the ability to learn English.

2.2 How Does It Work?

When it comes to organizing quality ESL curriculum, several recommendations have been put at the forefront. According to research previously done in the field, Borden has advised that ESL courses be set up under the guidelines of his research that is outlined throughout this section. The first point made is, “school administrators must be well versed in how to design high quality ESL programs that meet student’s needs while following district or state regulations and simultaneously recognizing local and fiscal cultural realities.”¹⁶ There are academic needs to be met for ESL students, such as proficiency testing. That is why it is extremely vital that those who set up an ESL class are aware of the methodology behind teaching ESL students and are able to meet the standards of the regulations set. Next, “those responsible for the placement of ESL students should gather as much background information as possible about each student and ensure that information is available to teachers.”¹⁷ It is important for teachers to know their student’s backgrounds, to be aware of cultural differences, and under what circumstance the child is coming to the

school, which could be important in the instance of behavioral issues. It may also be important to know information about the family: what predominant language is spoken at home, if anyone in the house speaks English and how proficient is their mastery of English, who the child is living with, are their basic needs for food, shelter and medical care being met, and other similar issues that affect how a child performs at school. Further, “teachers must receive adequate training if they are expected to understand and respond to the needs of ESL students placed in their classrooms.”¹⁸ Problems can occur when a child does not have the ability to express their confusion or misunderstanding if they have limited language ability or if there are cultural issues at play that a teacher may not be aware of. Often times, this can translate to teachers as a learning disability: other research suggests, “The heart of the problem is discerning whether students are simply struggling with acquiring English or truly have disabilities that are impeding their progress,” and it is pertinent that “a step-by-step process is used to make sure every explanation and intervention for a child’s lagging academic performance has been examined before assigning a placement in special education.”¹⁹ This is especially important because assigning a child to special education has “long-term implications,” and it is extremely difficult to get rid of the label of special education in a child’s educational career, hindering them from certain opportunities, especially if they are not meant to be labeled as such.²⁰

The next part of Borden’s research showed that, “Learning styles of ESL students must be matched as nearly as possible to the organizational styles of the teachers.”²¹ If a student is a visual learner, it is pertinent that the teacher also teaches in such a method that the child is able to learn to the fullest, and pertains to the other learning styles as well. Continuing, “classroom teachers and ESL teachers must work closely together to develop individual ESL programs for students.”²² The ESL teacher is a vital part of an ESL student’s school career. If there is not communication between an ESL teacher and the core teacher(s), it may be impossible to truly convey what problems an ESL student is having, or what they need improvement in. Furthermore, “school staff must understand that most ESL students suffer some overt or covert social ostracism or lack of social acceptance due to their limited English ability, and must work to overcome this.”²³ This can be extremely difficult in classrooms where a child is the sole ESL student, or the sole ESL student from a particular ethnicity. Being able to connect with other children is difficult with language barriers, and cultural differences certainly add to that. “Students, teachers, and parents must cooperate to take an aggressive and positive attitude towards English acquisition.”²⁴ Teaching an ESL student English should be done with positive reinforcement. Learning a new language is difficult, but if a child is not speaking English at home, learning a new language could be even more discouraging. The main goal is not for children to look at English acquisition as a forced chore during school, but as a way to bridge gaps with their home life and school life.

ESL classes take on several types of forms according to research previously done: First, “A homogeneous class that is of one group (natal language) learning English,” which is commonly seen in areas where there are high populations of refugees or immigrants.²⁵ Second, “A heterogeneous ESL class composed of students from various countries or native languages,” which is more common in areas where there are several immigrant populations.²⁶ Third, “A homogenous class where English is a third language:” for example, a student who speaks a language at home, but moved to a new area before coming to the United States, or possibly more commonly seen in refugee populations who have moved from their native country to a new country before moving.²⁷ Fourth, “A heterogeneous class composed of students from various backgrounds who have studied various languages and for whom English is a third language.”²⁸ A class such as this would more commonly be found in larger cities. Though Becica has only outlined four types of ESL classes, the guidelines encompass the diverse and ever-changing immigrant populations in school systems.

