

Adult English as Second Language Students Over Age 55 and Their Struggles

An Action Research Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Adult English as Second Language Students Over the Age of 55 and Their

Struggles

A Master's Special Project

by

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ABSTRACT

Title

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This project looked at how adult English as Second Language students 55 and over were able to learn English. Research was done to determine that older students can learn as they age. Using a standardized test, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, the researcher gave a pre and post test to two different groups of students. One group of students was the control group and they received regular instruction, the other group of students was the treatment group and they had focused re-teaching and repetition that concentrated on slower, relevant lessons. A t-test was used to determine the significance of the teaching methods and to see whether or not the treatment group performed better after the prescribed teaching methods.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

In 2003, the State Board of Community and Technical College (SBCTC) required all Basic Skills programs (ABE/GED/ESL) that were receiving state funding to start testing all students with Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) testing. Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System was a standardized test developed in California. There were several versions- work and life, life skills, employability. The CASAS tested students on life skills and employment skills. For ESL students there were processes of testing and evaluating students set up by CASAS to determine level. First an oral screen was given where specific questions were asked and answers were scored. Based on how the questions were answered the student was either given an appraisal reading and listening test, a pre-test reading and listening test, a literacy pre-test of reading only, or they were given no test at all. If a student was given an appraisal test they then needed to take a pre-test before the first 12 hours of instruction. At the end of each quarter all students were also given a post-test. All of this information, along with demographics, intake goals, and attendance hours all went into our reporting service known as WABERS or Web-based Adult Basic

Education Reporting System. This reporting system kept track of each student. Funding for basic skills programs were based on the information in WABERS. If all the information was correct, programs got money. If students showed gains within their level, programs got money. If students completed a level, programs got extra money.

South Puget Sound Community College had a flourishing ESL program. There were many different countries represented with the largest numbers being from South Korea, Mexico and Vietnam. There were all ages of students from 17-83. Students entered the program from Level 1- little or no English and/or not being able to read or write in English up to Level 6- high level of reading and writing skills, near fluency in speaking and understanding. (See Appendix- State standards for adult ESL – reading and writing) Most students spent anywhere from two quarters to 1 year (4 quarter) in a level. Often students in the low level 1 or the high level 6 didn't progress as quickly, because of what they needed to know to progress. SPSCC had the largest population in the state of Washington of adult ESL students aged 55 and over <insert %>. The majority of these students were in levels 2 and 3 with a few in L 1 and several in L 4 and 5. These students were staying in one level for 2-9 years making little or no progress. The CASAS scores showed a few point gains one quarter and a few point losses the next. These students were known as fossilized students. They got stuck in the tar and

were frozen in time; turned to stone. These students were good students; they faithfully showed up to every class, they participated in class and they usually did their homework (typically with the help of a family member). When it came time to take the final test, everything they appeared to have learned was forgotten. The CASAS scores never moved enough to count as a gain and the in-house written exam scores rarely got above 50%.

Something needed to be done for these students. This was a fairly significant number of students not making progress, and therefore the college was not getting extra level gain monies for them. For the past year, a new reading and writing class had been developed to serve the students that spoke and understood well, but were struggling with their reading and writing. In this class the students only worked on grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and reading skills. The instructor used different teaching techniques to deliver the material to the students. The pace of the class was slower and it had a relaxed atmosphere which allowed students to ask questions and discuss things they wouldn't bring up in the regular class.

Repetition and re-teaching were two methods that seemed to be working well. If students learned a grammar point one week, they would see it with subsequent grammar lessons thereafter. Another teaching tool was requiring the students to keep journals and reading for pleasure outside of class.

There was not a lot of research out about teaching adult ESL students 55 and over, although there was research and information on aging adults and learning, but not ESL specific. It was necessary to conduct further research on using the previously mentioned teaching techniques, as well as, looking into possible external factors of why these students were not progressing- social, environmental, and cultural, etc.

Statement of the Problem

Some students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) were staying in the same level for two years or more. They made very little progress and what progress they made they seemed to forget it over any break between quarters. Ultimately students who failed to make level gains over a period of time ended up effecting the funding of the program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not certain specified teaching methods would increase these students success in level

completion. It would also be determined whether there were other factors that were contributing to the fossilization of students.

Delimitations

This project included Level 2/3 adult ESL class with 28 students and Level 2/3/4 adult Reading and Writing class with 20 students. The classes were located at South Puget Sound Community College in Olympia, Washington.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were true:

1. Students showed up and actively participated in class.
2. Students knew their reading and writing levels vs their listening and speaking levels.
3. Students participated in the classroom activities.
4. Students did their best on the CASAS assessment.
5. The CASAS was a valid assessment of reading and listening skills mandated by the SBCTC for all basic skills students in the community college system.

Hypothesis

Students, who were in the same level ESL classes for more than six quarters, showed level gains when specific teaching techniques were applied, than if they

were not applied. Research also showed that other factors were also prohibiting students from achieving level gains.

Significance of the Project

The purpose of this project was to provide a factual base of information regarding the progression of students to another level if certain teaching methods were applied, and to see whether or not there were other factors keeping these students from moving up a level.

Procedure

For the purpose of this project, the following procedures were implemented:

1. A review of selected literature was conducted through articles collected through the use of internet search engines.
2. Permission to conduct research on students was received from the Dean of Developmental Education, Crystal Ashley.
3. The CASAS pre-test scores were compiled for the students in the two classes.
4. Teaching techniques were administered to the target class.
5. The CASAS post-tests were administered and the scores were compiled.
6. The CASAS pre and post test scores were compared, using a t-test to show significance.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following words are defined:

Level gain. A level gain happens when a student scores higher on the test.

If they score high enough they will get into the next level in the class.

Basic skills. In the community college basic skills classes are GED, adult basic education, and English as a Second Language. These classes cover the basics of reading, writing, math, listening and speaking.

