UNDERSTANDING THE INTERCULTURAL MOTIVATORS THAT ENCOURAGE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ESL STUDENTS TO PURSUE GENERAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my students. Thank you being my teachers, my
motivators—my reason.

Abstract

Per internationalization, the world of Adult Basic Education (ABE) has exponentially increased within the last decade (National Center for Statistics, 2015). Subsequentially, the Adult Basic Education (ABE) English as a Second Language (ESL) student population has experienced a huge upsurge nationwide. However, the students who have the English language proficiency to expand their academic and vocational skills by taking General Education classes (GenEd) are underrepresented in GenEd courses. Research posits ESL students are more apt to accomplish their academic and professional aspirations if their teachers employ interculturally competent (ICC) practices in the classroom. Nonetheless, Adult Basic Education (ABE) educators are not required to purposefully exercise ICC practices in the classroom nor are they expected to augment curricula to meet the diverse representation of cultures in their classes (Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014; Schalge & Soga, 2008). Hence, this qualitative action research study amplifies the voices of ABE ESL students' perceptions of ICC practices in the general education classrooms to understand how their beliefs impact their decision to enroll in general education courses.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

ABE.. Adult Basic Education

ACPC……………………………………………………Adult Career Pathway Courses

CLASP…………………………………………………...Center of Law and Social Policy

CoP…………………………………………………………… Communities of Practice

CSCAD ....Central South Carolinian Adult Education Center

ESL ....English as a Second Language

GenEd ....General Education

ICC... Intercultural Competence/Interculturally Competent

IET…………………………………………………. Integrated Education and Training

NRS…………………………………………………... National Reporting System

OCTAE………………………………. Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

SLA………………………………………………………Second Language Acquisition

TABE…………………………………………………. The Adult Basic Education Test

TESOL………………………………………. Teaching English as a Second Language

WIA…………………………………………………………… Workforce Investment Act

WIOA…………………………………………. Workforce and Integration Operation Act

Chapter 1

Introduction

When ABE ESL students were collectively asked why they were not actively seeking GenEd opportunities that could realign them with their professional abilities, two reoccurring responses emerged: "It is too difficult" and "My English is not good enough." In response to these remarks, I challenged them to consider, per their Test for Adult for Basic Examination (TABE) Language scores (LiteracyPro Systems, 2019), they do in fact possess the English language proficiency to pursue continuing education and or professional opportunities. Still, Jae and Kim rebutted, "We'll take this if you teacher it … we understand you and you understand us." Many of the other women offered up a chorus of concurrences.

Through my positions as an ABE Family Literacy Coordinator and English Language Arts and ESL teacher at Central South Carolinian Adult Education Center (CSCAD), I have had the unique privilege to engage in dialogue with CSCAD's ABE ESL populations. During our informal conversations, the topic of effective communication between GenEd teachers and ESL students was a reoccurring point of discussion. Interestingly, while these students were sharing their views, the administrative team was deliberating about possible measures they could employ to improve attendance. As most of CSCAD's funding is directly proportioned to the number of students actively enrolled, as well as the number of programs each student successfully completes, administrators were constantly seeking means to spur students accordingly. In

1

spite of their efforts, administrators have found garnering general education (GenEd) interest from ESL students an elusive task. However, over the course of the last four years, CSCAD has witnessed a substantial increase in ESL students' participation in GenEd courses—more specifically, my GenEd courses. Recognizing this shift, the administrative team has informally hypothesized a possible connection between my interculturally competent (ICC) instruction practices and ABE ESL students' enrollment. Thus, this study was designed to formally explore how ESL perceptions of interculturally competent practices in other GenEd classes impact their enrollment.

Reflectively, my introduction to U.S. public schools was less than pleasant because I was incessantly ridiculed for my natural cornrows, secondhand clothes, and Trinidadian tones. My cultural *differences* caused my high school peers to treat me contemptuously because they lacked the cultural literacy necessary to understand and accept me. Though my teachers were complimentary, they remained objectively detached because they did not offer students the context through which to see and or accept my cultural uniqueness. Yet, the character-torture I endured through high school inspired me to become an educator because I believed this career path would afford me the platform to inject tangible hope into the lives of impressionable, misunderstood souls like me.

During my undergraduate years, I developed a palpable passion for learning more about other cultures. As a result, I served on several short-term service trips to Jamaica, Mexico, Haiti, and China. My exposure to these cross-cultural experiences deepened my worldview and ignited my quest to bring the light of intercultural competence into full view. For as I grew to understand and accept my own cultural mental baseline, I honed the subjective context through which I could objectively embrace and appreciate others'

2

shared cultural experiences and worldviews (Bennett, 2009; Emdin, 2016; Freire, 1998, 2000, 2017; hooks, 1994).

Post undergrad, I continued along this ICC path as a long-term English teacher in Bronx, New York (where the majority of my students were first-generation Hispanic Americans), Ethiopia, and Japan for a total of six years. These formative years of my career helped further solidify my understanding of the "inter" in intercultural competence—it was through these experiences that I gained an authentic understanding of how someone else's culture becomes evident when individuals are willing to go beyond memorizing specifics about others' cultural norms (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006, 2008, 2009; Emdin, 2016; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013) to identify relatable commonness in humanness. In essence, intercultural competence is evident when one is able to analyze the interconnection between the cultures in a way that would offer interpretation of one's own culture as seen through the eyes of others, and an openness to allow others to reflexively and respectfully share their filtered view(s) of you.

Hence, all of my professional and educational exposure, which began with the derision of my American high school peers, has culminated in this: How can I improve and promote ICC behavior to build a practical bridge across the troubled waters of cultural-illiteracy so that educators can lead students to and through inclusive, intercultural practices? Ethnic-related issues and the effects of cultural biases in educational settings are sensitive and, at times, controversial topics. While some do not believe differences in subjective culture have a significant impact on education, others attest cultural subjectivity that has the power to derail learners' development (hooks,

3

1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018). Instead of denying that either of these realities exists, it is sagacious to explore the necessary ICC skills CSCAD GenEd teachers could employ to obtain and retain ABE ESL students in GenEd courses. For this reason, this study purposefully examines ABE ESL students' perspectives of ICC practices in GenEd spaces to gain a greater understanding of how their perspectives motivate and/or deter their GenEd enrollment.

Problem of Practice

In a world where lines of separation are drawn to categorize and set demographic groups apart, industrialization, emigration, and globalization work as collaborative forces to merge diverse groups into shared spaces. Yet, as the voices of the masses are mottled by the apparent discord of differences, shared settings remain segmented with pockets of people who may have positive communicative intentions but lack the intercultural competence to communicate effectively. Fortunately, educators are at the forefront of altering this divide.

Because internationalization is fully operative, the world of Adult Basic Education (ABE) has experienced an exponential increase in their ESL student population (National Center for Statistics, 2015). Yet, ABE teachers are not required to undergo intercultural competence training nor are they expected to augment their curriculum to meet the diverse representation cultures in their classes (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014; Schalge & Soga, 2008).

Moreover, specifically in the state of South Carolina, ABE ESL students are offered language acquisition courses, but they are not required to matriculate into any of the general education (GenEd) courses (Department of Education State of South Carolina,

4

2015) at their respective ABE sites. As a result, it appears most programs are unintentional about helping this population of students maximize their full professional potential. ABE ESL students, particularly at CSCAD, who represented over half of the entire student body, have proven to be some of the most dependable in terms of attendance, dedicated in terms of in-class participation, and developed in terms of language acquisition and or academic advancement (LiteracyPro Systems, 2019). So, from a logistical stance, if the educational team invested in this population in a way that would make matriculating to GenEd opportunities more accessible and appealing, both students and the program would benefit.

Furthermore, ABE students return to the classroom hoping to advance their professional and/or academic careers. However, students' growth is contingent on their commitment to enroll in and successfully complete pertinent courses; yet the vast majority of ABE ESL students who have the English language proficiency to matriculate into these courses have declined. Why? My informal inquiries with these students suggested they were fearful of making this transition for fear of being misunderstood by GenEd teachers.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study was conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how ABE ESL students' perceptions of teachers' interculturally competent practices influenced their enrollment in general education courses at CSCAD.

5

Significance of the Study

ABE ESL students at CSCAD have expressed interest in pursuing general education opportunities, yet the vast majority of this population have not enrolled. Nevertheless, since the CSCAD's ABE ESL population accounted for 51% of the entire ABE student population, educators in this setting must be intentional about exercising effective communicative practices to help these students reach their professional and academic aspirations. However, before programmatic interventions could be implemented, it was necessary to capture ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices because their fears of being misunderstood directly correlated with their beliefs about communicating with GenEd instructors.

Just as countless American cities could now be considered "international," the same is true for the educational spaces. While dialogue around globalization and diversity is far from foreign, we now live in an age when insubstantial conversations around inclusion without applicable means to implement change are absolutely unacceptable. Fortunately, educators are ideally positioned to facilitate impactful change and transcend diversity jargon (Bennett, 1993; Brock & Swiniarski, 2008; Deardorff, 2008; Freire, 1998). However, if teachers lack the knowledge, attitude, and skills to create spaces in which diverse groups of students can grow through shared experiences (Clement et al., 1994; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Nieto & Booth, 2010; United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013), they will squander the unique opportunity they have to impact both their and their students' intercultural development.

Arguably, one of the formative places in which students and teachers could cultivate concurrence in the presence of diversity is the classroom. Hence, educators

6

should tirelessly dedicate themselves to constructing inclusive spaces in which students could appreciate each other's distinctions as intertwining parts of a humanizing whole. When inclusive classrooms are constructed, students stand to profit academically and socially because through this process they learn how to make sense of their lives and their worlds (Buoncristiani & Buoncristiani, 2012; Freire 1998, 2000, 2017; Goodlad, 1992; Henry, 2014; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018). In essence, though seemingly utopic, both students and teachers are inclined to flourish holistically when teachers create classrooms in which shared experiences are used to contextualize individual mental models so that each contributor could gain a more informed understanding of varying worlds (Freire, 1998; 2000; Senge et al., 2012).

Thus, intercultural competence as defined by Deardorff (2009)—the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitude that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural settings (p. 3)—should be fully implemented. While the word "culture" in isolation has the potential to oversimplify teachers' understanding of individuals who adhere to distinct values, *inte*rcultural provides the context through which teachers could establish enduring comprehensive relationships amongst varying cultural groups in the classroom (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006, 2008, 2009; United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013).

Since I have joined the CSCAD teaching team, the program has experienced a notable increase in ESL students, who were solely enrolled in ESL classes, matriculating into my GenEd courses. This shift in turn posed a possible connection between my ICC instructional practices and ESL students' enthusiasm to enroll in my GenEd classes.

7

Hence, my reflexive reasoning influenced my rationale for conducting this qualitative

study to explore ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd spaces.

Research Questions

Through qualitative phenomenological action research measures, this study

endeavored to capture ABE ESL students' motivation toward GenEd by exploring the

following research questions:

1. What are ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in
   the classroom?

2. What impact does the implementation of interculturally competent practices have
   on ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses?

The first question explored how ABE ESL students perceive ICC practices in the

classroom, and the second question was designed to gain further insight into how ABE

ESL beliefs about ICC practices affected their decision to matriculate into GenEd college

and career related courses.

Research Design

Creswell and Creswell (2018) postulated after reading a phenomenological study,

"the reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, 'I understand

better what it is like for someone to experience that'" (p. 62). Accordingly,

phenomenological research design was aptly appropriate for this study because it allowed

me to capture ABE ESL students' views of intercultural practices in CSCAD's GenEd

settings. Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited, "Qualitative researchers are

interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct

8

their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Correspondingly, this phenomenological qualitative study conveys ABE ESL students' interpretation of ICC in GenEd classrooms, what has led them to their interpretation, and how these interpretations have impacted their decisions to enroll in GenEd courses.

Since "the philosophy of phenomenology comes from a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 25–26), I was keenly mindful that my primary role as a research-practitioner phenomenologist was to capture the heart of participants' experiences. ABE ESL students' perceptions are directly influenced by their experiences, so in order to understand these students' perceptions of GenEd, I needed to consult their experiences. As such, I employed qualitative methods to determine how ICC practices influence ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses.

I used CSCAD's electronic database to identify the students who have already made the transition from ESL classes to GenEd courses. Upon gaining written consent, I asked a purposive sample of ABE ESL students who have and have not enrolled in a GenEd course to participate in a focus group session to gather collective qualitative data. The purpose of this session was to gain an overall understanding of students' interpretation and perception of ICC in GenEd settings. It was necessary to include students who were not enrolled in GenEd courses to ascertain whether their perceptions of GenEd settings have deterred them from enrolling, as well as students who were currently enrolled to capture their firsthand experiences and motivation for enrolling. From the focus group and documents, I selected a subsample of students who were enrolled in GenEd courses to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews in

9

order to glean a more robust understanding of how GenEd teachers' ICC may have influenced their enrollment. Finally, I conducted observations of the students I interviewed to cross-analyze how their perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices manifested during their GenEd instructional time. In doing so, I was able to identify key factors related to my problem of practice.