2.3 What Are The Main Challenges?

There are several challenges that affect the English acquisition of students in a school setting and at home, or the ability for a school to provide a high standard of education for these students due to a variety of factors. “One of the biggest challenges, educators and advocates said, is communicating effectively with parents who don’t speak English.”²⁹ Other practical challenges include: finding bilingual staff members, school leaders bridging difficult political and cultural divides with the students and families, and the growing need for ESL teachers.³⁰

These cultural divides can have an effect on the student’s interactions at school. Without the proper insights into a student’s culture and background, bridging the gap to effectively communicate in order to teach them is highly complicated. Children with highly involved parents demonstrate a higher literacy attainment, according to children’s literacy learning.³¹ The students who have parents who are unable to communicate effectively, in English or in another language, are less likely to be as literate as those who can. It becomes a more apparent issue when the child’s English outgrows the proficiency level of their parent.

The socioeconomic status of the student can have an effect on the parent’s ability to facilitate those children at home and may also affect behavior. Mental health, mental stability, issues at the home of the student, the parent’s education

level, and other factors can seriously influence the education of some students. These are known as “non-school factors,” and these factors “outweigh school factors in their effect on student achievement.”³² Research that has also shown that some sub-groups of ELLs perform differently in certain subjects. For example, “ELL students with a Chinese-speaking background had significantly higher performance on science and reading tests than ELL students of Spanish-speaking background.”³³ The many challenges of ESL students in a school system can have different effects based on their backgrounds, their home life, and the ability of the school to perform at a high standard in several different areas, which is what educators need to be aware of in their classrooms.

With the growing influx of ESL students, the United States has found it hard to keep up with a teacher-to-student ratio. *Education Week* and the EPE Research Center produced a study called “Portraits of Populations” in 2009, mapping the demographic changes of rapid and diverse growing student populations and the policies in that region that support ELLs. “In one of its major findings, the report reveals a significant mismatch between the projected need for ESL teachers and state policies designed to increase the supply of such specialists.”³⁴ In 11 out of 50 states, there was a significant need for the increase of ESL teachers, a collectively anticipated need for 56,000 new ESL teachers, which would be a 38% increase in the coming years.³⁵ However, only a few states out of the 50 provide incentives for ESL teacher certifications and endorsements.³⁶ “That sweeping shift in demographic patterns has strained the capacity of school districts, and even departments of education, to develop and pay for instructional programs to teach children who are still learning English.”³⁷ With the demand for an increased supply of ESL teachers, school systems need to create programs and incentives for teachers to be more serious about the positive and necessary implications of ESL programs. Without the allocation of resources to properly teach the growing ESL community, many children will not be given the opportunities to succeed like their English-speaking peers.

2.4 Criticisms Of ESL Program Structure In The U.S.

When it comes to the regulations mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), several issues arise when ESL students are required to learn in the same manner as native English speakers. Research has shown that “language demands of tests negatively influence accurate measurement of ELL performance.”³⁸ The performance tests used to measure change of students have been developed for native language speakers. The language used in the tests are not always the best way to measure the “achievement and language ability” of an ELL.³⁹ Research also shows that general school performance of ELL students is far below that of their native English-speaking classmates.⁴⁰ Since ELL students are intermittently learning a new language and language content for their grade level, the performance is going to be much lower than a native English speaker who is taking the same comprehension test. Importantly, “Researchers found that the students who struggled the most with English learning lagged well behind their English-speaking peers at all levels of schooling, never really catching up at any point along the spectrum.”⁴¹ If the language was simplified for ELLs on comprehensive testing, research has shown that their scores improve, and in turn, accurately measure ELLs content knowledge.⁴² If a child is still struggling with language comprehension, it is certain that child is going to do poorly on tests that are looking for advanced language comprehension skills.⁴³ Abedi continues to state that NCLB’s main goal is to ensure 100% language arts proficiency in all students, but if ELL students were completely proficient in language arts, they would not be ELL students at all.⁴⁴ “Scholarly views diverge even more over how long it should take for students to master English, with estimates ranging from three to eight years.”⁴⁵ Clearly, NCLB laws cannot account for the accurate measurement of ELL’s English attainment if lawmakers have created testing in which 100% proficiency in the field of English language arts is expected. A challenge for many districts “is to satisfy two very different mandates of the federal law: assessing how well non-English-speakers are learning the language, while holding them to the same reading and math proficiency targets required of native English-speakers.”⁴⁶ The challenges posed by No Child Left Behind have created great concern for the legitimacy of the program and the way in which it manages the vast array of students throughout the U.S.