Acronym

ESL. – English as a Second Language

CASAS.- Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System

NRS. - National Reporting System

SBCTC. - State Board of Community and Technical Colleges

SPSCC. - South Puget Sound Community College

WABERS. - Web-based Adult Basic Education Reporting System

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

This chapter has been organized around the following topics: (a) Adult ESL students 55 and older, (b) Adult Education/Elderly Education, (c) Cultural Effects on Learning, (d) Adult Multiple Intelligence, and (f) summary.

Adult English as a Second Language Student 55 and Older

As the population in the United States started aging, community college basic skills classes started to see an increase of students 55 and older. The English as a Second Language (ESL) classes saw the largest increase in these older students. Having older students in class should be looked at as being a benefit, not a burden. Older adults could learn another language; there were certain things educators need to consider. There was no decline in the ability to learn as these students age, age was not a major factor in language acquisition, educators needed to be aware of minor considerations like vision and hearing loss and the context in which adults learned determines their ability to learn a new language (Schelppergrell, 1987). An organization out of Boston, Massachusetts called the Coalition of Limited English Speaking Elderly or CLESE put together a publication called Bright Ideas: Tips for Teaching the Elderly (CLESE, Aguirre Institute, 2000). This document shared many different ideas for teaching elderly second language learners. It also discussed things to consider when dealing with this population. It discussed program location, was the classroom close to their homes, was it accessible by public transportation was the building wheelchair

accessible, was there stairs, etc. Educators should be aware of things like how close the white boards were, was the lighting bright, was it easy to hear in the classrooms, were the classes in the morning or evening, because older students usually learned better in classes that were everyday in the morning.

Since the end of World War II, the United States had become home to over three million legal immigrants and refugees. This was only the legal immigrants; there had been just as many if not more undocumented immigrants. This actually made up a relatively large population within the United States. More and more newcomers were elderly or older adults. Many of the established immigrants and refugees, legal and illegal, were getting older “playing an increasing role in the “graying of America” as uprooted adults age in their new homeland.” (Weinstein-Shr, 1993) As this population aged they start finding the time to come to school to work on their language skills. These older students were able to learn language, but it took an ESL program stepping back and reevaluating how they were teaching and how their programs were designed to successfully instruct, integrate and retain these students.

Two difficulties pointed out by Weinstein-Shr in addressing the needs of these ESL students were the definitions of “older” and “literacy”. The term older was defined differently in research literature, in the laws that affected older adults, and within the communities they were members of. When most people think of

older adults they thought of it in terms of age, maybe 40-65 years old. Another way to define older adults was by status. Older workers may be categorized due to mid-life career changes, retirees returning to work, displaced workers or homemakers (Imel, 1991). People were also defined as older adults within their communities through life achievements, such as becoming a grandparent. Literacy was usually tested through standardized testing, which didn't usually take literacy level in their native language into account. Weinstein-Shr used the example of a Cambodian Khmer peasant farmer who had never held a pencil and a Russian engineer with a PhD who had not learned the Roman alphabet. (Weinstein-Shr, 1993). Should these two students be considered the same literacy level with the same needs? Regardless of definitions of terms, the fact remained that the number of non-native English language learners was on a rise and the availability of literacy resources was not necessarily meeting their needs.

Refugees and immigrants who came to the United States came with an important resource; an inner strength that allowed them to face and deal with enormous changes especially the older adults. These older people experienced many similar difficulties as the aging Americans, but many of the difficulties were specific to growing old in a foreign country and culture. Often times the elderly of these communities had strong family and community support, but if it was not strong these people usually suffer. As a whole this population not only

had to deal with growing old, but they often didn't have financial resources, the majority of this aging group were women who had not learned to navigate through a foreign society, and they were not proficient in the English language. If an aging person had family support, there was a newer problem with intergenerational roles changing. The traditional roles of the elders in families were changing and not necessarily for the better. Because of this shift, the elderly were often looked upon unfavorably, almost as a burden. The other family issue was language itself. Families that came to the United States and had been here for any amount of time started losing their native language within the generations. Mom and dad immigrated to the United States, got established and put their children in the American school system. The children became fluent in English and started losing their native language. Then mom and dad brought their parents to the United States. The children couldn't speak the native language and the grandparents couldn't speak English, the shared language is lost.

Literacy programs with these students in them must be aware of the stresses, difficulties, and loss these students were experiencing. They must build on the resources these elders brought.

Some past theories suggested older adults cannot learn language. The current research recognized the fallacy those theories hold. In actuality older adults may learn language quickly, because of adults' more highly developed

strategies for processing new information. As long as older people were healthy their ability to learn did not decline. The author described four factors to consider how well an older student would effectively learn a language: physical factors, cognitive factors, social factors, and other motivational factors. The physical factors were described as the decline in visual and hearing abilities. Educators should have taken this into account and adjusted the classroom environment and visual aids. The cognitive factors were described as the strategies older adults have for learning. Educators should have seen how a student learns best, be flexible in their teaching approach and draw on the students life experiences. The social factors were described as whether or not these older students were comfortable in the multi-aged classes and motivation. Older students may only be in class for socializing and getting out of the house. The other motivational factors were the reasons these students were in class. The programs must look at what was relevant to these students and teach what was needed. Very few of these students were learning English for a certificate or degree.

Adult Education/Elderly Education

Elderlearning: New Frontier in an Aging Society by Lois Lamdin and Mary Fugate was a book which offered up some interesting views of how aging people's cognitive abilities changed over time, Chapter 4 looked at the cognitive

abilities of aging learners. The public perception of aging adults was that they lose their minds and mental abilities with age. Not only did older adults have to face the public's perception, they also tended to accept and internalize these stereotypes. They started believing they were too old to try new things. As the numbers of people over 65 increases, there were increasing numbers of these aging adults who were debunking and fighting against these stereotypes.