Background and Context

One of the major reasons cited by researchers regarding why advanced ESL ABE students lack the confidence to excel beyond basic language acquisition courses is they fear they will be ill-received by their teachers and non-ESL classmates (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014; Schalge & Soga, 2008). Consequently, they limit their perimeters to ESL classes or terminate their attendance before maximizing their full academic/professional potentials. Other studies indicate teachers' lack of content contextualization and apparent inability to openly embrace cultural differences to a comprehensive end as chief catalysts for adult ESL students' apparent apathy for pursuing GenEd opportunities (Freire, 1970, 1998, 2000, 2017; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014; Schalge & Soga, 2008).

Since the conception of the United States, immigrants have flocked to North America in search of a better life. While the American dream is often synonymous with this capitalistic eminent principle: *hard work equals success*, most English language learners are forced to add a fundamental addendum to this statement: hard work *plus proficient academic English language skills* equals success. As a result, the pressure for ESL students to acquire English does not stop at the basic communicative juncture; rather, their ability to excel linguistically is directly connected to all of their successes—their

10

American dream. However, it was not until 1974 that President Ford signed the amendment to include Adult Education provisions to accommodate the needs of ESL students per national standards (National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium Inc., 1998). Herein, the need for ESL adult students' motivation toward academic achievement was nationally recognized as not just an intrinsic drive of the individual student, but rather as a national objective towards fortifying ABE ESL adult learners' linguistic and academic ambitions (National Coalition of Literacy, 2015).

Nonetheless, the present provision of these academic and career opportunities designed to offer CSCAD ESL students' avenues to realize their full ascension to success is underutilized. As a result, students who demonstrate English language proficiency to excel through GenEd prospects (ABE ESL Level 4+) limit their learning solely to ESL classes and thereby forfeit the chance to maximize additional GenEd academic or professional resources available to them. The most current statistical data of this population revealed ESL students comprise 43.9% of ABE learners nationwide (National Center for Statistics, 2015), and the CSCAD ESL population exceeds this statistic with 51% (LiteracyPro Systems, Inc., 2019). Yet currently, only 6 of CSCAD's 17 Level 4+ ESL students have matriculated into GenEd courses (LiteracyPro Systems, Inc., 2019). Of these 6 ABE ESL GenEd enrollees, 67% were enrolled in my GenEd classes.

Additionally, ABE ESL students' English language proficiency is more likely to increase if they learn in integrated settings because learners will have more opportunities to acquire the language through contextual means (Clement et al., 1994; Neito & Booth, 2010; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018). Moreover, though numerous studies posit one of the most effective ways to improve ESL students' secondary language acquisition (SLA) is

11

to create consistent opportunities for them to learn with native English language students, this practice is not encouraged nor deliberately practiced in many ABE settings (Glass, 1997; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). Though ABE ESL students' motivation for academic development may vary, teachers who demonstrate high levels of intercultural competence (ICC) have the skills to create integrated educational spaces for ESL and GenEd students to learn together—in so doing, they are likely to attract and retain their ESL student population (Glass, 1997; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). Ideally, the more opportunities ABE ESL students have to learn in GenEd classrooms, the more they will thrive linguistically and academically.

Limited training and instructional proficiency of teachers are cited as another major reason why adult basic education programs nationwide experience poor ABE ESL student retention rates (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018). Still, empirical studies designed to capture the experiences of ABE ESL students remain underrepresented (Beder, 1991; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Linvelle & Whiting, 2019).

Nitzberg (2015) asserted, "Community education is about creating a participatory learning culture that incorporates principles and practices of respect, mutual aid, inclusiveness, lifelong learning, skill building, self-appreciation, entrepreneurship, and leadership development" (p. 7). These tenets encompass the core results of what occurs when learners and educators exercise ICC. So, in my relentless effort to aid, include, empower, equip, and advance ABE ESL students, I believe it is imperative to explore factors that have and will continue to embolden ABE ESL students to assume their role as equal contributors of the CSCAD learning community.

12

Consequently, this qualitative phenomenological study is designed to unpack how Level 4+ CSCAD ABE ESL students' perception of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices affect their decisions to enroll in GenEd courses. Additionally, since empirical research on ABE ESL students is scarce, this study offers ABE educators a more informed understanding of how teachers' ICC practices may influence ABE ESL students' GenEd enrollment and commitment.

Theoretical Framework

Considering I sought to understand students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices to determine how these practices may influence ABE ESL students' GenEd enrollment, I aptly chose qualitative measures for this inquiry. Since "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meanings the attribute to their experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6), I captured ESL ABE students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices to gain a clearer understanding of how these practices impacted students' enrollment. This phenomenon of interest emerged from my observation of the disproportionate number of ESL students enrolled in my GenEd courses compared to the number of ESL students enrolled in other GenEd courses. Since empirical research cites interculturally competent practices in the classroom as a fundamental motivator of English learners, I endeavored to understand how the ESL ABE students attributed teachers' ICC practices as motivators to pursue GenEd opportunities.

Moreover, phenomenological qualitative research is "interested in how meaning is constructed" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). Consequently, the essence of ESL ABE

13

students' perceptions of ICC practices was best constructed from the voices of these students. Constructivism stipulates learning occurs when the learners extract information from experiences and mental models to create meaningful ideas. This theory is fluid and it frees learners to illustrate and innovate. While exposure to the environment and mental processes are key, constructivism stresses the learners' interpretation of these encounters (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Essentially, information is not just given and/or processed; rather, knowledge is dynamically created through lived experiences—therefore subject to change based on the learner. As such, ESL ABE learners' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classes were subject to these learners' interpretation of ICC and its influence on their GenEd enrollment.

Per a constructivist approach, one's cultural identity and worldview are conceptualized through language (Emdin, 2016; Freire, 1998; Nieto & Booth, 2010). As such, students learning a second language essentially must develop a new (additional) reality to understand their new cultural environment. Educators' ICC (the ability to successfully teach students who come from different cultures other than their own) and *intercultural sensitivity* (ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural difference) could help ABE ESL students effectively construct meaningful understanding(s) of their new environment (Deardorff, 2006, 2008, 2009; Henry, 2014; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Nieto & Booth, 2010). Because teaching students from various cultures can become delicately complicated if there is a lack of cultural understanding between educators and students, educators should take the lead in developing and modeling intercultural competence. In doing so, they stand to gain a better understanding of themselves and ultimately facilitate students' cross-cultural

14

exchanges as both parties work toward understanding each other (Emdin, 2016; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto & Booth, 2010). Also, educators' ability to exercise intercultural sensitivity and teach students the same will create a fertile environment for ABE ESL students' second language acquisition (SLA) and GENED development because their exposure to the new language through ICC interactions will increase students' confidence and decrease their anxiety (Nieto & Booth, 2010).

Moreover, since qualitative action research draws from numerous disciplines such as sociology, demography, and psychology (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the theory of reciprocal determinism appositely captures a possible rationale behind the interaction between ABE ESL students and their involvement in GenEd courses. Espoused by social cognitive theory, *reciprocal determinism theory* asserts one's behavior, environment, and cognition are all determinants of each other, i.e. what we think is a major determinant of who we are and what we do (Bandura, 1978). Fundamentally, ABE ESL students' thoughts (cognition) about GenEd courses/instructors (environment) directly affect their decision to enroll (behavior) in GenEd courses. As such, this study endeavored to understand ABE ESL students' cognitive processes of this GenEd environment to understand how intercultural practices influence their behavior. Thus, this phenomenological qualitative study used a constructivist theoretical lens through reciprocal determinism to examine the multiple realities interculturally competent behavior has for ABE ESL learners at CSCAD.

Occupational Framework

In regard to Evans's (2001) description of *multiplicity*, general education teachers at CSCAD are subject to marginal toxic levels of stress, as teachers who are certified in

math are also required to teach science, and English teachers are also required to teach social studies. While administrators strive to use pretests to group students into low, intermediate, or advanced cohorts, open enrollment makes it virtually impossible to clearly plan lessons that would seamlessly meet each student's academic needs. Consequently, general education teachers are positioned with unpredictable realities in which they are forced to make short-term lesson plans that are liable to change daily based on students' transient attendance patterns and varying academic abilities. So, from these educators' perspectives, proposing additional change(s) to consider further training to accommodate ESL students to their current scope of responsibilities may quite likely be received as a peripheral/optional task, at best.

History and Politics

Historically, CSCAD has existed on the outskirts of the district's holistic endeavors. While many ABE schools in the state of South Carolina enjoy the security of guaranteed state funding in addition to enrollment- and performance-driven federal funding, CSCAD has historically and presently had to rely solely on the participation and dedication of students to keep its doors open. Subsequently, the reality of conditional funds leaves faculty and staff feeling disposable, and this lack of job security breeds a culture of distrust. Evans (2001) referenced this detachment as a "union mentality;" however, since CSCAD does not have access to an actual teachers' union, "their appetite for sacrifice" is seemingly quenched by the notable ways they are overly underappreciated (p. 124). Hence, the potential for innovation is understandably overshadowed by the need for self-preservation.

16

Stress and Finances

Per my previous account of our teachers' occupational framework, stress is a logical progression, for "the more isolated people are, the more vulnerable they are to stress" (Evans, 2001, p. 131). Sadly, the majority of teachers' (and administrators') stresses are deeply rooted in financial deficiencies, in that if students do not perform proficiently, federal funds are withheld, and if funding is withheld, the existence of the school is uncertain. Hence, while most contributing components of CSCAD may genuinely care about both general education and ESL students' progress, this restricted financial guillotine invokes levels of cortisone that force every portion of our beings to live in a state of sustainable defense.

Reflective Thinking and Generative Conversation

When one considers describing the assumptions and beliefs within my school's system as defined by Evans (2001), artifacts and creations, values, and basic assumptions speak volumes. These factors culminate to turn assumptions into conclusions, which become enduring norms that exist in the undercurrent spaces of each individual component. Additionally, while most existing contributors of this organization may circumvent owning resistance to change (especially if the measures of change are supposedly profitable), Evans (2001) noted the structure that inherently subsists within organizational systems feeds into an operational paradox—the more things *change*, the more they remain the *same*.

CSCAD is housed in two buildings within 2.5 miles. Though both locations, in terms of space, are seemingly adequate, the general emotion behind our school district's

17

inability/or unwillingness to provide an exclusive independent site often leaves all parties with a lingering emotion of detachment, insignificance, and or irrelevance.

Values and Assumptions

Conversely, because our campuses are small, this force both students and faculty at each site to be intentional about maintaining peaceable connections in terms of communication and collaboration. Hence, the problem of not having our own space has caused us to value each other's presence and desires. In general, students welcome both academic and personal advice from the staff, and the teachers and administrators maintain an open-door policy so that students can freely express their holistic concerns. Our motto states, "We Specialize in Second Chances," as most of our enrollees admittedly left a previous professional/personal experience in search of obtaining a more desirable one through our program. Moreover, because most of our students value the opportunity to redeem their educational/professional goals, we rarely have instances of blatant defiance.

Consequently, one basic underlying assumption that is true to our cultural core is: All students will be committed to this academic/professional privilege because they all welcome an opportunity to improve their lives. We have a diverse adult population of students and staff who are inclusive at heart and united despite and/or because of their differences. All staff members are truly invested in meeting students' academic (and often, personal) needs, so students will be compelled to realize their individual goals. The success of each student primarily lies within each student—teachers are equipped to teach; administrators are dedicated to manage/facilitate; but students themselves must actually want to learn. Thus, when students are noncommittal and/or choose not to take

18

full advantage of the many opportunities afforded them, we assume they lack the intrinsic motivation to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Ultimately, the staff serves adult students, which inherently connotes that every student must take full responsibility for successes and/or failures.

Additionally, this research assumed all participants effectively articulated their understanding of interculturally competent practices in the classroom and openly share their perceptions of ICC and influences. Finally, this research assumed participates would offer honest accounts of relevant experiences.

Limitations

Significantly, this phenomenological qualitative action research study is limited in terms of generalizability. Though the findings may apply to other ABE centers, these outcomes are specific to this particular ABE population. Another limitation was the small sample size. Since the ABE ESL student population is extremely transient, my intended number of participants decreased from twenty to twelve at the point of data collection. Additionally, the data from the study were sequentially collected in this order: focus group session, semi-structured interviews, and observations. However, the decision to conduct the interviews before doing the observations may have limited the depth of participants' responses because I could have used my observations to ask students more pointed questions about their ICC interactions with their GenEd teachers.