Another criticism is how students should be taught in ESL settings. Some research has shown that it is more effective to teach children bilingually. However this presents the continuation of the problem of finding ESL teachers.⁴⁷ Though it may be viable to find ESL teachers that speak Spanish, it may be more difficult to find an ESL teacher that is proficient in Moldovan or languages that are less common in the United States. A few states have completely banned the use of native language instruction with English-learners, according to a survey by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center.⁴⁸ At times it is easier to grasp a concept if one is able to relate that concept to their native language. However, the consistent repetition and the use of a single language in a class may outweigh the few times when it is needed to speak bilingually.

3. Case Study

In Western North Carolina, Buncombe County is home to about 247,500 residents.⁴⁹ In Buncombe County alone, about 64 languages are spoken in the school system (“School System Profile 2012”).⁵⁰ With many languages spoken in one community, resources need to be utilized to keep these children moving through school at the same pace as their native English-speaking classmates. In Buncombe County, Emma Elementary School is able to successfully provide an educational experience for their ESL population and provide a number of resources to ensure the greatest achievement of their students.

3.1 Nation, State, And County Demographics

In the Buncombe County school system, like all other school systems in the United States, English as a Second Language courses are mandated. Under the No Child Left Behind act, ELL students are required to take proficiency tests annually, beginning the first year of enrollment in U.S. schools.⁵¹ In the Buncombe County school system, the English as a Second Language and English Language Learners (ELLs) are a large percentage of the student body in the school system. The County is currently working with 1,736 students whose native language is not English.⁵² Buncombe County also houses a Newcomer Center that prepares secondary level ELL students with low English proficiency and/or limited formal education that have transitioned into an American public school for the first time.⁵³ Emma Elementary School is one of the institutions in Buncombe County that takes part in these English language acquisition programs.

3.2 Meeting Emma

One of the 42 schools in Buncombe County is a fairly small school that sits in a minority neighborhood in Asheville, NC. Emma Elementary is comprised of 386 students in total; of those, 205 (53%) are National Origin Minorities (NOMs). That means that the student’s home language is a language other than English, and these students are not performing up to the district standards of proficiency.⁵⁴ Emma has 68 out of the 205 NOMs in ESL courses, which is 33%.⁵⁵ These 68 students are Limited English Proficient (LEPs), and receive ESL services meaning 135 out of the 205 students (65.8%) NOMs stay in their core classroom because they have graduated, or exited from the ESL program.⁵⁶ However, even though a child has exited from an ESL course, this does not mean that they have achieved full language fluency and will not have issues throughout their education. Their core teachers need to be aware that these students may still have gaps in their language proficiency. Of the total population at Emma Elementary School, 17 percent of the student body is enrolled in ESL courses, which is a relatively high number compared to the United States and North Carolina.⁵⁷ By comparison, the national average of English-learners in public schools was 9.7 percent, and the North Carolina average is 6.6 percent of all public schools, but by 2030, the number of ELLs in the American public school system is projected to be 40 percent.⁵⁸ This means Emma has an incredible need for ESL services, much greater than that of the North Carolina and national averages.