In the past 23 years, research had been done toward understanding cognitive functions of aging adults. Early studies compared younger and older adults. These studies showed significant decline in the older adult's abilities. More recent studies done longitudinally have shown there actually wasn't a decline in cognitive abilities, but older adults could actually improve their cognitive abilities. "Continuing learners are better learners." (Lambdin, 1997) Klaus and Ruth Rieget at the University of Michigan did a study in 1956, then a follow-up study in 1966. They found that when significant mental decline did occur it comes shortly before death. This five (or fewer) years before a natural death was known as a "terminal drop" (Rieget and Rieget, 1956). So barring brain disease or impending death, cognitive abilities would respond favorably to ongoing learning and education.

Social factors also played an important part on how we aged cognitively. People who were well educated, either academically or self-taught, worked in

mentally challenging occupations and had been surrounded by a strong support circle of friends and family who valued education had a better chance of building their cognitive abilities as they age. Aging adults who did the same thing every day in their jobs and in their lives with an undemanding and unsupportive social environment, mindless leisure time and the self-fulfilling prophesy of the negative stereotypes could speed up a mental and physically decline.

Early researchers did cross-sectional studies to look at whether IQ's decline with age. These cross-sectional studies supported the hypothesis that IQ's did in fact decline with age. The problems with these cross-sectional studies were numerous. Comparing 30, 50, and 70 year olds was a bit like comparing apples, lettuce, and pecans. Different age groups had been exposed to different things. The old way of learning was memorization. Now days critical thinking was emphasized with very little memorization. Younger people had also become experienced test takers. Cultural differences also influence how successfully tests were taken. Many of the tests were written in language for the younger generations, which the older generations may not have understood. For example, to an older adult RAM was a horned sheep not computer memory. Another factor that influenced these cross-sectional studies was the difference in schooling. Classes the older students took in college were probably similar to classes younger students took in high school. Older students also tended to not do as well

on timed tests. They may be slower and needed time to jar their memories, and they didn't have the same experience in taking test either. They may not have the same motivational factors, and their mood and state of health also influenced their testing abilities.

Due to all of these factors some scientists decided to use longitudinal studies. Rather than looking at different age groups at the same time, scientists looked at one group over time. Werner Schaie, a pioneer of the psychology of aging, did a longitudinal study where he tested the same group over 7 year periods starting at age 60 and ending with age 81. Over the course of the study, 60-85% of the participants either remained stable or improved their cognitive abilities. (Lamdin and Fugate, 1997) Another study done in Washington State looked at the intelligence of people in their 60's and again tested in 7 year intervals. The participants in their 70's actually scored higher than the participants in their 60's. It was believed that television could have played a part in this increase. Less active older people would sit and watch television. They typically watched in-depth news, public affairs, and history, culture and nature programs.

There were two types of intelligences discussed, fluid and crystallized. Fluid intelligence continued to move and change. Fluid intelligence used the short-term memory, it allowed people to perceive complex relations and created concepts. It was less dependent on instruction and acculturation. Crystallized

intelligence was the accumulation of knowledge over time. Crystallized intelligence grew with time. One researcher went back and looked at a cross-sectional study in which younger people were compared with older people. She found that there was a lot of variance within the older people, as far as, reaction time, memory, and fluid intelligence; however the differences were far less in the crystallized intelligence. It came down to the difference between cognitive abilities/strengths (fluid intelligence) and what a person had learned through culture, schooling, and exposure to learning experiences throughout their lifetime (crystallized intelligence). Fluid intelligence may diminish over time, but crystallized intelligence stayed the same and in many cases actually increased. (Morse, 1993) People were active seeker of information in the world; they received this information from the senses. People were like computers in that they took in and stored information, first into their short-term memory and then into their long-term memory, then they were able to recall that information and used it at a later time. As people age this process may work a bit slower and the recall part may not happen 100% of the time, but they were still able to recall most things and apply what they know to other things they were learning. Many of these recall deficits were actually caused by problems in language production not problems with language comprehension, which was a cognitive function. People

continue to have the abilities to learn, no matter what age they were. They just learned at a different speed.

There were many changing views of aging adult education. This growing population had to overcome some old research and archaic beliefs. The most damaging piece of research was put out in the 1960's. It was called the critical period hypothesis. This hypothesis was based on the then current theories of brain development. This theory stated that the brain lost cerebral plasticity after puberty (Schleppegrell 1987, Lenneberg 1967). This loss of plasticity made it difficult for adults to learn a language. This theory, although not true, still stuck in people's minds today. Recent research showed that actually adults tended to be better language learners than children. Adults already had a history of language learning, and therefore were able to learn grammar, structure, and vocabulary better. Adults also tapped into long-term memory rather than short-term as younger people did. Adults were able to use association based on their previous learning experiences. Older adults faced other issues. The older adults tended to be harder on themselves, they doubted they were able to learn a new language and they didn't think they could keep up with the younger students. Health was another problem. Some diseases or health problems affected a student's ability to learn. Hearing and vision loss tended to be the biggest problem of our adult learners.

Schleppegrell mentioned some specific things to watch out for in the classroom. Classroom set up was important. The classroom needed a good environment with good lighting, not a lot of background noise and a seating arrangement which recognized the possible hearing and visual issues. Speed drills, oral drills, and memorization did not usually work with older students. Older students usually didn't have good short-term memories and often needed a little more time to process, so if you were doing memorization drills, speed drills or competitive drills the students would not be able to keep up. Older students were often harder on themselves about learning. They feared failure more than the younger students. Teachers needed to be aware of this and try to keep the anxiety levels down. Teachers should not focus on oral repetition or perfect pronunciation. It was more meaningful for the student to be able to work together to practice language learning. Teachers should keep the lessons relevant. Most older learners were not learning a language for academic purposes, but for a specific purpose. If it didn't relate to real-life and if it didn't appear to be relevant the older learner would not be successful. Teachers needed to be aware of and appreciate the fact that older students came to class with a life time of experience. They had already developed learning strategies. Teachers needed to be flexible.