19

List of Definitions

Culture: Culture is defined as values, beliefs and norms held by a group of people. Culture shapes how individuals communicate and behave, that is, how they interact with others (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006).

Cultural diversity: Cultural diversity permits, and intercultural competences require, understanding one's own culture but also recognizing that each culture provides only one option among many possibilities (United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013).

Constructivism: While exposure to the environment and mental processes are key, constructivism stresses the learner's interpretation of these encounters (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). So, information is not just given and/or processed; rather, knowledge is dynamically created through those encounters—therefore subject to change based on the learner.

ESL adult education: English language classes are designed to help immigrants and others who have not yet developed proficiency in English to acquire the basic knowledge and skills they need to function effectively as parents, professionals, and citizens.

General education: General education refers to the list of instructional courses that are not ESL courses. They consist of the following: High School Equivalency Preparation, Career Readiness Certification (WIN Test), Paraprofessional Certification, Family Literacy, College and Military Entrance Exam Preparation, Academic Enrichment, Computer Literacy, and Writing Workshop.

Level 4+ ABE ESL Students: ABE ESL students who are in the e*xpanding* or *bridging* Level 4 or higher stages [as defined by TESOL Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency

Standard Framework, 2006] of their English language proficiency skills. At these levels of proficiency ABE ESL students have the base to pursue GenEd courses.

Intercultural competence (ICC): Intercultural competence is one's ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural settings (Deardorff, 2006).

Reciprocal Determinism: Reciprocal determinism denotes one's behavior, environment, and cognition are all determinants of each other; consequently, what one thinks is a major determinant of who one is and what one does (Bandura, 1978).

Organization of Dissertation

As it pertains to capturing ESL ABE students' perspectives of GenEd spaces at CSCAD, the subsequent chapters include: Chapter 2 reviews existing literature to substantiate this study. Chapter 3 offers detailed descriptions of the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents interpretations of data collections and findings. Finally, Chapter 5 addresses implications for practice, future recommendations for follow-up interventions, and substantial conclusions.

Literature Review

Introduction

Because globalization is on the upsurge, the cultural demographic of this nation's educational landscape is more diverse than it has been in years past (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). As such, educators are charged with the arduous task of discovering strategies to motivate students with heterogamous linguistic backgrounds to accomplish their educational and professional goals. This movement toward worldwide integration, specifically in the United States, has directly affected the growing number of foreign-born, adult, ESL students enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) programs nationwide (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Westat & Creighton, 1999). Many of these students once thrived in their professional careers in their native countries; however, upon migration, their limited English language ability and/or lack of connections with Americans caused them to live below their optimal potential (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010).

Despite these documented deficiencies, many ABE programs report a steady increase of students in the adult ESL population who are English language proficient, and thereby capable of enrolling in general education (GenEd) courses (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). However, the majority of these students have not been taking advantage of these opportunities. So, in this study, I sought

to explore motivational factors that would mobilize this group of students toward matriculating into GenEd opportunities.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological action research study endeavored to capture Central South Carolinian Adult Education Center (CSCAD) ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in General Education classrooms by exploring the following research questions:

1. What are ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in the classroom?

2. What impact does the implementation of interculturally competent practices have on ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses?

Accordingly, in this chapter, I discuss the historical and current landscape of adult basic education for foreign-born ESL students in the United States to explain operational and influential factors. Next, I propose a theoretical framework through constructivism and reciprocal determinism to prioritize these students' voices as the primary data source. Thereafter, I explore the demotivational factors that reportedly impede Level 4+ ABE ESL students from pursuing GenEd opportunities at CSCAD.

Purpose of Literature Review

According to Machi and McEvoy (2016), a literature review is a written argument that supports a thesis position by building a case from credible evidence obtained from previous research. Thus the material I have surveyed and critiqued for this literature review aimed to explore motivating factors that cause ABE ESL students to invest in

23

GenEd courses, as well as take a keener look at how the emergent perception of ABE ESL students' views of GenEd teachers' intercultural practices could affect students' decision to further their academic and professional endeavors through ABE centers.

As an English/ESL teacher and Family Literacy Coordinator, I discovered the majority of our center's L4+ ABE ESL students were not enrolled in GenEd classes. Yet, research shows ABE ESL students who are English-language proficient were inclined to seek out GenEd opportunities because they view these prospects as gateways to gainful employment (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Eyring, 2014; Mortrude, 2016; Nooten, 2018). Consequently, there seems to be a disconnect between what research deems as one of the key motivational factors for ABE ESL students' involvement in GenEd classes and the number of students who have actually enrolled in GenEd courses at CSCAD.

However, since I have joined the CSCAD instructional team, ABE ESL populations in GenEd classes have seen unfamiliar highs, and of the students who have matriculated, 67% only attended my GenEd classes. Hence, I theorized this huge percentage may be attributed to the classes I teach ("Career Pathways through Family Literacy" and "Writing Basics") and my interculturally competent instructional practices (LiteracyPro Systems, Inc., 2019). Thus, this literature review seeks to explore how ABE ESL students' perception of GenEd teachers could affect ABE ESL GenEd enrollment. While the literature herein presents a number of evidence-based reasons that motivate ABE ESL students toward GenEd opportunities, one recurring implication that increases ABE ESL students' interest in GenEd is their acuity of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices. As a result, I conducted a series of Boolean searches using key

24

words "adult basic education," "ESL students," "teachers," "motivation," *and/or/not*
"intercultural competence" to refine my search through the following databases: EBSCO,
ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, and SAGE (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). In addition to these
research portals, I consulted several books that specifically addressed the focus of this
dissertation from both contemporary and formative lenses to present existing positions on
this research.

Theoretical Landscape of Adult Education

Since the number of immigrants in the U.S. continues to increase, the landscape
of foreign-born adult education students has changed drastically in the 21st century, so
provisions must be made to ensure students can access the tools they need to meet their
academic and professional aspirations. Providing these services for ABE ESL students
can ideally empower them to be self-sufficient, independent, contributing members of
society (Chisman, 2008). Hence, this section of this research will explore how and why
Level 4+ ABE ESL students could thrive in GenEd ABE settings through constructivist,
reciprocal determinism, and situated learning lenses.

Self-Directed Theory Connected to ABE ESL Students' Advancement

Research shows that adult learners are highly motivated by their individual
intrinsic needs (Chao, 2009; Knowles, 1990, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).
Knowles (1990, 1994), a leading researcher in the area of adult education, reported four
distinct motivators as key contributing factors that distinguish ABE learners from others:
(a) adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluating process of their learning; (b)
they learn best through experience; (c) relevant learning is of utmost importance; and (d)

25

adult learning is problem centered rather than content centered. The need to construct meaning for immediate specified reasons is the fuel that drives these learners toward achieving their academic and professional goals. Accordingly, these stimuli correlate with constructivist theory in that learning occurs when the learners extract information from experiences and mental models to create new meaningful ideas (Bennett, 1998; Dewey, 2017; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Freire, 1998, 2017; Greene, 2017).

While exposure to the environment and mental processes are key, constructivism stresses the learner's interpretation of these encounters (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). So, information is not just given and/or processed; rather, knowledge is dynamically created through those encounters—therefore subject to change based on the learner. As such, learners should be able to extend meaning to create, and instructors should contextualize information in realistic settings so that learners can find relevance (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Thus, constructivism empowers learners to actively contribute to pre-existing knowledge. It challenges hierarchies and promises to be all-inclusive, since no idea is final (Freire, 1998, 2017). This theory is fluid and frees learners to illustrate and innovate. Hence, the parallelism between Knowles's (1990, 1994) self-directed learning theory impeccably correlates with the tenets of constructivism.

Constructivist Theory Connected to ABE ESL Students' Advancement

Freire (1998, 2017), a renowned critical constructivist, spent most of his career teaching adult learners. He endeavored to equip them with the skills (i.e., literacy and technology) necessary to thrive in the dominant society, not with the spirit of assimilation, but rather with the intention of overcoming their oppressors by debunking stereotypes attributed to the marginalized. Freire starkly opposed the "banking of knowledge," which

26

is the traditionalists' model of curriculum instruction. Instead, he argued education is never purely subjective or objective; rather, one's experiences are the foundation upon which sustainable learning occurs. Thus, curriculum becomes meaningful to learners when it is built upon students' lived experiences. Though highly philosophical and political, Freire's position on curriculum is learner-centered in terms of humanizing the marginalized.

Freire's (1998, 2017) position informs this study, as ABE ESL students are one of the most marginalized groups in the adult education setting because much of their reluctance to branch outside of ESL courses is not necessarily linked to their intellectual nor language ability. Nevertheless, since constructivist education warrants learning through contextualized experiences (Freire, 1998, 2017; Joldersma, 2001), one of the most powerful ways to increase ABE ESL students' educational endeavors is to create intentional spaces for them to learn with the GenEd student population. Shared perspectives through education allow for more construal for students' individual and collective lived experiences—thereby, both ABE ESL and GenEd students would profit.

Moreover, Freire (1998, 2017; Joldersma, 2001) posited adult learners' awareness of lifelong experiences precedes their ability to realize new perceptions. Foreign-born ABE ESL students bring with them a wealth of background proficiencies from their native countries—these lived experiences serve as the foundation upon which they can built new knowledge as it pertains to language and career readiness. While many ABE ESL teachers incorporate culturally relevant instructional materials and strategies rooted in students' cultural backgrounds to meet their existing academic goals, GenEd teachers set to teach ABE ESL students should be professionally equipped to do the same. Since

27

the state and national goal of adult education is career driven and language plus general and/or career education is the avenue through which ABE ESL students move toward this path, naturally GenEd teachers will encounter more ESL students. Thus, they must apply intercultural knowledge, attitude, and skills to effectively integrate ABE students' diverse needs in GenEd spaces.

Authentic dialogue is another key aspect of critical constructivism that is aligned with how ABE teachers should approach instructional provision for ABE ESL students: "true dialogue unites subjects together in the cognition of a knowable object which mediates between them" (Freire, 2017, p. 181). As such, ABE GenEd educators must foster learning environments in which all students use their words to develop relationships, engage in self-reflection, and actualize their goals. Authentic dialogue exists within the parameters of genuine relationships; however, it is virtually impossible to build true relationship with others if one does not take the time to effectively communicate. Effective communication, especially in globally diverse settings, warrants the reflexive tenets of intercultural competence (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2009; Günay, 2016). Günay (2016) argued, "In order to effectively encourage a cultural exchange and intercultural dialogue, teachers need to cultivate their own intercultural competence" (p. 407). This is possible through "self-awareness—of one's own normative settings— acceptance of equality of different cultural approaches, and strategies for how these can be transformed in personal attribute" (Günay, 2016, p. 407). Developing this awareness is a lifelong intentional process (Deardorff, 2009); nonetheless intercultural competence training for ABE educators is limited (Papachristos, 2007).

28

Reciprocal Determinism Theory Connected to ABE ESL Students' Advancement

While exposure to the environment and mental processes are key, constructivism stresses the learner's interpretation of these encounters (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Considering knowledge is dynamically created through a series of encounters—thus, subject to CHANGE based on the learner's experiences. Hence, constructivism emphasizes the idea that individuals construct the meaning of their experiences.

However, because meaning is not constructed in isolation, constructivist theories must adhere to a principle that reality is a personal interpretation, dependent on how individuals perceive their experiences. Since only 2 of my 12 ABE ESL participants were enrolled in GenEd other classes, I felt it was imperative to align my research with a theoretical perspective that speaks more specifically to students' cognitive processes.

My quest led me to Bandura's (1978) reciprocal determinism theory. Espoused by social cognitive theory, *reciprocal determinism theory* asserts one's behavior, environment, and cognition are all determinants of each other, i.e. what we think is a major determinant of who we are and what we do (Bandura, 1978). Fundamentally, ABE ESL students' thoughts (cognition) about GenEd courses/instructors (environment) directly affect their decision to enroll (behavior) in GenEd courses.

ESL Students' Connection to Career Pathways

ABE ESL students are more likely to thrive in classrooms where instruction is contextualized, meaning these students seek to make practical connections between their educational endeavors and their daily livelihood (Freire, 1998, 2017; Green, 2017). Consequently, the Workforce and Integration Operation Act (WIOA) of 2014, designed to combat barriers that keep the marginalized oppressed by creating more opportunities

29

for education, training, and jobs, endeavored to look beyond the high school equivalency credentials toward paths that would ensure students secure careers (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). In doing so, WIOA, in conjunction with the Center for Law and Social Policy, created an integrated educational framework for adult education students in which English language acquisition is interconnected with concurrent and contextual workforce preparation and workforce training activities (Mortrude, 2016; South Carolina Department of Education, 2019). Subsequently, the movement toward career paths for ABE ESL is plausible professional progression.