3.3 The ESL Services At Emma

The two ESL teachers at Emma are a small percentage of “the nation’s roughly 45,000 ESL teachers who have expertise and strategies to ensure that English-learners are not shut out of their rigorous, grade-level content.”⁵⁹ Many of those teachers split their time among schools with little chance to co-teach or plan with core content teachers.⁶⁰ This is the case of one of the two ESL teachers at Emma, who splits her time 75% at Emma, and, 25% at another school in Buncombe County.⁶¹ The reason this ESL teacher splits her time between the two schools because of the large number of students that Emma exited from the ESL program. In the 2014 school year, 33 ESL students were exited from the curriculum for all grades.⁶² Lovejoy stated that both ESL teachers have incredibly high expectations for the students, and they push the students to make sure they are learning at as rapidly. She stated the importance of teaching the students in a way that they will truly be successful, not solely to pass a proficiency test. It is apparent that at Emma Elementary the core curriculum teachers also know how to pace the ESL students so they can function at grade level in their core classes, accessing extra resources from ESL teachers or the other services provided if necessary.

3.4 The Method

The ESL classes at Emma use a pullout model, in which English Language Learner students are taken out of core classes for explicit language instruction.⁶³ “Students at all grade levels [kindergarten through fourth] receive instruction in English from regular classroom content teachers, and support and individualized instruction in the content areas from the ESL staff.”⁶⁴ The children that are newcomers and need additional time to get situated have 75 minutes a day to work one-on-one or in group settings, while the other ESL students have 30 minutes a day of ESL instruction.⁶⁵ In most cases, this means that the child is missing the more language-intensive subjects (language arts and social studies, for example) while attending ESL class, but participates in science, mathematics, physical education class and art classes.⁶⁶ Emma uses the pullout model in which a small group of the same-aged children leave their class to move to their ESL class. The ESL classes are typically composed of students from different language and cultural backgrounds.

Each ESL class at Emma is set up differently depending on grade level, and whether or not the child is a newcomer. All grade level ESL courses are aligned with that age groups’ core curriculum. The newcomers receive the core curriculum and also basic instruction to get them caught up with their ESL peers. In most ESL courses, however, the students are reviewing curriculum they are working on in their core class, which gives the children more reinforcement to make sure they are truly grasping the information presented. ESL teachers at Emma use what they call “manipulative material” to help the students better understand core content.⁶⁷ In some cases, “this would include songs, poems, or interactive materials, in which the children are actively learning as well as using all of their senses.”⁶⁸ Using manipulative material is a way to make learning English a more fun and attainable goal, rather than a “must do” to make a specific grade on a test. Making learning a new language fun for young children when it could be something that they are uncomfortable with and intimidated by makes them all the more willing to learn.

Each year in February, the ESL students are tested on their English proficiency. Testing their progress in the course and if they are able to exit. They are tested on their English proficiency in four categories: listening, reading, speaking and writing. The children need to achieve a certain score in all four of the categories to be able to exit the ESL program. That is to say, if a third grade ESL student achieves the exiting score for reading, listening, and speaking, but not writing, they will continue in ESL courses until their writing scores are at the same exiting level. As well as preparing the children for their English proficiency exams, Emma closely monitors the student’s academic abilities, moving the child to special education or academically gifted (AG) programs as needed.⁶⁹

3.5 Language

At Emma, there are around 15 different languages spoken, including Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, a few Chinese dialects, Marshallese, Micronesian, and Portuguese. The most prolific language spoken at Emma other than English is Spanish, with 185 of the 205 NOMs as native Spanish speakers, which equates to about 90%.⁷⁰ Native languages are not spoken in an ESL classroom except for certain occasions. Speaking other languages is not vital to have an ESL teacher that is bilingual or has understanding of other languages, but it is an advantage. In Emma’s case, when a child’s native language is Spanish, the ESL teacher will only speak Spanish in the classroom if the child is a newcomer or kindergartener who has little background in English or during times that those children are having difficulty understanding a subject. The only other time a native language is spoken in an ESL classroom setting is for discipline. When a child hears their maternal language in a disciplinary setting, it is taken more seriously because it is the same language they are disciplined in at home.