One researcher had found that physical and cognitive changes happened slowly. Older adults learned to compensate for the decline in cognitive abilities.

(Lachman, 2001) Although as people age there was a decline in short-term memory and in how quickly they processed things, older adults were still able to learn. This was true especially when adults were able to control the pace of their learning. The Seattle Longitudinal Study looked at 500 adults ages 26-67 over a period of time. Their cognitive abilities were tested starting in 1956 in seven year intervals until 1998. The study looked at six basic mental abilities: vocabulary, verbal memory, number, spatial orientation, inductive reasoning, and perceptual speed. Based on the findings of this study, vocabulary, spatial orientation, verbal memory and inductive reasoning actually improved through middle age. The middle-age subjects did better than the younger adults. The fact that verbal memory actually improved with age would suggest the continued ability to learn another language. The fact that there was a decline in perceptual speed may, however, have a negative effect on language learning. The brain did have the ability to compensate for the decline in perceptual speed. In spite of the verbal memory's improvement through mid-life and the brain's ability to compensate for the slowing of perceptual speed, students still reported the decline in short term memory affected their ability to learn another language. (Hale, 2005)

Short-term memory was important but could be overcome to allow older people to be able to learn another language. There were other types of memory which were important too: episodic, semantic, and working memory.

Episodic memory helped a person remember information or experiences. This included things like remembering an appointment or remembering where you put your glasses. It also helped in remembering names, routines, and objects. Episodic memory was affected when someone was tired or under stress; people had more problems if they were tired or under stress. The decline in episodic memory didn't really affect a person's ability to learn a second language, because other memory systems were involved.

Semantic memory was defined as "...the acquisition and retention of generic facts, knowledge and beliefs." (Lachman, 2001) This included things like the learning of vocabulary, concepts and facts. This was an important memory function for learning a language. Semantic memory actually increased with age. However, this ability to recall information decreased over time. An example of this was trying to remember or work or a name and coming up blank. Everyone experienced this, but older adults tended to experience this more frequently, and when you added the stress or anxiety of learning a new language it increased. Most researchers agreed that the ability to retrieve information slowed down with age. Older adults relied on long term memory, which included both episodic and semantic memory to learn another language. The biggest memory problem older students needed to overcome was the decline of short-term memory. In order for

something to be put into long-term memory, it first had to be stored in short-term memory.

Short term memory was called working memory. This was where information was temporarily stored to be processed before being put into long term memory. Working memory helped with things like language comprehension, vocabulary and the input and output of language. A person's working memory declined with age, but older adults had found ways to compensate for a slower working memory. As long as the language classes older students were in didn't overload the working memory, students should have no problem learning another language. Overall, older adults had the cognitive ability to learn another language, but they had to go slower and there needed to be more repetition.

There have been many decades of negative stereotypes about aging people. Older people often apologized for being old. Often times, students believed they were unable to learn another language, because they were too old, they were too slow, they couldn't remember, etc., this effected self-confidence which was a huge component of learning another language. To go back to school and learn another language after many years of being away from school took a certain amount of self-confidence and risk. Self-efficacy was "the belief that one can cope and succeed" (Ehrman, 1996) Low self-efficacy led to low self-esteem. Students, who thought they couldn't do something because they were too old,

didn't do things because they were too old. Students with high self-efficacy tried harder and gave things their all. One big thing that older students must overcome to have high self-efficacy was the negative stereotypes of aging learners. Once those stereotypes were overcome students needed to build their sense of confidence and control.

Older adults who were learning a second language quite often were doing so because of instrumental motivation. Instrumental motivation was when they needed to learn a second language to do their jobs or to survive in a foreign country. Adults who were going into a second career or a post-retirement career overseas were motivated by integrative motivations. Integrative motivation was when they wanted to fit into their new culture and develop relationships. These students were very motivated and wanted to learn the language but they were quickly discouraged when they realized they weren't learning as quickly as they think they should. If they had internalized the negative stereotypes, they never expected to succeed in the first place. "Research is not conclusive whether motivation is a consequence of success or the cause of success." (Skehan, 1989)

Overall older students may not learn a second language as quickly as they would like, but they were able to learn. If they had realistic expectations, motivation and a positive outlook their language learning would be a positive experience for these students.

There were many different things that could be done to help older language learners succeed in learning another language. Instructors should make a point to get to know their students. Older students brought a lot into the classrooms and when instructors took the time to learn their student's strengths and weaknesses it helped in developing an appropriate program for the students. Individualize programs as much as possible. Older students needed a slower pace and lots of repetition. Set expectations high, but not unrealistically. If some older students were only able to do half of an assignment, in the same time it took the other students to finish the assignment, make sure the students know that was okay- it was not about how fast they get through something, it was whether or not they were doing it correctly. Make the lessons relevant to the students. If the students found something to be childish or what they perceived as being worthless they were not going to see the value and they lost their motivation. Be aware of what these students had gone through and were going through, keep the mood of the classroom relaxed, comfortable and as stress free as possible and enjoy the opportunity to teach these older students.

Cultural Effects on Learning

There was a belief among many Americans that if people were going to come to the United States from other countries they must learn English to become a true American. Many immigrant families realized the importance of learning

English especially for their children, but they also wanted to see their native language and customs preserved and carried on for subsequent generations. Young children may learn their first language, but as they started in American school systems their first language was quickly replaced with English. By the end of their K-12 careers, many of these students knew very little of their first language. A study performed by Leanne Hinton at the University of California, Berkeley in 1999 looked at autobiographies written by Asian-American college students over several years. It looked at the patterns of language shifts (loss) and why it happens. It also looked at what families do to try and keep their first language strong.

The students in this study all reported they knew little or no English when they started school in the United States. Many experienced “language shock” (Hinton, 1999); not only were they trying to learn a new language, but they were trying to assimilate to a new culture. Throughout K-12 none of these students were in bilingual programs. Asian-American bilingual programs are rare. Many of the students did have some form of ESL (English as a Second Language) in their school.