So, why has the impetus toward career pathways for ABE ESL students who have the English language proficiency been underutilized? ABE programs should not present career pathways as an option—conversely, pursuing a career through GenEd opportunities should be marketed as an end goal.

Students' Language Development Situated Cognition

English language proficiency is evident when learners competently exhibit writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. This is true for native and non-native learners. Yet, while native learners have the advantage of cultivating these literacy skills from conception, ESL learners, particularly adult ESL learners, often trek along arduous paths to learn the dominant language with a fraction of the resources (Roger, 2009). Thus, it is imperative ESL educators absorb the weight of these students' needs to spur them to finding ways to remedy learners' language poverties.

The presence of community often eases the disorientation associated with migrating to a country where one has to learn a new language (Gutowska, 2014; Norton, 2000). Foreigners who partake in communal units where they can share old and new

30

experiences to construct meaning of their new worlds find the transition more manageable. So as adult ESL educators develop curricula to effectively reach these students, it is necessary that they utilize instructional strategies that situate second language acquisition (SLA) in communities of practice (CoP). Per Wenger (1998) a community of practice is a living context that can give newcomers access to competence and also can invite a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation. To this end, adult ESL students enrolled in ESL courses in an English-speaking country are ideally situated to learn from English natives because the "living context" of the desired language is readily accessible. Consequently, Gutowska (2014) and Larrotta (2009) presented situated cognition theoretical concepts, primarily through CoP instructional strategies, as effectual means through which adult ESL students can advance their English language competence. Suggested recommendations address mutual limitations specifically in terms of time restraints.

Jean Lave (1988, 1996), social anthropologist and originator of situated cognition, noted knowing and learning were accomplished when learners served as apprentices to experts. In doing so, learners were afforded ample opportunities to solidify their knowledge through scaffolded practice under the tutelage of their instructors. Situated cognition draws from constructivism as new information is constructed through real-life, meaningful exposure to develop a desired skill (Lave, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Hence, adult ESL students have shown great promise in their endeavors to improve their language skills and continue their education when given the opportunity to authentically

experience language in collaborative situations that promote ongoing interaction between native English speakers and ESL students (Lave, 1996; Wegner et al., 2002).

Ideally, the emphasis of situated cognition is that language acquisition is a byproduct of students' surroundings and learning the desired language is a natural procession of one's environment (Wegner, 2015). The focus is lifted from the individual learner and placed on the group of apprentices and experts. This group serves as a CoP, in which all participants share common interests and cooperatively work toward expanding their knowledge (Wegner, 1998; Wegner et al., 2002). While Knowles's (1990) widely received adult learning theory, andragogy, assumes adult learners learn best when self-directed, CoP challenges this notion because it conversely promotes cooperative groups of learners who share interests, practices, and knowledge. As a result, adult ESL students involved in CoP, who are committed to investing time to collaborate, improve their long-term organizational memory as they actively strive to negotiate meaning (Smith, 1999; Wegner et al., 2002).

Critics of situated cognition learning theory argue it is challenging to replicate authentic learning experiences in public school settings because the recommended time, resources, and expertise needed to legitimize this theory is virtually nonexistent (Smith, 1999). They also contend situated cognition may not be easily transferred because, as experts share their knowledge, they are simply modeling (Compton et al., 2011). In essence, because apprentices only learn how to make decisions within context and rarely learn the intricacies of why those decisions were made, learned concepts may not be effectively represented in new contexts (Compton et al., 2011; Clancey, 1997).

32

However, in the case of adult ESL learners, the desired knowledge is English language proficiency, so while limited time and resources are often problematic, experts in the form of native English language learners are readily available. If instructors create opportunities for communities of practice in which ESL (apprentices) and competent native English learners (experts) collaborate, SLA will be nurtured. The major advantage here is that CoP are readily available to ESL teachers and students; as a result, students are aptly positioned to accomplish their SLA goals.

Moreover, since these ESL students reside in communities in which English is the dominant mode of communication, they will have countless opportunities beyond their classrooms to exercise their language skills—thereby, they will also be able to sustain the learned language within their long-term organizational memory. Hence, Compton et al.'s (2011) argument regarding situated cognition's lack of transferability is nullified in settings in which ESL learners are actively committed to learning English within communities of English practitioners both in and outside of the classroom. While situated cognition may truly suffer in content areas such as mathematics and science for lack of time, resources, and or expertise, learning English in English dominant settings is more viable because the learning is structurally embedded in ESL learners' daily encounters (Robbins & Aydele, 2009).

Consequently, if ABE ESL learners experience literacy programs that draw from situated cognition instructional practices, namely CoP, to create meaningful opportunities for students to learn from native experts, these learners will be motivated to accomplish their educational goals.

Students' Connection to Intercultural Competence

When tasked with educating students from diverse cultural backgrounds, teachers must take their intercultural competence into account (Deardorff, 2006, 2008, 2009; Freire, 1998, 2017; Bennett, 1993; Ollerhead, 2013). As presented by Deardorff (2009) intercultural competence is marked by

> The *effective* and *appropriate* behavior and communication in intercultural situations … Effectiveness can be determined by the individual while the appropriateness can only be determined by the other person—with appropriateness being directly related to cultural sensitivity and the adherence to cultural norms of that person. (p. 1)

Essentially, ABE teachers' ability to effectively communicate with foreign-born ESL students in intercultural settings directly impacts students' educational experience. While ESL students' motivation for learning English may vary, teachers who demonstrate high levels of intercultural competence (ICC) are able to create integrated educational spaces for ESL and GenEd students to learn together. In so doing, they attract and retain their ESL student population (Clement et al., 1994; Deardorff, 2006, 2008, 2009; Ollerhead, 2013; Nieto & Booth, 2010).

Historical and Current Landscape of Adult Education

Though the emergence of ABE can be traced back to the colonial foundation of the 1600s (Beder, 1991; Chisman, 1990; Knowles, 1994; Rose, 1991), the institution of adult education as a national, federally funded organization began in 1964 when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act (Eyre, 1998; Knowles, 1994). President Johnson, with the support of Congress, launched a state and

34

federal bill designed to offer adults the opportunity to earn their high school credential. Previous accounts of adult education offered students similar opportunities, including citizenship classes for foreign students; however, the intent of the Economic Opportunity Act was to decrease the poverty rate and increase the nation's literacy and numeracy rates (Eyre, 1998; Eyring, 2014; Knowles, 1994; Rose, 1991). The federal government allotted $18.6 million to each state, which afforded 37,991 adults to enroll in ABE.

By the 1970s, the United States had begun to experience a steady influx of Asian and Hispanic foreign-born residents—reports showed an average of 1.8 billion people per year between 2000 and 2006—and during the same time period, 14 states experienced a 30% or more increase in their foreign-born populations (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010). As a result, the purpose statement of the Adult Education Act expanded to include bilingual instruction. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan approved the first discretionary program to support ESL learners. He then solidified his support for the AE ESL population by offering programs such as an English language literacy grant (Eyre, 1998; Knowles, 1994; Rose, 1991).

As ABE programs continued to expand their mission to meet the evolution of the ABE population in the United States, federal representatives began to discuss the notion that ABE's ultimate goal should be to secure attainable employment opportunities for students. Thus, in 1998, ABE experienced a shift in priorities—the Adult Education Act, which emphasized literacy, was replaced by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which emphasized employment (Eyre, 1998; National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016; Sticht, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). WIA mandated that adult education programs offer their students opportunities to cultivate skills that

prepared them for the workplace. Though the focus was redirected, it still aligned with the Economic Opportunity Act's original vision in the sense that ABE students' proficiency in literacy and numeracy would enable them to secure professional careers that would inevitably boost the economy.

Since the push toward workplace courses through ABE exponentially increased after 1998, adult ESL students (especially those who are proficient in English) now have a plethora of possibilities to pursue through GenEd opportunities. Some of the GenEd offered by federally funded ABE programs include workplace education/training, vocational rehabilitation, family literacy, civics education, basic or functional literacy, and high school equivalency education (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010). And while English language deficiency is one of the major barriers for pursuing GenEd opportunities, this study is specifically geared toward the ABE ESL students who are in the e*xpanding* or *bridging* Level 4 or higher stages (as defined by TESOL Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency Standard Framework, 2006) of their English language proficiency skills. At these levels of proficiency, adult ESL students have the base to pursue GenEd courses; therefore, they should be encouraged to utilize GenEd prospects.

ABE centers nationwide, and more specifically ABE programs in South Carolina, have recently updated their expectations for ESL students to include Career Readiness 101 and other ESL career-based curriculum (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019). Per the Integrated Education and Training Act of 2010 and the Workforce and Integration Operation Act of 2014, the goal is to look beyond the high school equivalency credentials toward paths that would ensure students a secure profession (Mortrude, 2019). Yet, there is very little documentation reporting how ABE administrators are keeping the

staff and ESL students accountable. Also, ESL ABE students comprise 44% of federal and state funded programs nationwide (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2016). So, it would benefit students and programs alike to be intentional about mobilizing this population to move in the direction of GenEd (Eyring, 2014). "The common denominator in these diverse settings and among these populations is people motivated to build foundational skills in order to make a change in their lives" (Mortrude, 2016, p. 1). So, ABE stakeholders need only utilize available resources to assist the ESL students in achieving their educational/professional goals.

Practitioners

ABE teachers are among the most unique group of educators. Unlike Pre-K–12 and postsecondary educators, AE teachers are not required to procure a teaching certificate (Beder, 1991; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Eyring, 2014; Mathews-Aydinl, 2008; Rose, 1991; Schaetzel et al., 2007; South Carolina Department of Education, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2013); therefore, the professional abilities of these practitioners vary in quality and experience. Though most programs would prefer certified teachers, the only documented qualification needed to validate ABE teaching ability is a college education (Beder, 1991; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Eyring, 2014; Sticht, 2000; Westat & Creighton, 1999).

Reports from the National Reporting System (2018) show that 293 of South Carolina's 733 ABE personnel have not earned a teaching credential—this number accounts for 39.9% of its entire adult education teaching population. Additionally, only 8 of the 733 have TESOL certification, which is approximately 1.1%. These numbers carry huge implications for the quality of instruction accessible to ABE ESL students. Though

37

the NRS (2018) does not specify what percentage of this population has earned a postsecondary credential, and assuming that an ABE teacher who has not earned his teacher credentials may be lacking, "the need for qualified adult ESL teachers is great, especially considering the numbers of students and the cultural and logistic complexity of most adult ESL classrooms as described previously" (Eyring, 2014, p. 132). Likewise, when ABE ESL students matriculate to GenEd courses, the teachers should be professionally equipped to accommodate the diverse cultural and logistical needs of ESL ABE students because it truly takes a skilled educator to facilitate the myriad of intricacies within globally heterogeneous ABE ESL and GenEd classrooms.

In spite of the need for more professionally trained teachers who can meet the instructional demands of diverse ABE setting, the future of recruiting more certified teachers for adult education programs is grim (D'Avolio, 2017). There are several factors that derail the recruitment of certified teachers: most teaching positions are part-time and are paid hourly rates without benefits; the inconsistency of students' enrollment directly affects available teaching positions; teachers have limited relevant professional development trainings; and particularly for the ABE ESL population, teachers lack cultural competence (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Eyring, 2014; Rose, 1991).

Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994), DeJaeghere and Cao (2009), Günay (2016), Nieto and Booth (2010), Rodriguez-Garcia (2014), and Prieto (2012) have found direct correlations between teachers' intercultural competence levels and students' motivation to reach beyond language acquisition classes in pursuit of GenEd courses. Hence, the ultimate purpose of this study is to assess the correlation between teachers' intercultural

38

competence levels and ABE ESL students' decision to continue their education through GenEd adult education courses.

Per existing studies' implications and recommendations (Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Günay, 2016; Nieto & Booth, 2010; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014; Prieto, 2012), I hypothesized students' perception of teachers' intercultural competence directly influences students' pursuit of continuing their education. Consequently, this literature review also explored students' perception of teachers' intercultural competence.

Funding

Though the United States continues to experience a rise in unskilled and/or illiterate adult population nationwide (OCTAE U.S. Department of Education, 2018), the available funds for ABE programs have decreased. Federal funding, which is distributed based on an increase in students' literacy and workforce achievements, has remained $13.7 million dollars from 2016–2018. However, state funds have declined by $95 million per state since 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)—and the total budget amounts listed here are distributed among individual ABE programs within each state. These federal funds are available to community-based programs such as local church-based private programs, which are not affiliated with school districts.

Additionally, all funds are attendance and performance-based (OCTAE U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Thus, if an ABE program's enrollees are not able to show academic and/or workforce gains and attendance dwindles, that program's funds will be taxed. Herein lies the conundrum that is seeded at the core of the institution of adult education: it is not mandatory for ABE educators to be certified teachers; most ABE

students (GenEd and ESL) elect to enroll in these programs, therefore there are no immediate penalties for stopping or dropping out; yet students' academic or professional success and attendance are the primary criteria federal and state education representatives use to determine whether the doors of an ABE center remain open.