Anita Lovejoy, the ESL teacher who was interviewed at Emma Elementary, talked about her experiences transitioning from Mexico to America and her struggle with learning English. She stated that when she first started at an English speaking school, she was distressed and did not want to learn English at all. As an ESL teacher, her personal experiences allow for her to connect with her students and understand the nature of their situation, their feelings, and the general stresses that come with language acquisition.

3.6 Challenges At Emma

Some of the problems in Emma include having groups of children of the same native language in classrooms. This range of students can pose challenges because they are more likely to speak their native language with their peers. Which can take away from English instruction, and when a child does not understand a concept, they tend to use their native language to ask other children if they understand, instead of asking the teacher. They also tend to speak their

native language with those same peers rather than attempt English with the other peers in the classroom. “The more children there are that use the same native language, the less likely they will be to use English,” as Borden suggests.⁷¹ This is seen frequently at Emma due to the large populations of students that speak the same native language.

Due to the fact that many ESL students lag behind their English-speaking peers, Emma has tools put in place to make sure that their students do not continue to fall behind. On a needs basis, the students may have a one-on-one tutor with a volunteer UNCA student, or other one-on-one tutoring sessions with student volunteers from Carolina Day School or Asheville Catholic School. Core teachers will identify which students are most likely to benefit from one-on-one tutoring based on their need and what the teacher has observed in the classroom setting.⁷² One-on-one tutoring provides a child with extra time to work on skills that are harder to grasp, as well as, giving them the attention necessary to see where problems are arising, or where the child needs extra assistance without the distractions of other students.

Emma Elementary is a Title 1 school, which creates problems for the student body in general. “Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to states and school districts to meet the needs of educationally at-risk students.”⁷³ “The goal of Title I is to provide extra instructional services and activities which support students identified as failing or most at risk of failing the state’s challenging performance standards in mathematics, reading, and writing.”⁷⁴ Title I schools are typically situated in lower income and impoverished areas with a student body population that has less access to resources to facilitate success due to their social and economic status. The status of the students and their families that are in Title 1 areas can impede in their ability to succeed versus those who have a higher economic or social status in the same area.

3.7 Parent Intervention

Parent participation is encouraged at Emma and the ESL teachers make sure that the family is given resources to help their child with English attainment as much as they can. In some cases, Lovejoy stated that some of the families are struggling to put food on the table and cannot find the time needed to work with their children. Economics, poverty level and the educational level of the parents affect how ESL children are able to learn in schools. Parent support is one of the largest factors for a child learning a new language, but in certain cases parents are illiterate which poses a challenge. If ESL children do not have the resources they need at home to accommodate them, Emma has several programs in place that give them extra time and resources. At times, the parents are learning English along side their children. In cases such as these, Emma will send home bilingual books so the parents are able to work with the children. Homework for Spanish-speaking students goes home in Spanish and English, along with student updates so the family is aware of what is going on at school. Emma also sends home bilingual dictionaries in the students’ native language and English if it is a language that Emma has a dictionary for. Emma also has a handful of other programs that act as extra support for ESL students. Some of these programs include an afterschool homework club that meets twice a week and an afterschool session that is there to help children who are falling behind. The ESL classes also send home educational DVDs so students may get a better grasp some of the concepts they are learning in the classroom. Emma’s ability to send extra academic material home allows the students to continue their English acquisition after school, which gives them a greater chance to attain the language and necessary information.⁷⁵

Other programs are also set in place so that parents are able to be involved in the actual school community settings. Emma has a bilingual parents liaison that is able to communicate with the family to increase their involvement with bilingual workshops to assist parents in helping their students at school. Emma also holds curriculum nights where families can come to the school, and math games or reading times are held. These curriculum nights grant school staff time to explain to parents how to best teach and provide support to their children at home.