The autobiographies revealed that there were many different approaches to teaching English. Many schools were not prepared and the students found themselves in some interesting classes. One student reported that her school had

ESL for Spanish speakers and sign-language. The school wouldn't put her in the ESL for Spanish speakers, so she was taught sign language. For awhile the only way she could communicate to English speakers was through sign language. The three other main sources of learning English the students reported were through television, friends, and family.

Many students reported that watching shows like Sesame Street and Mister Roger's Neighborhood helped them learn English. They also chose friends at school who didn't speak their first language, to be able to learn English faster. Some families were not able to or chose not to speak English at home, but often times when there were other siblings at home English was learned quicker via older siblings.

First language attrition happened in different ways. Almost every student in this study reported loss of first language. Most reported their dominant language was English. Some children had only a passive knowledge of their first language, they may understand but could not speak or they may be able to speak but not read or write it. Often times a mixture of their first language and English emerged in their homes. This ended up being a sort of compromise between children and parents. The children didn't know enough of their first language to be able to discuss things with their parents and the parents didn't know enough English to use that as a communication tool. The best these families were able to

do, communication wise, was to come up with a fusion language. Many of these students reported they felt alienated within their own families. They were not able to fully communicate with relatives and often times if visitors came from the old country or if there were older relatives in the family they couldn't communicate at all or only basic needs. It made it really difficult for children and parents to communicate about anything more than the basic day to day doings; they were unable to talk about important, deeper issues. The other issue within the families was the parent's insistence on not speaking English and retaining their first language and customs. Parents were not always as supportive with speaking English in the home.

It was known that English was important and children who didn't learn English had problems in school both academically and socially. Schools often encouraged parents to use English at home. By doing this their English improved, but they lost their native language. The student who were in households where no English was spoken retained fluency or near-fluency. However, many students whose families decided to only speak their native language still lost their language as they became more fluent in English. Other families chose to use the one parent one language method. One parent spoke the native language and one parent spoke English. The families who were consistent with this method found the children ended up being fluently bi-lingual. A huge factor even, bigger than the

unintentional loss of language was language rejection by the students themselves. Other kids could be very mean and unkind if someone was different. Students figured this out early and in trying to fit in, refused to learn their native language. Often times if a student had lived here all their lives they didn't see the point of using their native language.

Despite all of this there was a bigger push to retain their first language. There were heritage language schools opening up around the country. These schools often met on weekends or after regular school. Many parents were enrolling their children in these schools in an effort to preserve the language and culture. The students reported they really didn't feel as though they were truly benefiting from these schools. One thing that seemed to be helping was television. Just as television helped people learn English it was also helping students maintain and improve their native language. Thanks to satellite and cable television, many stations and shows could be seen in the native language. Having peers who also spoke the first language also helped a lot, living in neighborhoods with high populations of native speakers, attending churches and other organizations gave students a chance to speak their first language outside of the home.

As students started realizing the importance of retaining their first language the efforts by families' communities and schools will start improving to ensure future generations will be able to know their heritage language.

Students found it difficult to remain bi-lingual in a society that valued English so much. The students that participated in this study knew the importance of being able to speak their native language as well as English, but did not get the support needed to actually become truly bi-lingual. Upon entering the American school system, for the majority of their day English was spoken and taught, they watched American television and had American friends. The only time their native language was spoken was at home by their parents and family. The students in this study reported that very few of them were actually able to function with any type of fluency in their native language. The students who did report that they were fluent in both English and their native language came from homes in which the parents implemented the one parent, one language way. One parent only spoke English and one parent only spoke their native language. This was a great approach if one parent was actually fluent in English, which often times was not the case.

Adult Multiple Intelligence

Instructors from the world of basic skills, Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and General Education

Diploma (GED), came together to do an 18 month study on Adult Multiple Intelligence (AMI). They focused on applying AMI to their teaching strategies in the classroom.

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence (MI) had typically been used and implemented in the K-12 educational system for many years. Gardner's theory stated that people learn in different ways. There were eight different intelligences which influenced how people learned the best. In 1996 the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) launched the first extensive study of the use of Gardner's multiple intelligence theory in adult literacy education. MI was a theory so it could involve many different interpretations of how to implement it. The commonality of these interpretations was student centered instruction.

Each instructor involved in the study used AMI in different ways. Many of the instructors chose to use an assessment to determine the student's type of intelligence. They used tools where student's assessed their own intelligences. Many of the instructors found these self-assessments to be useful, but several did not find them useful and chose not to use them. The two ESOL instructors who were involved in the AMI study did not find these types of assessments useful. For one thing, the language used in these assessments was too difficult for the students to understand. They found that the whole idea of discussing and

assessing one's intelligence is an uncomfortable concept for ESOL students. Many also did not see the educational value in doing such an assessment. If there was no relevancy or apparent value in something there was not the buy in from this population. The instructors teaching ABE or GED found the students enjoyed taking these assessments and finding out about their learning styles. Many of these students struggled in school, and to have someone help them realize they aren't stupid, they just learn differently is a life changing event. A few of the instructors tried observing their students to determine their learning style rather than devoting too much time doing assessments. This method worked well in the ESOL classrooms.

As a whole, MI could be called constructivist learning. This type of learning built on what a student already knew and felt competent in. The instructors involved in this study were given free reign to do what they thought was going to be best for the students and were encouraged to think outside of the box.

One instructor chose to develop lessons based on the same learning goal for each of the eight intelligences. This allowed the student to choose the method they wanted to use to learn a certain thing. This was called choice based learning.