As technology provides more organizations with efficient ways to keep employees accountable, ABE programs are required to use the National Reporting System [NRS] (2018) to keep them succinctly in tune with set standardized expectations. Unlike all Pre-K–12 and postsecondary education institutions, ABE is the only educational institution for which the federal government assumes a substantial financial responsibility (Ryan, 1991; Sticht, 2000). As such, the NRS (2018) is the nationwide database that federally funded ABE programs employ to track students' enrollment and progress (OCTAE U.S. Department of Education, 2018). On a local plane, this data enables individual ABE programs to maintain current documentation of their enrollees, identify trends to inform curriculum instruction, and cast vision for future instructional goals. Correspondingly, the federal and state branches of government use NRS data to assess the success of programs for the purposes of allocating earned funds.

Since students' active involvement plays a compulsory role in ABE education, it is befitting that ABE personnel find astute avenues to maximize their apportioned funds. One major way they could collect a sizeable return on their educational investment is to embolden the L4+ ABE ESL population to take advantage of GenEd courses. These students are already enrolled in their program, so there is a level of in-house familiarity that works in their favor. They should already have some encounters with the GenEd faculty and staff, as well as have some exposure to the types of GenEd classes offered.

Also, a large percentage of English language proficient ESL are intrinsically interested in exploring career opportunities available to them (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Eyring, 2014; Mortrude, 2016; Nooten, 2018). Therefore, the possibility of fortifying one's AE program funds by advancing one's ESL student population is attainable.

Over the past decade, adult education has become part of a national conversation initiated in part by the haunting ETS Perfect Storm research—responding to the structural reality that a high school credential is no longer the marker for self-sufficiency in our new economy and that, demographically, our growing populations are those we have historically served poorly in our education systems –not to mention the hurdles built into our society for many low-skill, low-income communities of color when accessing housing, healthcare, banking (Educational Testing Center, 2019; Mortrude, 2016). Thus, ABE ESL students are not only tasked with meeting their English language proficiency—ultimately, they are expected to become financially independent as a result of career pathways.

The path toward motivating ABE ESL students is curvilinear. Though recommended solutions have not been fully realized, partially due to limited empirical research, it may be quite profitable to identify some of the main barriers that dissuade adult ESL learners from pursuing continuing education opportunities as well as known motivators (Driscoll, 2005; Evans, 2001; Freire, 1998; Henry, 2014; Mortrude, 2016; Nooten, 2018; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014). Since "motivation and barriers to learning are created, formed, and changed on two spaces: the individual learner and the socio-environment" (Chao, 2009, p. 905), ABE ESL students' cognition towards GenEd spaces are major determinants for enrolling in GenEd courses.

41

Psychologists have found that adult learners have a series of barriers that directly affect their decision to pursue additional education: "*situational* (depending on a person's situation at a given time), *institutional* (all practices and procedures that discourage adults from participation, *dispositional* or *psychosocial* (person's attitude about self and learning) and *informational* (person is not aware of educational activities available)" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, pp. 86-90). Additionally, geographic, demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural determinants are also key factors that influence adult learners' decision to seek out academic growth (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Learning, as defined by Illeris (2007), incorporates three dimensions of one's internal and external understanding: *cognitive* and *emotive*, which are internal, and *environment*, which is external. When considering the barriers ABE learners face, emotive and environmental dimensions are the two areas that highly deter adult learners from pursuing their educational desires (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Many of the factors are outside of ABE centers/staff members' realm of influence; however, very specific to this study, cultural determinants is fortunately one factor that AE educators can alter to meet the needs of ABE ESL learners.

Cultural Determinants

There are several definitions of the term *culture*, but for the purposes of this study, "culture is defined as values, beliefs and norms held by a group of people. Culture shapes how individuals communicate and behave, that is, how they interact with others" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 1). The specific cultural groups pursued in this study are foreign-born ABE ESL students. All ABE teachers are responsible for fostering classroom environments in which learners' cultural differences are welcomed assets to their entire

42

learning experience. However, if these educators possess low levels of intercultural competence, they may not have the intercultural competence tools to empower these students—ultimately, deterring this population of students from chasing their education and or professional ambitions.

As stated previously, language acquisition and career pathways are two specific advantages GenEd courses could offer L4 or higher language proficient ABE ESL learners; still instructors must be prepared to accommodate their learners' cultural needs.

Adult Education Restraints

Adult learners, and more specifically ABE ESL learners, are gravely underrepresented in the research realm (Mathews-Aydinl, 2008), so determining how to best serve this population of students is perplexing. Per *funding*, "education professionals/ stakeholders are seemingly more concerned with measuring students' progress primarily through program enrollment performance when they should be forced on providing the resources needed to reach the population of students" (Mortrude, 2016, p. 109). Two major disparities in adult education include the need for more research and more certified competent instructors. Teachers' inability to motivate students toward pursuing their intended aspirations as well as students' incapacity to see beyond their current reality makes it challenging for both students and teachers to accomplish their goals (Nooten, 2018). Lastly, the vision for moving toward career development for *all* ABE students has not been widely communicated—though the literature exists, the accountability at local centers is sparse (Egan & Andress, 2018; Mortrude, 2016).

Though empirical records of ABE programs that intentionally employ integrated measures to engage and maintain their ABE ESL students are limited, Ollerhead (2013) conducted a multi-site case study to examine the experiences of teachers and adult ESL literacy learners within Australia's Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Program (LLNP). She aimed to examine how the pedagogical practices of teachers meet the demands of ESL literacy learners with diverse sociocultural backgrounds and linguistic needs. Ollerhead's findings revealed: (a) teachers who identified meeting learners' sociocultural needs as significant part of the roles appeared to exercise greater agency in the face of policy restrictions; (b) learners' sociocultural backgrounds played an important role in shaping their multiple investments in ESL literacy learning; (c) learners who were able to articulate their imagined identities had defined goals for ESL literacy learning, which enhanced their engagement in classroom activities and in learning more generally; (d) learners with a clear sense of imagined community appeared to experience a heightened sense of agency in their efforts to learn ESL literacy; (e) critical and culturally relevant teaching practices that drew on learners' varied imagined communities enhanced learners' abilities to inhabit a broad range of identity positions in the classroom; (f) learners who were offered extended identity positions through classroom teaching practices were able to engage more constructively with classroom learning activities; and (g) ESL literacy learners brought a wealth of diversity and situated knowledge to the classroom, which some teachers used as tools for intercultural learning (Ollerhead, 2013, pp. 204–217).

Similarly, Nieto and Booth (2010) conducted a convergent mixed-methods study with a convenience sample of college students and professors to explore how ESL

44

students were affected by their professors' levels of intercultural competence. They found instructors with high levels of intercultural competence are more likely to: (a) understand the challenges of seeking a degree in a foreign language; (b) help international students feel accepted as they are encountering U.S. culture; (c) be aware of the need of creating an environment that facilitates international students' feeling engaged in the class; (d) be aware of international students' daily challenges; and (e) be conscious of students' language challenges (Nieto & Booth, 2010, pp. 415–418). This study also revealed international ESL students: (a) believe that teachers are an important component in helping students feel comfortable in U.S. culture; and (b) think that teaching international students requires the instructors to have knowledge of the students' cultures (Nieto & Booth, 2010, pp. 416–418). Though retention was not the focus of this empirical study, both instructors and students reported "instructors are the main factor in the students' sense of welcoming and acceptance in this college community" (Nieto & Booth, 2010, p. 419). Hence, one could argue if students feel welcomed and accepted, they will maintain their attendance. As a result, this research study explored how ABE ESL students are similarly affected by GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices.

Nitzberg (2015) asserted, "Community education is about creating a participatory learning culture that incorporates principles and practices three of respect, mutual aid, inclusiveness, lifelong learning, skill building, self-appreciation, entrepreneurship, and leadership development" (p. 7). Hence, in a relentless effort to aid, include, empower, equip, and advance ABE ESL students, it is imperative to explore factors that have and will continue to embolden ESL students to assume their role as equal contributors to ABE communities.

45

While Nieto and Booth (2010) and Ollerhead's (2013) research did not discuss how intercultural competence training for teachers could positively impact their influence in the classroom, Henry's (2014) two-phase, mixed-methods study lent itself to the positive effects of ICC training for outbound study abroad students. Although this study did not involve teachers, the concept of offering ICC training to preservice and current ABE teachers is a viable parallel one could extract from this study. By using a number of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, Henry (2014) found student participants: (a) indicated that they are more open-minded about understanding cultures different from their own; (b) gained the following cultural competencies: patience, flexibility, cultural humility, and cross-cultural communication skills; (c) received cultural support and encouragement through the instructor's knowledge and experiences, the examples shared in class by their peers, and the provided class resources; (d) identified that they better understand their own cultural identity and want to learn more about these identities; (e) expressed growth in their desire to engage and interact with cultures different from their own; (f) and identified growth in the researcher-practitioner's teaching style and abilities and diverse aspects of leadership skills (p. 125). These results carry implications that ICC training for ABE teachers has the potential to enhance both teachers and students' educational experiences in the classroom.

Boylan (2018) also investigated whether teaching culture in a university foreign-language class through a cultural text and personal experiences impacts attitudes and perceptions about the target culture(s) in this group of students and, if so, in what manner. A secondary purpose was to discover students' own past experiences and current feelings toward learning about culture integrated in the foreign language classroom (Boylan, 2018,

p. 24). In doing so, the researcher found: (a) students have limited and/or inaccurate knowledge of the target culture(s); (b) student knowledge of target culture(s) is more objective than subjective; (c) students can and do want to learn the target culture(s) alongside the language; (d) student intercultural awareness increases with exposure to the target culture(s); (e) students need to understand their own culture to understand the target culture(s); and (f) students will open up about their story and cultural experiences if given the opportunity (Boylan, 2018, pp. 232–239). Consequently, this study implies if AE ESL learners are given more opportunities to learn in diverse general education settings, they will be more apt to gain a broader understanding of the English language in relation to attributes of the targeted culture.

Summary

Adult education ESL students enrolled in AE programs have the potential to not only improve their English language proficiency but also make career advances that could improve the trajectory of their lives. Though the resources are limited, ABE administrators and educators must work toward securing career opportunities through general education classes. All courses should be delivered by teachers who are interculturally competent. As a result, ICC training is highly recommended.

Chapter 3 will address the methods through which I invited ABE ESL students to share their perspectives of ICC practices in GenEd classrooms.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the procedures used to collect and analyze data. This research employed qualitative methods to examine Adult Basic Education (ABE) English as a Second Language (ESL) students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices and possible connections to this population's apprehension to enroll in GenEd courses. Consequently, this chapter provides a detailed description of this Central South Carolinian Adult Education (CSCAD) site and student population, as well as rationale to support why qualitative action research methods was the most suitable design for this inquiry.

Just as countless American cities could now be considered "international," the same is true for the educational spaces. While globalization and diversity are no longer foreign, we now live in an age when having insubstantial conversations around inclusion without applicable means to merge varying nationalities is absolutely unacceptable. Fortunately, educators are ideally positioned to facilitate impactful change that transcends diversity jargon (Bennett, 1993; Brock & Swiniarski, 2008; Deardorff, 2008; Freire, 1998). However, if teachers lack the knowledge, attitude, and/or skills to create spaces in which diverse groups of students can grow through shared experiences (Clement et al., 1994; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Nieto & Booth, 2010; United Nation Educational

48

Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2013), they will squander the unique opportunity they have to truly help students develop an intercultural lens.

Moreover, specifically in the state of South Carolina, adult ESL students are offered language acquisition courses, but they are not required to matriculate into any of the general education/career development courses (GenEd) (Department of Education State of South Carolina, 2015) at their ABE centers. As a result, it appears most programs are unintentional about helping this population of students maximize their full potential. Yet, adult ESL students (particularly an Adult Education Center in Columbia, South Carolina), who represent approximately half of the entire student population, have proven to be some of the most dependable in terms of attendance, dedicated in terms of in-class participation, and developed in terms of language acquisition and or academic advancement (LiteracyPro Systems, 2019). So, from a logistical stance, if the educational team finds a way to invest in this population in a way that would make matriculating to GenEd opportunities more accessible and appealing, both students and the program would benefit.

As I have pondered possible ways to combat the attendance attrition CSCAD has undergone, I see a wealth of possibilities in our ESL population and have managed to singlehandedly recruit the largest number of ESL students to partake in my GenEd courses in the history of our program (LiteracyPro Systems, 2019). However, if my limited efforts are backed by school-wide administrative support, the program shift in terms of inclusion, attendance, and overall participation could be exponential. Since I credited the success of my rapport and ability to recruit ESL students to my

interculturally competent instructional practices, I endeavored to measure this assumption by exploring the following research questions:

1. What are ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in the classroom?

2. What impact does the implementation of interculturally competent practices have on ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses?