3.8 Community Backing

Emma truly caters to the international community. At the front door, the first wall holds a large map of the world labeled with the countries that all of the students are from. In the cafeteria, there are flags from almost every country in the world, and it creates a sense of belonging and indicates that each child may be unique, but there are other children who also are new to the area or have been transplanted from another country or culture. Emma takes extra strides to make sure that each child is able to share their culture and their background with the rest of the school community, and this creates a sense of belonging for all of the students as their backgrounds are celebrated and not pushed aside to create a solely American identity.

Emma is home to a resource center that holistically addresses the child’s life experience outside of school, which exponentially aids the situation of Title 1 students. The resource center offers services such as sending food bags

home from a food pantry housed on the school's campus. They offer classes for families such as the Mother Read program where parents are able to attend meetings in which they are taught to skills so that they can read to their children. The community center also offers computer classes and parenting classes where family members are taught how to discipline their children and learn viable job skills they may not have access to in the community. Though the student body at Emma is not as large as some of the other areas in Buncombe County, the resources that can be attained in the community are a great asset to ESL students and their families.

4. Conclusion

The United States as a whole has a great need for ESL courses and curriculum to allow the growing immigrant populations the proper English acquisition to succeed. The numbers of students in need of ESL courses will continue to grow over the years, and it is vital that the U.S. has the infrastructure to expand as well. The benefits of having prosperous ESL courses in schools will create a stronger base of literary skills for those who have newly arrived to the country or are having difficulties strengthening their English language abilities. By giving children on a nationwide level the ability to improve their language skills, they are more likely to succeed after their primary school education, providing a chance for secondary education and more valuable skill sets with English acquisition.

Due to the various backgrounds and cultures that are present in America, ESL programs in the U.S. have been present since WWII and have progressed to become a mandatory part of curriculum in public schools across the nation. The predominance of families that speak a language other than English at home is growing in the United States, and the necessity of ESL programs has proven so. In the upcoming years, the United States public school system will need to take on a large number of ESL teachers and staff to fulfill the demand of the students in the school system. Supplying ESL teachers who are qualified and aware of the challenges and issues of ESL students that are present in the classroom is the main challenge faced. Without necessary funding and incentives for teachers to teach ESL courses, the students who are already lagging behind their peers will fall much farther behind, creating an even larger success gap.

The ways in which ESL programs are set up is truly dependent on the characteristics of the student population and the necessities of those students. ESL classes may take a variety of forms, but there are many obstacles to be met with each individual student. Educators must be aware of the circumstances ESL students are under and the great challenges that they face while learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, and transitioning into a school setting where they may feel uncomfortable due to the language and cultural barriers. However, the ESL programs that are set up fully and cater to the needs of the individual students are able to exit a large number of ESL students from the program; such is the case at Emma.

Emma Elementary has taken the demands of their large population of ESL students and has created an ESL program that accommodates to the needs of students who are newly arrived to the states and to students who have exited the ESL program but are still in need of extra tutoring. The way in which the program provides ample time for each student individually and in groups grants the child the suggested allowances of English acquisition time. Emma's ability to keep parents knowledgeable about school activities and their child's classwork, although it may be in a language they do not speak, permits the family to be more involved in their child's education. The strive for parents to be actively involved grants their children confidence and support in learning a language other than that of which they speak at home, which can influence the success of the child. Overall, the achievement level of ESL students is not solely dependent on the school system but also the support of teachers, parents, and the school community as a whole. If this can be achieved, then the rate at which students exit from ESL programs will be incredibly efficient.