Instructors also used thematic and project-based lessons; both are very typical constructivist ways of lesson planning. One of the instructors, Wendy

Quinones, showed the movie *Educating Rita*. She came with eight different things to observe in the movie, which would align with the eight MI's. Prior to showing the movie she instructed the students to pick one or two things to observe. She gave the example of a choice being a description of the floor plan of Rita's house. "To a linguistic person that would be a difficult and somewhat ridiculous task, but to a spatial person this would allow the student to understand the movie in a way that makes sense to them. ...The floor plan would have to be deduced from events in the movie." (Quinones, 1998, p.11)

According to all the instructors participating in this study, student's regular reflection and self-assessment of their learning was very important. The students began to see value in more diverse ways of learning." These self-assessments were essential in students accepting MI curriculum." (Paxton, 1998, p.27) Another important part of implementing MI instruction was building trust and the sense of community. This allowed students to take risks.

Something that all of the instructors agreed on was the instructors had to be willing to give up some power in the classroom. This type of instruction required a shift in the balance of power to take place. Most students were used to an instructor standing up in front of the class lecturing and then the student would have an assignment. The AMI model of instruction gave more of the onerous on the student. The student became responsible for more of their own learning. The

classrooms became more interactive and students were able to demonstrate what they had learned. Another thing that seemed to happen was the instructor's expectations of their student increased. Through this kind of instructions instructors got to know their students better and they started to see what the student was capable of. This made the instructor and the student start to expect more. Students were doing more in class than they ever thought they would do and more than their instructors had ever seen.

The instructors involved with this AMI study spent a lot of time trying to assess their students to determine which kind of the eight MI's did they have. The instructors found they were taking too much time doing this. They finally realized this was not the important issue, but being aware of the diversity of how people learn and adjusting the way they plan lessons and teach was more important. This awareness allowed these instructors to offer students choices and multiple ways to engage with topics and materials. These choices gave students the power to decide which way their learning is going to go. These AMI instructors were able to build trusting community classrooms. There was a power shift between the teachers and the students, causing everyone's expectations to rise.

Summary

The collective consensus of the research showed that older adults did have the ability to learn and this carried through to include learning another language. Older learners needed to first identify and address certain physical factors that may be standing the way of learning. These included hearing and vision loss, how they were sleeping and other physical ailments. Language programs needed to adapt their methods to accommodate vision and hearing issues. Instructors also needed to be willing to change the way they thought about their students and their teaching. An instructor needed to be aware of the fact their older students may be experiencing stress and feeling of alienation. They may also be experiencing internal family friction. They may be feeling a sense of worthlessness within their families and communities. Instructors also needed to realize that most older students were not in class to learn English for academic purposes, but they learned English for survival, to communicate with grandkids and quite often they came to class for social escape. Therefore, lessons and what was taught needed to be relevant.

Older learners needed to overcome the stereotypes that have been forced upon the population and people over 60 years old. The research used to say that as people age their cognitive abilities declined and older people were not able to learn. This has since been disproved. In fact, older people were able to learn and when it comes to language there were actually some advantages older people had

over younger people in language learning. Longitudinal studies showed that there was not a decline in cognitive abilities, but older adults could actually improve their cognitive abilities. A good positive attitude, a strong social circle of family and/or friends, and continuous exercising of the brain all contributed to improved cognitive abilities.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of the Data

Introduction

This chapter has been organized around the following topics: (a) Methodology, (b) Participants, (c) Instruments, (d) Design, (e) Procedure, (f) Treatment of Data, (g) Summary.

Methodology

Review of selected literature: A review of selected literature was conducted on the internet. Additional information was acquired from the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC).

Permission to conduct research: Permission to conduct research at South Puget Sound Community College was granted by Crystal Ashley, Dean of Developmental Education. Permission was also granted by Heather Williams, full time faculty for the ESL department and Kathy Lundeen, Dean of Enrollment Services.

Teaching strategies: Repetition and re-teaching are two strategies used in the classroom with the target students. These students also were required to keep journals and read for pleasure outside of class.

Administering CASAS: A pre-test and a post-test were given to the students in two classes. One class was the control group and the other class was the group that received the teaching strategies.

Participants

The participants of this study were level 2/3 and a Reading/Writing class with various levels between 2-4 English as a Second Language students at South Puget Sound Community College. There were 28 students in the regular L 2/3 ESL class and 20 students in the Reading and Writing class. They ranged in age

between 20 and 76 years old. The different countries represented were South Korea, Mexico, El Salvador, Vietnam, China, Thailand, Laos, and the Philippines.

Instruments

Two instruments of measure were used in this study. The instrument used in this study was the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), which is a standardized test that looks at a student's reading and listening levels. The final instrument was the in-house writing assessment used to determine a student's writing ability.

Design

For the purpose of this study an action study was used, because certain methods were used on a specific group in the classroom. Experimental research was also used. Two groups of students were given a CASA pre test. The regular L2/3 class had regular instruction. The Reading and Writing class was given the prescribed teaching methods. Both groups were administered CASAS post tests at the end of the quarter. The scores were then compared using a t-test to test for significance.

Procedure

For the purpose of this project, the following procedures were implemented:

1. A review of selected literature was conducted through articles collected through the use of internet search engines.
2. Permission to conduct research on students was received from the Dean of Developmental Education, Crystal Ashley.
3. The CASAS pre-test and in-house writing exam scores were compiled for the students in the two classes.
4. The Reading and Writing class received continuous re-teaching and repetition throughout the quarter. The regular Level 2/3 class received the regular instruction which includes reading, writing, listening and speaking exercises focused on specific life skills from a prescribed textbook.
5. The CASAS post-tests and in-house writing exams were administered and the scores were compiled.
6. The CASAS pre and post test scores were compared, using a t-test to show significance.

Treatment of Data

A t-test was used to test for significance between the control group and the treatment group. A pre-test and a post-test were given to two classes. The test

scores were compiled and the numbers were entered into StatPak software which was used to do the t-test calculations.

Summary

This chapter was designed to review the methodology and treatment of data related to whether or not re-teaching and repetition would make a difference in level gains in adult ESL students in Level 2/3. The analysis of data and findings from this study are reported in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Chapter 4 has been organized around the following topics: (a) description of environment, (b) hypothesis, (c) results of the study, (d) findings, and (e) summary.