Research Design

Since the heart of action research is to "gain insight, develop reflective practice, effect positive changes in the school environment, and improve student outcomes and the lives of those involved" (Mills, 2018, p. 10), and my study was primarily inspired by my interest "in understanding how people [my ABE ESL students] interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and attribute meaning to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6), I employed phenomenological qualitative methods. This approach was chosen to capture ABE ESL students' voices regarding ICC in order to substantiate ICC developmental training for teachers.

Rationale for Methodology

The focus of qualitative research, as noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "is on understanding the meaning of experience. As such, I was the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and rich description characterizes the end product" (p. 21). A quantitative design possesses a certain level of assurance guaranteed by the definitive nature of numbers: if the calculations are accurate, the results are generally conclusive. However, this scientific approach to research is rather sterile—

so capturing the essence of my participants' lived experiences would be limited and possibly omitted through quantitative methods.

Conversely, qualitative research designs are built to capture the nuanced life experiences of participants through observations, interviews, documents, and/or audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mills, 2018) in ways meant to highlight the human experience. Though qualitative findings are not generalizable, qualitative studies remain valuable to research practitioners who are less likely to find answers to their inquiry through digits (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills, 2018). While I saw the benefit of collecting varying data to cover more ground, I selected qualitative methods because I am far more concerned with the *hows* of life than the *whats*. Qualitative measures provided a more profound understanding of the impact intercultural practices have on ABE ESL students' engagement.

Moreover, since qualitative action research draws from numerous disciplines (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), Bandura's (1978) theory of reciprocal determinism appositely captures possible rationales behind the interaction between ABE ESL students and their involvement in GenEd courses. Reciprocal determinism theory substantiates that behavior, environment, and cognition are all interdependent (Bandura, 1978). Essentially, ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd environments affect their decision to enroll. As such, this study offers insight for understanding ABE ESL students' cognitive processes of this GenEd environment to denote how intercultural practice influences their behavior.

Moreover, phenomenological research reinforces the philosophy and psychology of inquiries designed to describe the participants' lived experiences. The most reliable

51

description of ABE ESL experience about the phenomenon concerning their GenEd enrollment comes from the students themselves. As such, I employed a focus group, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations to capture ABE ESL students' perspectives of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classrooms.

Thus, this phenomenological qualitative action research study employed a constructivist theoretical lens to examine the multiple realities that intercultural competent behavior has on ABE ESL learners in our education environment.

Research Design Validity

Applying qualitative open-ended characteristics is the ideal mode for this research undertaking because the realities behind the social construct of our school are "shaped by individuals' subjective interpretations, and influenced by their personal, cultural, and historical backgrounds" (Mills, 2018, p. 40). Hence the goal of this research was "to rely as much as possible on participants' views" (Creswell, 2014, p. 324) of ICC practices in GenEd classrooms.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited qualitative researchers can never capture an objective truth or reality; however, "triangulation is a powerful strategy for the credibility or internal validity of [their] research" (pp. 244-245). Consequently, I implemented triangulation by cross-analyzing data from a focus group session, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Additionally, per member checks or respondent validation, I shared my emergent findings with my participants, a teacher, and an administrator. In doing so, I minimized conceivable misinterpretations and or biases.

52

Context and Setting of Study

The site selection for this study was an accredited adult education program in Central South Carolina. Data for Fiscal Year 2019–2020 reflected the total number of enrollees was 167 at the time of data collection. Table 3.1 lists the courses offered at CSCAD and the number of students enrolled in each course (LiteracyPro Systems, 2019).

Table 3.1 *CSCAD Courses and Enrollees*

Courses	Enrollees
Beginner ESL Level 1	27
Intermediate ESL Level 2	20
Intermediate ESL Level 3	22
Advanced ESL Levels 4+	17
High School Diploma	19
High School Equivalency	47
Literacy	11
Skills Enrichment	2
Paraprofessional	2
Career Pathways through Family Literacy	Comprised of 4 of the ESL L4 and 2 L3 students

Of the 167 students, all of the Advanced ESL Level 4+ students have the English language proficiency to matriculate to GenEd courses, yet only 6 ABE ESL students are enrolled in GenEd courses. As a result, the students selected to participate in this study consisted of the 2 Level 4+ ABE ESL students who were enrolled in my GenEd courses, 2 Level 4+ ABE ESL students who were enrolled in other GenEd teachers' courses, and 8 Level 4+ ABE ESL students who were not enrolled in GenEd. Demographically, all

53

participants are foreign-born immigrants, their ages ranged from 29–57, and the population included 2 men and 10 women.

<center>**Participant-Researcher**</center>

My fundamental goal as a research practitioner was to understand students' perspective so that I could improve my instructional practices and encourage fellow educators to do the same to ultimately benefit our students' educational experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills, 2018; Tugel & Porter, 2010). As a result, I was determined to collect and analyze pertinent data from the consenting participants. As an ELA/ESL teacher and Family Literacy Coordinator, I have had numerous opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with the entire ABE population. My responsibilities as an Advanced ESL teacher and Writing Workshop teacher have also afforded me several opportunities to converse with ABE ESL students a minimum of two hours per day four days per week.

As the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I conducted a one-hour focus group session with 12 Level 4–6 ABE ESL students to gain a collective understanding to address my research questions. Students whose English language proficiency met or exceeded Level 4 rarely need a translator; nonetheless, I secured an electronic translation device during each interview session to use if needed.

Thereafter, I selected a purposive subsample of 4 students from the focus group to partake in 30-minute face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were designed after the focus group to give participants an opportunity to expound upon their initial focus group responses. Finally, I conducted daily observations for a period of one week in the GenEd classes at CSCAD of the 2 participants enrolled in

<center>54</center>

GenEd classes taught by other teachers. Each observation session covered the duration of a 45-minute block. During these observations, I took handwritten field notes focused on ABE ESL students' verbal and non-verbal interactions with their GenEd teachers. More specifically, I recorded evidence of the GenEd teacher's ICC practices, as defined by Deardorff (2009), and ABE ESL students' response to these practices. Then I used the field notes from my observations to cross-analyze participants' interview responses of their GenEd classroom experience. Per confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms and all collected data were securely stored electronically.

Because "qualitative researchers, like others whose roles demand selective attentiveness … pay special attention to a few things to which others ordinarily give only passing attention" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 138), I employed systematic observation methods to extract information related to how ABE ESL students responded to their teachers' use and/or failure to use ICC during instruction time (see Figure 3.1).

In doing so, I obtained more information to triangulate my findings from the focus groups and interviews to find emerging themes (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Since I was an insider researcher, I had already had permission from these teachers and established an amicable rapport with the students in their classes. All field notes were broadly hand-written during the onsite observations.
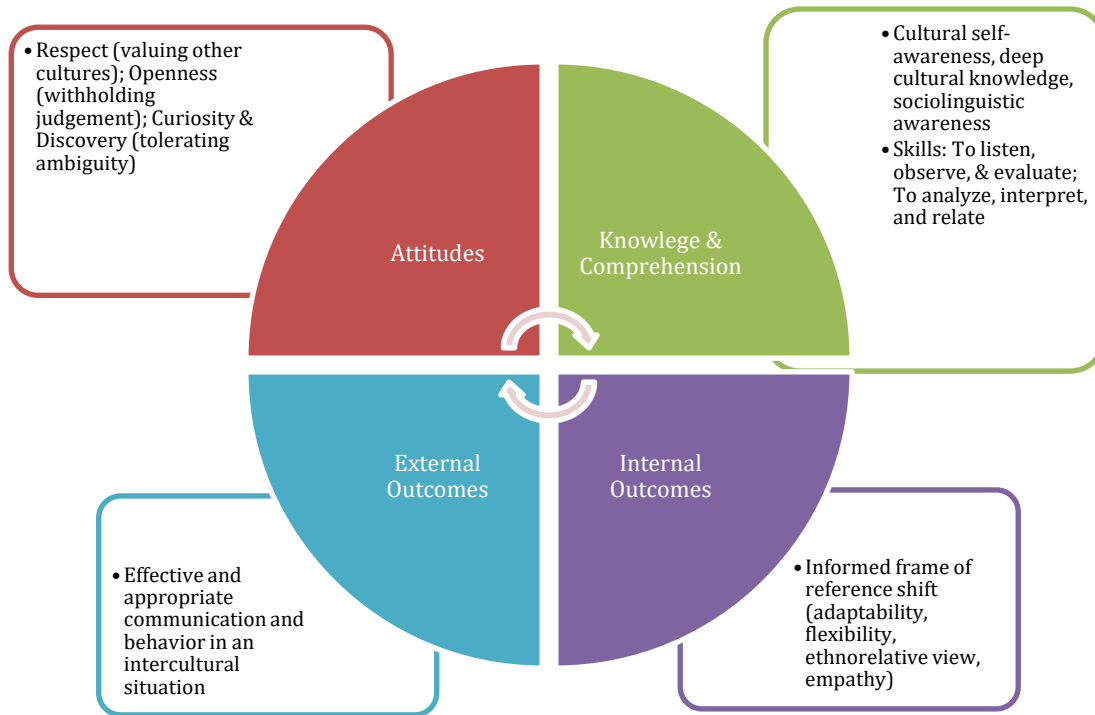
Figure 3.1. *The process model of intercultural competence* (Deardorff, 2009).

Positionality

I have been teaching at CSCAD for seven years, primarily as a High School

Equivalency (Reasoning through Language Arts and Writing Basics) teacher; however,

for the last three years, I have taught the Advanced ESL Level 4+ course and the Career

Pathways through Family Literacy course. Since I made this transition, I have become

increasingly aware of the disparity of ABE ESL representation in GenEd classes. My

rationale for selecting ABE ESL students who both have *and* have *not* enrolled in GenEd

courses is substantiated by reciprocal determinism in that each group's cognition of the

GenEd environment has affected their behavior. Thus, the internal validity of this

qualitative study warrants the perspectives of both enrolled and non-enrolled ABE ESL

students.

Considering this is an action research study, designed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how ICC practices affect students enrolling in GenEd courses to inform my practice, I conducted all of my data collection on site over a four-six-week period. Upon completion, I shared my findings with our instructional team to explore future interventions.

Ethical Considerations

Per ethical considerations, I required every participant to sign a consent form that clearly indicated participants' identities are confidential and the contents of their statements and my observations would be securely recorded and stored. Also, per internal validity, participants were given the opportunity to review their respective transcripts and my analyses thereof. They were also encouraged to express concerns and or questions regarding my analysis. In doing so, I confirmed whether participants' perspectives of ICC practices correlated what they articulated during the semi-structured interviews. Also, per internal validity measures, I shared my transcripts and analysis with each participant. By implementing these member checks, I hoped to confirm that I captured the essence of students' perspectives of how their GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices influence their continuing education aspirations.

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Student-Participants

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Initially, 17 ABE ESL students agreed to participate in this study; however, given the transient nature of the adult education population, only 12 of the students who confirmed participated. The purposive sample consisted of 10 female participants and 2 male participants. This apparent disproportion of participants in terms of gender

57

accurately reflects the overall ratio of female to male ABE ESL students in this CSCAD program. Of the 86 ABE ESL students enrolled in this program, 15 are male and 71 are female. Hence, the female to male ratio of the participants in this study proportionately reflects the program's ABE ESL population, totaling 83% females and 17% males. These participants represented diverse ethnicities/races: 33% identified as Hispanic, 33% White/Caucasian, and 33% Asian. Notably, the race/ethnicity proportions of participants were equally represented.

Their ages ranged from 29 to 57, and they represented 9 nationalities. More specifically, the sample consisted of two Mexican (17%) and South Korean (17%) women, one male and one female participant from Turkey (17%), one male Ukrainian (8%), and one female participant from each of the following countries: India (8%), Syria (8%), the Dominican Republic (8%), China (8%), and Venezuela (8%). I selected these students for my sample because I believed they would offer distinct dimensions of perspectives to address my research questions. Table 3.2 offers a comprehensive depiction of participants' correlating demographics.

Per Table 3.2, from a sample of 12 students who participated in the focus group session, I created a subsample of 4 participants to engage in the semi-structured interviews. Penny and Kim were the only 2 participants from the focus group who elected themselves; Slown and Stone were purposefully selected because they were enrolled in GenEd classes. Finally, I observed Slown and Stone during their instructional time with GenEd teachers.