A healthy international and immigrant community is one that the United States can greatly benefit from, especially if ELL children are able to participate fully in society. The success of ELLs in the educational system has many advantages across the spectrum. If a child is able to participate fully in society because they were given resources to succeed, the melting pot society known as America will continue to advance and grow while encompassing what international aspects can be brought to the table.

5. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express their appreciation to Anita Lovejoy, Dr. Agya Boakye-Boaten, Ellen Bailey, and Jeff Horner.

6. References

-
- 1 Camille Ryan, "Language Use in the United States: 2011," *American Community Survey Reports 22* (2011): 2, *Census*. U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011, Web, 10 Nov. 2015.
 - 2 Hasia Diner, "Immigration and U.S. History," *IIP Digital*, U.S. Department of State, 13 Feb. 2008, Web, 17 Nov. 2015.
 - 3 Diner, "Immigration and U.S. History."
 - 4 Ryan, "Language Use in the United States: 2011."
 - 5 "6.2 Languages and Nationalities," *Learn NC*, UNC School of Education, n.d, Web, 01 Oct. 2015.
 - 6 "What is ESL?" ESL Directory, N.p., n.d, Web, 01 Oct. 2015.
 - 7 "What is ESL?"
 - 8 "ESL," *Cambridge Dictionaries Online*, Cambridge University Press, n.d, Web, 7 Nov. 2015.
 - 9 "What NCLB Says About ELL Students." *Center for Public Education*. National School Boards Association. 30 Oct. 2007. Web. 7 Nov. 2015.
 - 10 Arnulfo G. Ramirez, and Nelly P. Stromquist, "ESL Methodology and Student Language Learning in Bilingual Elementary Schools," *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): TESOL Quarterly* 13.2 (1979): 145-58. Web, 1 Sept. 2015, 145.
 - 11 Jamal Abedi, and Ron Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners," *National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing* (2004): n.p., *CRESST*, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, Winter 2004, Web, 7 Nov. 2015.
 - 12 "English-Language Learner Definition," *The Glossary of Education Reform*, Great Schools Partnership, 19 Aug. 2013, Web, 07 Nov. 2015.
 - 13 "North Carolina QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," *United States Census Bureau*, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015, Web, 10 Nov. 2015.
 - 14 "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States," *American FactFinder*, US Census Bureau, 2012, Web, 10 Nov. 2015.
 - 15 "Buncombe County, North Carolina," *United States US Department of Commerce*, Census Bureau, n.p., 2015, Web, 7 Nov. 2015.
 - 16 Jonathan F. Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," *The Middle School Journal* 29.3 (2009): 25-33, Web. 1 Sept. 2015, 25.
 - 17 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 27.
 - 18 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 27.
 - 19 Lesli A. Maxwell, and Nirvi Shah, "Evaluating ELLs for Special Needs a Challenge," *Education Week* 32.2 (2012): 1-12, Web. 1 Sept. 2015, 1.
 - 20 Maxwell, Shah, "Evaluating ELLs for Special Needs a Challenge," 1.
 - 21 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 28.
 - 22 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 29.
 - 23 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 30.
 - 24 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 33.
 - 25 Boza Becica, "First Language Backgrounds as It Affects ESL Teaching," *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): TESOL Quarterly* 3.4 (1969): 349-53, Web, 1 Sept. 2015, 349.
 - 26 Becica, "First Language Backgrounds as It Affects ESL Teaching," 349.
 - 27 Becica, "First Language Backgrounds as It Affects ESL Teaching," 349.
 - 28 Becica, "First Language Backgrounds as It Affects ESL Teaching," 349.
 - 29 Lesli A. Maxwell, "Schools Falter at Keeping ELL Families in the Loop," *Education Week* 32.6 (2012): N.p, Web, 1 Sept. 2015.
 - 30 Amy M. Hightower, and Sterling C. Lloyd, "Mismatch Between Policy Efforts and Projected Need for ESL Teachers," *Education Week*, N.p, 12 May 2010, Web, 10 Nov. 2015.
 - 31 Honglin Chen, and Pauline Harris. "Becoming School Literate Parents: An ESL Perspective." *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 32.2 (2009): 118-35. Web. 1 Sept. 2015, 118.
 - 32 Abedi, Dietel. "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
 - 33 Abedi, Dietel. "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
 - 34 Hightower, Lloyd, "Mismatch Between Policy Efforts and Projected Need for ESL Teachers."
 - 35 Hightower, Lloyd, "Mismatch Between Policy Efforts and Projected Need for ESL Teachers."