Description of the Environment

The study involved two English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at South Puget Sound Community College in Olympia, Washington. The control group was an adult Level 2/3 class that varied in ages between 20-75 years old. There were 21 students who were involved in the study, in this class. The other

class was an ESL class that was specifically for reading and writing. This was the treatment group. The class was an adult Level 2/3/4 class between the ages of 24-69. There were 17 students involved in this group. The study took place between September 2007 and December 2007.

Hypothesis

Students, who were in the same level ESL classes for more than six quarters, showed level gains when specific teaching techniques were applied, than if they were not applied. Research also showed that other factors were also prohibiting students from achieving level gains.

Null Hypothesis

Students who were in the same level ESL classes for more than six quarters, showed no significant difference when specific teaching techniques were applied, than if they were not applied. Research also showed that other factors could prohibit students from achieving level gains.

Results of the Study

The control group and the treatment group all took the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) as a pre-test and a post-test. These scores were used to determine whether or not repetition and re-teaching were more effective than the usual way of teaching and whether or not the test scores show a significant difference. (See Table 1 and Table 2)

TABLE 1- PRE AND POST TEST SCORES FOR CONTROL GROUP

CONTROL GROUP	PRE-TEST SCORE	POST-TEST SCORE
0	208	206
1	222	214
2	201	203
3	220	216
4	214	232
5	203	199
6	210	197
7	189	191
8	210	213
9	206	213

10	210	213
11	216	230
12	215	224
13	212	224
14	210	209
15	190	200
16	206	205
17	214	218
18	209	200
19	209	208
20	207	230

TABLE 2- PRE AND POST TEST SCORES FOR TREATMENT GROUP

TREATMENT GROUP	PRE-TEST SCORE	POST-TEST SCORE
000	214	216
001	220	222
002	216	222
003	234	230
004	221	222
005	211	222
006	211	213
007	216	218
008	215	219
009	219	222
010	218	220
011	216	219
012	205	212
013	229	232
014	221	224
015	210	211
016	213	212

A dependent t test was done between the pre and post test of the control group. The t-value was 1.55 and the degrees of freedom (DF) were 20. Using the Distribution of t chart the distribution of t at .05=2.08 and the distribution of t at .01=2.84. (See Table 3) The null hypothesis was accepted and the hypothesis was not supported, so there was no significant difference between the pre and post test of the control group based on the dependent t test.

Number of pairs	21
Sum D's	64
Mean of D's	3.05
Sum D Squared	1818
t value	1.55
DF	20

TABLE 3 – DEPENDENT t TEST FOR CONTROL GROUP

Probability	.05	.01
t value	1.55	1.55
Distribution of t	2.08	2.84
Null hypothesis	Accepted	Accepted
Hypothesis	Not supported	Not supported

A dependent t test was done between the pre and post test of the treatment group. The t-value was 3.53 and the DF was 16. Using the Distribution of t chart the distribution of t at the probability of .05=2.10 and the distribution of t at .01=2.92. (See Table 4) The null hypothesis was rejected and the hypothesis was supported, so based on the dependent t test there was a difference between the pre and post test of the treatment group.

Number of pairs	16
Sum D's	47
Mean D's	2.76
Sum D Squared	297
t value	3.53
DF	16

TABLE 4- DEPENDENT t TEST FOR TREATMENT GROUP

Probability	.05	.01
t value	3.53	3.53
Distribution of t	2.10	2.92
Null hypothesis	Rejected	Rejected
Hypothesis	Supported	Supported

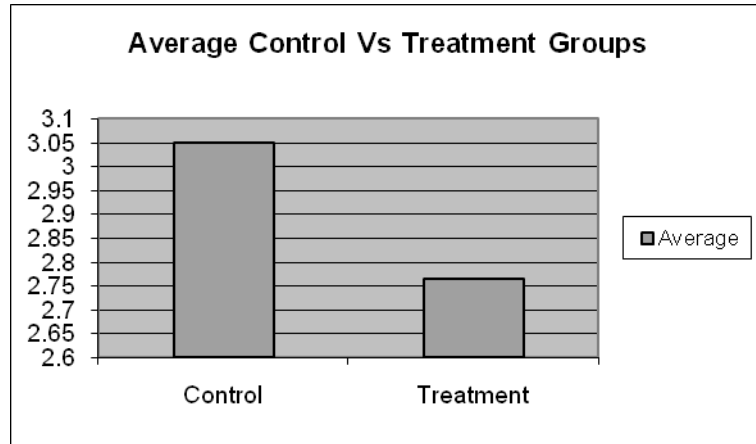
The difference between the pre and post test score in the control group and treatment group was figured by subtracting the post test from the pre test. The differences were added together to get the sum, then an average was found. (See Table 5) The average of the difference for the control group was 3.05 and the average of the difference for the treatment group was 2.76. (See Figure 1)

TABLE 5: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRE AND POST TEST OF THE CONTROL AND TREATMENT GROUP

Control			Treatment		
Pre	Post	Difference	Pre	Post	Difference
208	206	-2	214	216	2
222	214	-8	220	222	2
201	203	2	216	222	6
220	216	-4	234	230	-4
214	232	18	221	222	1
203	199	-4	211	222	11
210	197	-13	211	213	2
189	191	2	216	218	2
210	213	3	215	219	4
206	213	7	219	222	3
210	213	3	218	220	2
216	230	14	216	219	3
215	224	9	205	212	7
212	224	12	229	232	3
210	209	-1	221	224	3
190	200	10	210	211	1
206	205	-1	213	212	-1
214	218	4			
209	200	-9			
209	208	-1			
207	230	23			
Sum		64			47

Average 3.047619 2.764706
**FIGURE 1: AVERAGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CONTROL AND
TREATMENT GROUP**