Table 3.2 *Participants' Correlating Demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Professional Career in Native Country	English Language Proficiency
Angie	F	29	Mexican	None	Level 4
Demi	F	32	Turkish	Mechanical Engineer	Level 4
Jae	F	48	South Korean	Business Administrator	Level 6
Jill	F	57	Turkish	Chemistry Teacher	Level 6
Kim	F	33	South Korean	Master of Business Administration	Level 6
Penny	F	41	Dominican	Financial Advisor	Level 5
Rena	F	29	Indian	Math Teacher	Level 4
Stone	F	29	Chinese	Nurse	Level 5
Tenny	F	54	Venezuelan	Speech Therapist	Level 4
Tina	F	30	Mexican	None	Level 5
Slown	M	46	Ukrainian	Building Contractor	Level 5
Tim	M	49	Turkish	Computer Engineer	Level 5

Each participant divulged their employment status, as indicated in Figure 3.2. Two of the ABE ESL students were self-employed (17%) and three were full-time employees (25%). One student admitted she has no desire to work (8%), while another professed, she chose to work part-time (8%). Still, an overwhelming 42% of participants expressed they were unemployed and seeking jobs. This percentage revealed the majority of these students could benefit from enrolling in GenEd courses, as they are designed to improve students' academic and vocational skills.

59
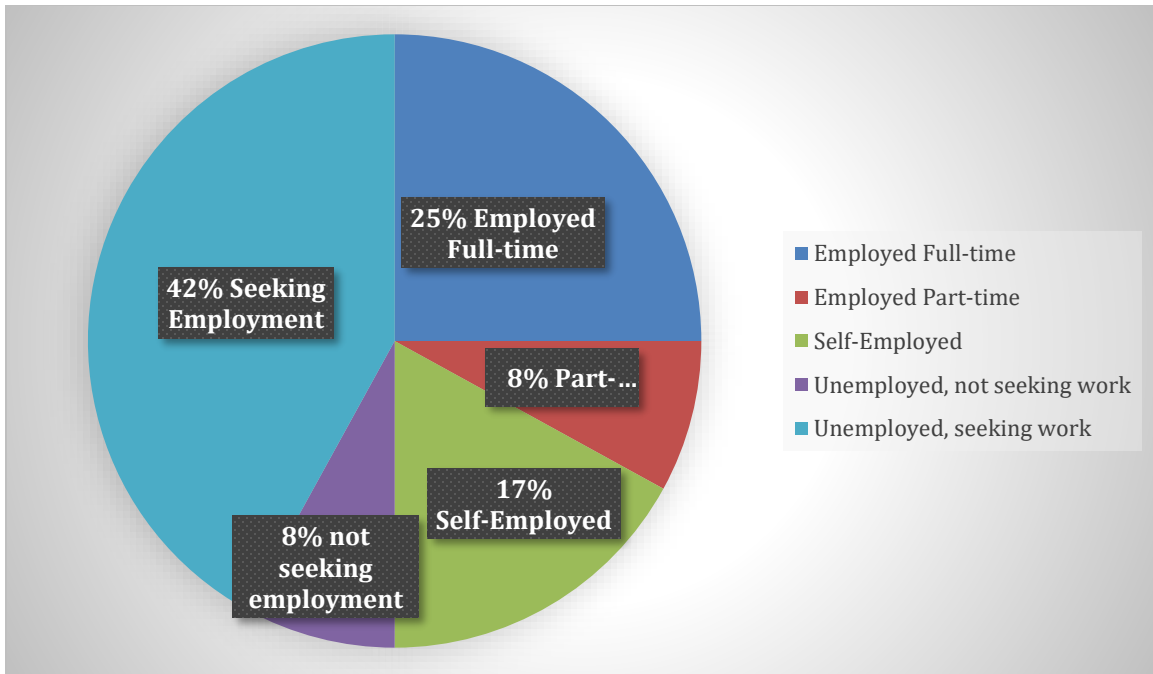
Figure 3.2. Employment status of participants.

Participant Profiles

The 12 participants offered written consent to partake in this study. Since I planned to employ peer debriefing from a member of the administrative team to review and ask questions because "this strategy—involving an interpretation beyond the researcher and invested in another person—adds validity to an account" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 201), I have used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. The following account presents an aggregated analysis of pertinent data collected from the interviews and focus groups categorized by participants' gender.

Profiles of Female Participants

The 10 female participants involved in the study were enrolled in the same ABE ESL program in Central Columbia, South Carolina. They were all migrated from Asian, European, or South American countries. All of these participants had English language proficiency levels that met or exceeded those required to effectively participate in GenEd courses. Yet only three (Jill, Rena, and Stone) were currently enrolled in GenEd courses at this center. Rena and Jill were enrolled in my Early Childhood Career Pathway class, and Slown and Stone were students in two other GenEd courses. Consequently, being ever conscious of my positionality, I opted to function as a complete observer—a researcher who observes without participating (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)—in Slown and Stone's GenEd classes to widen my scope of understanding students' perspectives and curtail my implicit biases.

Notably, eight of the female participants held professional degrees and careers while living in their native countries. Additionally, all of them studied English before immigrating to the United States; thus, their English language proficiency all met or exceeded Level 4, which is considered the minimum proficiency ability ESL learners must have in order to be successful in higher education settings. Demi was a mechanical engineer in Turkey; Jill was a chemistry teacher in Syria; Jae was employed as an business administrator in South Korea; Penny was a financial advisor in the Dominican Republic; Stone was a nurse in China; Tenny was a speech therapist in Venezuela; and Rena a secondary math teacher in her native India. Both Angie and Tina earned their high school degrees in Mexico, and though Kim did not pursue a professional career, she earned a master's degree in business in South Korea.

Still, despite their English language proficiency and overwhelming academic and professional success, none of these women were currently employed, nor were they working toward employment in their respective fields. Sixty percent were unemployed but seeking employment; one was self-employed, selling used books through Amazon; 20% worked as house-keepers out of necessity; and 10% were unable to legally pursue employment because of their immigration status. Though 30% of these female participants were employed, they were not using their professional training as depicted in Figure 3.2. Jae and Kim were the only participants who expressed they had no interest in utilizing their professional training since relocating to the United States.

Profile of Male Participants

Both male participants resided in Central Columbia, South Carolina and were enrolled at the CSCAD center. Slown is the father of a two-year-old and desires to earn a college degree in business. He endeavored to use the knowledge he gleaned from this degree to embolden the success of his construction business. Consequently, he enrolled in GenEd courses at the adult education center to acquire the academic support he needed to successfully complete the high school equivalency test, formally known as the GED. Prior to enrolling in these classes, Slown's highest academic accomplishment was a high school diploma from his native country, the Ukraine.

When Tim settled in South Carolina, he enrolled in an online cybersecurity certificate program because he believed earning an American certification would make him more marketable. Despite his efforts, he was unable to secure employment in his desired field. CSCAD offers a test prep class to prepare students to successfully earn a

WIN credential, which reinforces their employability; nonetheless, Tim was not enrolled in this GenEd class.

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Data Collection, Tools, and Instruments

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All data collection was conducted at the district's main ABE center. I conducted, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews using open coding to identify themes relevant to addressing my research questions.

Focus Group

The focus group was semi-structured so that students could freely share their experiences and perceptions. Per Appendix A, five questions served as guides; however, students were encouraged to expound on their responses as well as ask relevant questions. I chose to start collecting data with 12 ABE ESL participants because I believed this open dialogue would provide a comfortable environment for students to articulate their thoughts. I also hoped to use their responses to develop more specific questions for the semi-structured interviews. The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed verbatim with Rev.com software. Then I used NVivo's qualitative data analysis computer software to formulate preliminary coding schemes that I could use to identify themes for my write up (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews

Four participants from the focus group contributed more data in response to the questions stated in Appendix B. Each interviewee was asked the same semi-structured questions; however, they were not limited to these questions. I specifically asked Stone and Slown to participate in the interviews because they were enrolled in GenEd classes

that I do not teach. As such, I intended to cross-analyze their responses from the focus group and interview with the field notes from my classroom observations to explore how their perceptions of interculturally competent practices were realized in GenEd classes. Kim and Penny were the only other students from the focus group participants who agreed to participate in the interviews. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim after each session. I used Temi.com to generate each transcript.

All of the interviews were conducted in my classroom during the two-hour break between the morning and evening courses. Then, using NVivo.com, I added the preliminary codes from the focus group responses in conjunction with similar codes from the interviews to generate code phrases correlating with the codes from the focus group codes to develop themes for my write up (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observations

I observed Stone and Slown during their 45-minute GenEd classes. Functioning as a complete observer, I recorded verbal and nonverbal evidence of ICC interactions between these students and their GenEd teachers. Thereafter, I compared Stone and Slown's responses from their interview and observations to ascertain possible correlations between students' perceptions of ICC practices in GenEd classes with their lived experiences in GenEd classes.

Research Procedures

A purposive sampling was used for the phenomenological qualitative study. Because I sought to understand ABE ESL students' perceptions of ICC practices in the classroom and the way their views affect their enrollment in GenEd courses, it was

64

imperative I selected participants who fit this particular demographic. Per recruitment, I asked all the Level 4+ ABE ESL students to participate; however, only 12 of these students partook in one or more of the data collection sessions.

All data were collected at CSCAD. The focus group was held in my classroom and the interviews were held where and when it was most convenient for each interviewee. All conversations were audio-recorded. Thereafter, I used Temi.com to transcribe the conversations from the focus group and the semi-structured interviews. During the last stage of my data collection, I conducted one week of 45-minute observations with the two ABE ESL students who were enrolled in a GenEd course taught by other GenEd teachers.

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data heavily rests upon the researcher's ability to objectively convey the subjective voices of her participants (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited, "The purpose of phenomenological reduction is to lead the researcher back to the experience of the participants and to reflect on it…to suspend judgment, so that one could stay with the lived experience of the phenomenon in order to get at its essence" (p. 227). Thus, the richness of participants' lived experiences must be accurately transcribed and compared and contrasted so that prevailing themes could emerge.

After transcribing the focus group discussion and interviews using Temi.com, I listened to and read each transcript. Thereafter, I imported the transcript to the qualitative coding software, NVivo, to generate a coding classification spreadsheet. I used this list to identify frequently used words in order to generate themes. Once this process was

completed, I used what I generated from the focus group discussion and interviews to manually code my observations. Through the process of triangulation, I constructed themes that poignantly answered my research questions. During the initial coding phase, I employed the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to organize, categorize, and synthesize each transcribed interview and focus group. In Chapter 4, I will present a compilation of words participants frequently used to express their perceptions of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classrooms.

Thereafter, I conducted a text search query using stems for Deardorff's (2006) tenets of intercultural competence to seek out emergent theme topics pertaining to my research questions. Using codes generated from the word frequency query, I created nodes to categorize and analyze emergent patterns. Following this process, I synthesized my findings, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, to display my analysis of the data systematically (Watkins, 2015). The juxtaposition of codes related to ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd and ESL intercultural practices was evident during the focus group session and was solidified during the coding process.

Summary

This phenomenological action research study was qualitatively designed to gain an extensive understanding of CSCAD ABE ESL students' perceptions of ICC practices in the classroom to determine how these practices impact their enrollment. Thus, these ABE ESL Level 4+ responses from the focus group session, semi-structured interviews, and observations offered conclusive findings of their perspectives herein.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative phenomenological inquiry of Adult Basic Education (ABE) English as a Second Language (ESL) students enrolled in a Central South Carolinian Adult Education (CSCAD) program. Since over half of this program's student population consists of ESL students, educators must employ intercultural communicative practices to encourage these students to realize their linguistic and academic aspirations.

Research Questions

As the primary instrument, I selected a purposive sample of consenting ABE ESL Level 4+ students enrolled at CSCAD to interview and observe in order to inductively acquire answers for the following research questions:

1. What are ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in the classroom?

2. What impact does the implementation of interculturally competent practices have on ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses?

67

Problem of Practice

Though a significant portion of the ABE ESL population has the English language proficiency to enroll in GenEd classes to further their academic and/or professional abilities, the vast majority never venture beyond ABE ESL classrooms. An educator's interculturally competent (ICC) practices in the classroom have a significant influence on ESL students' motivation (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2018; Linvelle & Whiting, 2019; Mathews-Aydinl, 2008; Papachristos, 2007; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014). Thus, I have conducted a qualitative inquiry to identify ABE ESL students' perceptions of teachers' ICC practices in the classroom to determine whether these practices impact students' enrollment in GenEd courses.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data were collected and triangulated to provide an in-depth analysis of this population's ICC perceptions of GenEd educators. As such, this chapter includes the demographic data for each participant and the nascent themes derived from the focus group, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations in order to explore this phenomenon. I initially conducted a one-hour focus group session with 12 Level 4 students, semi-structured interviews with 2 GenEd ESL students, and classroom observations of GenEd teachers and ESL students. To analyze the data, I employed these steps: (a) used Temi.com to transcribe the focus group and semi-structured interviews verbatim; (b) asked interviewees to review the transcripts to verify whether each transcript was accurately transcribed; and (c) used NVivo.com (qualitative data analysis software) to generate code concepts.