-
- 36 Hightower, Lloyd, "Mismatch Between Policy Efforts and Projected Need for ESL Teachers."
- 37 Leslie A. Maxwell, "Shifting Landscape: Immigration Transforms Communities," *Education Week* 28.17 (2009): 1-2. Web, 1 Sept. 2015.
- 38 Abedi, Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
- 39 Abedi, Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
- 40 Abedi, Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
- 41 Debra Viadero, "Delving Deep: Research Hones Focus on ELLs," *Education Week* 28.17 (2009): 3-5, Web, 1 Sept. 2015, 3.
- 42 Abedi, Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
- 43 Abedi, Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
- 44 Abedi, Dietel, "Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners."
- 45 Viadero, "Delving Deep: Research Hones Focus on ELLs," 4.
- 46 Scott J. Cech, "Testing Tension: Weigh Proficiency, Assess Content," *Education Week* 28.17 (2009): 6-8, Web, 1 Sept. 2015, 6.
- 47 Viadero, "Delving Deep: Research Hones Focus on ELLs," 3.
- 48 Viadero, "Delving Deep: Research Hones Focus on ELLs," 4.
- 49 "County Demographics," *Asheville Chamber of Commerce*, Duke Progress Energy, 50.06 (2013): n.p, July 2014, Web, 1 Sept. 2015.
- 50 "School System Profile 2012," *Buncombe County Schools*, Buncombe County Schools, 2012, Web, 1 Sept. 2015.
- 51 "What NCLB Says About ELL Students," *Center for Public Education*, National School Boards Association, 30 Oct. 2007, Web, 7 Nov. 2015.
- 52 "School System Profile 2012," *Buncombe County Schools*.
- 53 "School System Profile 2012," *Buncombe County Schools*.
- 54 Alberto M. Ochoa, *Equality of Educational Opportunity for National Origin Minority Students*, Publication, Anaheim: Annual California Association of Bilingual Education Conference, 1982, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED227685, College of Education San Diego University, Web, 7 Nov. 2015.
- 55 Anita Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program," Personal Interview, 15 Oct. 2015.
- 56 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 57 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 58 Maxwell and Shah, "Evaluating ELLs for Special Needs a Challenge," 1. See also, "Number and Percentage of Public School Students Participating in Programs for English Language Learners, by State: Selected Years, 2002-03 through 2012-13," *National Center for Education Statistics*, Institute of Education Science, Mar. 2015, Web, 07 Nov. 2015.
- 59 Lesli A. Maxwell, "Standards and English-Learners," *Education Week* 33.10 (2013): 9-12, 30 Oct. 2013, Web, 9.
- 60 Maxwell, "Standards and English-Learners," 9.
- 61 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 62 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 63 Maxwell, "Standards and English-Learners," 11.
- 64 Gisela Ernst, "Beyond Language: The Many Dimensions of an ESL Program," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 25.3 (1994): 317-35, Web, 1 Sept. 2015, 318.
- 65 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 66 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 26.
- 67 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 68 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 69 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 70 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 71 Borden, "The Pitfalls and Possibilities for Organizing Quality ESL Programs," 32.
- 72 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."
- 73 "What is Title I," *Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*, N.d, Web, 7 Nov. 2015.
- 74 "What is Title I," *Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*.
- 75 Lovejoy, "Emma ESL Program."