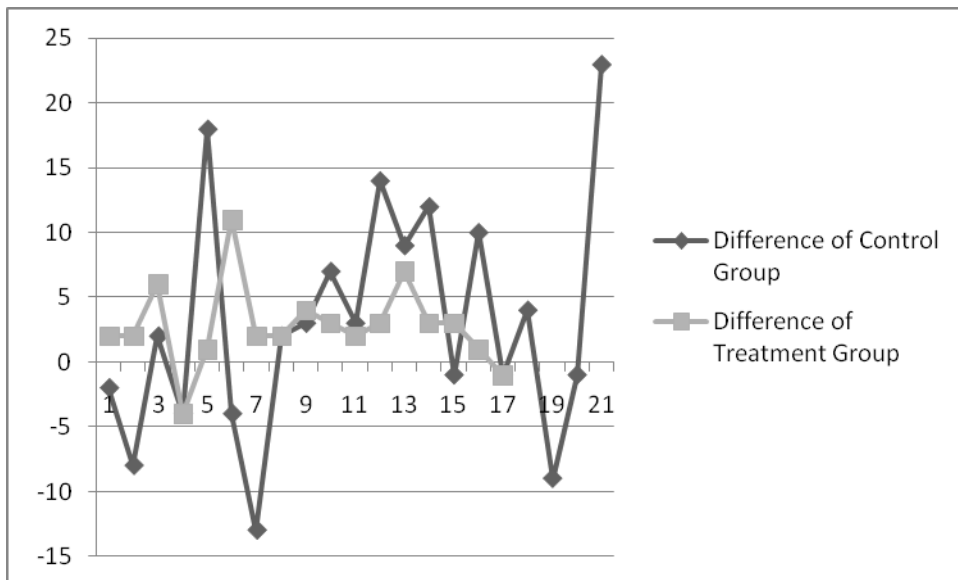
	Control	Treatment
Average	3.047619	2.764706



The difference between the pre and post tests of the treatment and control group were put into a figure to show that there were fewer negative scores in the

treatment group versus the control group. The control group had some skewed numbers because some student's test scores jumped a lot from the pre test to the post test and some dropped a lot from the pre test to the post test. (See Figure 2)

FIGURE 2: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TREATMENT AND CONTROL GROUP



Findings

Based on the findings of the dependent t-test the null hypothesis was accepted and the hypothesis was not supported in the control group, but the null

hypothesis was rejected and the hypothesis was supported in the treatment group. The difference between the average of the pre and post test scores for both the treatment group is 2.76 and the control group is 3.05 points, which also shows that the null hypothesis is accepted and there is not a significant difference in level gain when certain teaching methods are applied and the hypothesis is not supported.

Summary

Based on the findings of the dependent t-test the null hypothesis was accepted and the hypothesis was not supported in the control group, but the null hypothesis was rejected and the hypothesis was supported in the treatment group.

The difference between the average of the pre and post test scores for both the treatment group is 2.76 and the control group is 3.05 points, which also shows that the null hypothesis is accepted and there is not a significant difference in level gain when certain teaching methods are applied and the hypothesis is not supported. The researcher expected to support the hypothesis by applying re-teaching and repetition to the treatment group, but the numbers show it did not make a significant difference within the three month time period of the study. The suspected reasons are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter has been organized around the following topic: (a) introduction, (b) summary, (c) conclusions, (d) recommendations.

Summary

The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is a standardized test adopted by Washington State to assess adult basic education students in the community college system. This test is used to determine what level an English as a Second Language (ESL) student is upon entering an English class. South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) has a high number of students over the age of 55. They have the highest number in the state at 35%. Often times these older students are in the same level for many quarters. These students are called fossilized students because they don't progress and at times they regress.

The research shows that older students do have the cognitive ability to learn new things. These students need to think of the brain as a muscle which needs to be exercised. These students learn slower and in different ways. These students also have certain physical and medical barriers to overcome, such as hearing loss, vision loss, sleep problems, mobility issues etc. Some teachers have tried using Adult Multiple Intelligence (AMI) practices with these older ESL students and have had success in teaching them. Adapting a lesson plan to be slower, relevant, and repetitious helps these older students learn.

The researcher set out to show that if one class was taught using re-teaching and repetition, going through lessons slower that this would increase

level gains by increasing the CASAS test scores in reading. The control group was an adult ESL Level 2/3 class. The treatment group was an adult Level 2/3/4 ESL Reading and Writing class. A pre test and a post test were given to both groups. The scores were compared by finding the difference between the post test and pre test, adding those scores up and finding the average. A dependent t-test was also run to determine significance between the control group's scores and the treatment group's scores.

Conclusions

The data shows that the hypothesis was not supported, in other words the treatment group's scores did not show a significant gain due to teaching methods that were implemented. The control group's scores actually appeared to increase. This is based on looking at the averages of the differences between the pre and post test scores (See Figure 1) and the dependent t-test results (See Table 3 and 4). In looking at the actual scores of the differences it does appear that over the entire treatment group did better with more consistent increases than the control group (See Table 5 and Figure 2). The control group had 9 negative numbers, meaning the test scores actually went down versus the treatment group with only 2 test scores going down. This supports the hypothesis even though the numbers did not. The other factor to consider is the fact that in the control group the numbers were skewed. There were some low test scores and some really high test scores.

Observation shows that students tend to dumb themselves down upon entering the program. When the students come in for the initial appraisal they are scared and don't want to be in too high of a class, so they act like they don't know as much. The students then get into a lower level class and at the end of the quarter they are more comfortable and the students do really well on the test. The post test is determined by the pre test score, so if a student doesn't do well initially they will get an easier version of the test.

Recommendations

This research lends itself to a longitudinal study. It really should be a long term study looking at some core groups of students over a couple of years. There should be three groups, one group would be in a regular class without any special types of instruction, a second group should be in only a class where there is the special instruction- repetition, re-teaching and slowing the lessons down, finally the third group should be in two classes one with the treatment and one without.

The researcher believes that over time the test scores will increase steadily with the specific teaching of repetition, re-teaching and slowing things down.

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