68

Significance of Study

Though Level 4+ students at CSCAD have the English language proficiency to pursue GenEd opportunities and the majority have the desire to advance academically and or professionally (as seen in Figure 3.2), this program has not been able to encourage this population of students to matriculate into GenEd courses. While my informal conversations with ABE ESL students suggested they did not enroll in GenEd classes because they thought they would not be able to effectively communicate with GenEd teachers, I had no valid evidence to qualify their stance. As such, I endeavored to explore ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classrooms to gain an in-depth understanding of how these practices affected their decisions to enroll in GenEd courses.

Per ABE ESL qualifying assessment [Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE)-Language] scores, all of these ABE ESL participants had the English language proficiency to pursue GenEd opportunities, and 10 of the 12 participants aspired to continue to build upon the professional careers they secured in their native countries. Nevertheless, only 2 of these participants were actively enrolled in GenEd career-prep courses.

Intervention/Strategy

In an effort to gain a robust understanding of ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classrooms, it was necessary to capture these students' voices through qualitative measures. Hence, I triangulated the data from a focus group session, interviews, and GenEd classroom observations I gathered from this

69

student population to succinctly encapsulate their perceptions and decisions toward

GenEd enrollment.

Table 4.1. *Preliminary Codes from Transcribed Interviews and Focus Group*

Words	Frequency of Occurrences
Changing	739
Think	687
Judge	537
Communicate	506
United	399
Activities	363
Know	327
Accept	303
Like	298
Feel	279
Love	205
Care	171
Support	156
Learn	153
Understand	141
Open	118
Meaning	101
Teacher	100

Analysis and Findings

Per qualitative measures, ABE ESL participants expressed their perceptions of

GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices in GenEd classrooms. I have

compiled the responses from this purposive population—expressed through a focus group,

interviews, and classroom observation—and analyzed data that express their perceptions

70

and motivators toward realizing their full academic/professional potentials. The following tables present ABE ESL students' expressions of their perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices at CSCAD.

These words are displayed from highest to lowest occurrence per the NVivo frequency query ranging from 739 for the term "changing" to 100 for the term "teacher." As expressed in these codes, data confirmed ABE ESL students' greatest aversion to enrolling in GenEd course is they are afraid of change.

Though the term "teacher" was used most infrequently, all of the adjectives and adverbs between *change* and *teacher* suggested GenEd teachers have the ability to persuade or dissuade ABE ESL enrollment.

The five overarching patterns in Table 4.2 yielded affirmative comparative findings of ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd and ESL teachers' ICC practices. Each code pair revealed ESL teachers' ICC outnumbered GenEd teachers by an average 6.6 frequency occurrences. While these differences were not vastly grave, Deardorff (2006, 2008, & 2009) posited an individual's developing ICC enters the phase of maturation when he effectively exhibits external outcomes of appropriate communication and behavior in intercultural situations and internal outcomes through informed frames of reference shifts. As such, the disparity of ICC practices in GenEd classrooms as perceived by ABE ESL students is duly noted by the themes extracted from the data in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 *Classification of Codes from Transcribed Interviews and Focus Group*

Code	Frequency of Occurrence	Meaning
GenEd teachers' respect	196	Participants found GenEd teachers valued others' cultures
ESL teachers' respect	203	Participants found ESL teachers valued others' cultures
GenEd teachers' openness	99	Participants expressed GenEd teachers withheld judgment
ESL teachers' openness	106	Participants expressed ESL teachers withheld judgment
GenEd teachers' curiosity and discovery	117	Participants shared GenEd teachers tolerate ambiguity
ESL teachers' curiosity and discovery	124	Participants shared ESL teachers tolerate ambiguity
ESL teachers' cultural self-awareness	54	Participants spoke about ESL teachers' depth of cultural knowledge of sociolinguistic awareness
GenEd teachers' cultural self-awareness	51	Participants shared their perception of GenEd teachers' cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness
ESL teachers' ICC comprehension skills	80	Participants expressed ESL teachers' ability to listen, observe, evaluate, analyze, interpret, and relate
GenEd teachers' ICC comprehension skills	71	Participants expressed GenEd teachers' ability to listen, observe, evaluate, analyze, interpret, and relate

Additionally, these data reveal ABE ESL students believe both ESL and GenEd teachers value students' culture, although the data also show GenEd teachers lack comprehensions of said cultures. Considering that ABE ESL students' perception of both ESL and GenEd teachers' cultural self-awareness is more than 57% less than the other

72

codes, one could induct teachers' deficiency of in-depth cultural and sociolinguist knowledge negatively impacts their ability to draw ABE ESL students in. Since the great gap from the data in Table 4.2 showed GenEd teachers lack ICC comprehension skills, this result supports why this population is reluctant to enroll in GenEd class—the fear of being misinterpreted, misapprehended, misjudged, and misunderstood.

As aforementioned, the codes in Table 4.2 unveil affirmative accounts of students' perceptions of teachers' ICC practices. However, I also thought it noteworthy to contrast these themes to determine whether students' perceptions of what teachers practice exceed that which they do not practice.
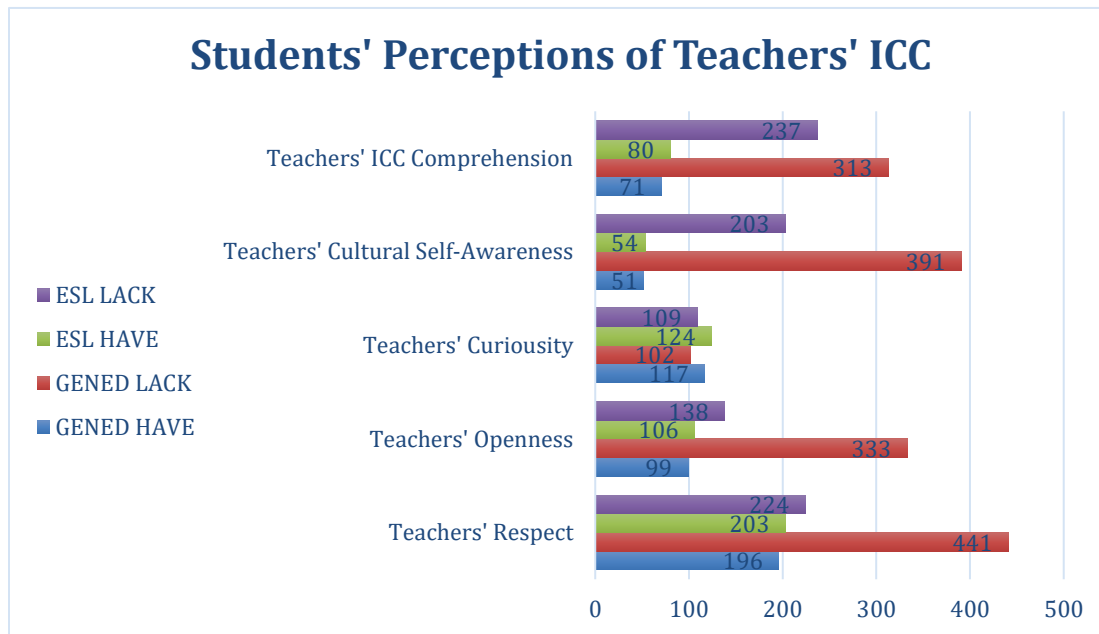

Figure 4.1. Students' perceptions of teachers' ICC practices.

Table 4.3 *Classification of codes from Transcribed Interviews and Focus Group*

Code	Frequency of Occurrences	Meaning
GenEd teachers' lack of respect	141	Participants found GenEd teachers do not value others' cultures
ESL teachers' lack of respect	224	Participants found ESL teachers do not value others' cultures
GenEd teachers lack openness	333	Participants expressed GenEd teachers do not withhold judgment
ESL teachers lack openness	138	Participants expressed ESL teachers do not withhold judgment
GenEd teachers lack curiosity	102	Participants shared GenEd teachers do not tolerate ambiguity
ESL teachers lack curiosity	109	Participants shared ESL teachers do not tolerate ambiguity
ESL teachers lack cultural self-awareness	203	Participants spoke about ESL teachers' void of deep cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness
GenEd teachers lack cultural self-awareness	391	Participants shared their perception of GenEd teachers' void of cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness
ESL teachers lack ICC	237	Participants expressed ESL teachers' lack of comprehension skills, the ability to effectively listen, observe, evaluate, analyze, interpret, and relate
GenEd teachers lack ICC	313	Participants expressed GenEd teachers lack comprehension skills, the ability to effectively listen, observe, evaluate, analyze, interpret, and relate

74

Figure 4.1 displays students' perceptions of CSCAD interculturally competent practices. This data emerged from the transcriptions of the interviews and focus group session. The classification of ICC codes represented on the y-axis reflects the characteristics of ICC practices: teachers' ICC comprehension, cultural self-awareness, curiosity, openness, and respect. As noted in Figure 3.1, a teacher's attitudes, comprehension, and knowledge directly influence the teacher's *external ICC outcomes* (effective and appropriate communication and behavior in an intercultural situation), and *internal ICC outcome* (informed frame of shift thorough adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view, and empathy).

While the terms "lack" or "have" on the x-axis could be misconstrued as inferior or deficient based jargon (Bialka, 2015), my intent was to add a visual representation for ABE ESL students' perceptions of teachers' ICC practices. Using NVivo coding software, I conducted a text query to capture the number of times participants expressed the absence or presence of ICC. Moreover, the data parallel evidence of ESL and GenEd teachers' ICC practices because the data from the focus group and interview transcripts reflect these comparisons.

The contrasting codes from the text search query in Table 4.3 revealed that participants' perception of GenEd teachers' failure to employ ICC practices (with the exception of curiosity) exponentially exceeds their affirmative practices. Still, Figure 4.4 offers a powerful visual representation of ABE ESL students' perception of GenEd teachers' intercultural practices in the classroom. At first glance, all teachers perceivably "lack" more ICC than they have in four of the five ICC tenets. However, ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd ICC teachers are notably in need of improvement.

Theme A: ABE ESL Students' Perceptions of Interculturally Competent Practices

This theme, derived from ABE ESL students' responses to the Focus Group Questions 1, 2, and 5, addresses Research Question 1: What are ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in the classroom?

Theme A: Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Question 1 How would you define the term intercultural?

Participants were asked to share their understanding of the terms "inter," "cultural," and "intercultural." The reason I chose to begin collecting data with this question was to determine the level of existing understanding students had of the tenets of ICC. In order to for them to express their perceptions of this practice, they must first be able to articulate their understandings of ICC. While none of the participants admitted to having heard the term *intercultural* before, all of their responses distinctly defined this term.

Table 4.4 *Participants' Definition of Intercultural Competence*

	Frequency	%
Mixture of customs	4	33
Shared perspectives	4	33
Ability to effectively communicate cross-culturally	2	17
Empathetic and flexible	2	17
Total	**12**	**100**

Four of the participants expressed a person who is interculturally competent makes a conscious decision to mix their cultural custom with others. Jae expressed, "I need to share my way of life with others and I need to learn about others too." Similarly, four other students expressed the need for shared perspectives, qualifying ICC as not just

sharing what culturally different people *do*, but also sharing their beliefs. To this end, Jill explained

> Basically, culture is identity of the person because a culture reflects what you are. Because culture made the person. So, every country, there is a different culture, different religion. But we will never learn about each other if we don't share what we believe … not to change each other but to understand each other.

Additionally, two participants stressed intercultural competence exists when one can effectively communicate cross-culturally. Tim explained, "They have the skills to deal with everybody … to become not angry or nervous…they have to talk clearly with everyone." Lastly, two participants stressed the need for teachers to practice empathy and flexibility. Tina added,

> Teachers should have being in fact empathic, empathic, empathetic, empathetic and flexible. It's basal, uh, for us, we are immigrants and we have, um, um, our, um, uh, abilities and uh, we needed to do, communicate is not good. And we have different jobs with different schedules is not, uh, this, our schedule is not, although it's not always the same. So if I feel, um, like, um, pressure, pressure, pressure from the teacher because I'm skipping some classes, um, it's very hard and difficult for us.

Tenny also added,

> And people, we all need to show empathy. This is the root of some of what makes you stay open to know people.

These students' responses specifically address the tenets of Deardorff's ICC process model thereby confirmed participants understanding of intercultural competence.

77

Focus Group Question 2 *Should teachers exercise interculturally competent practices in the classroom? Why?*

I then asked participants to express why all teachers (more specifically GenEd teachers) should exhibit ICC. Their responses in terms of comparing their experience with ESL teachers to GenEd ABE teachers were unanimous in terms of expressing the value of ICC practices in the classroom. The overwhelming majority of participants identified acceptance and motivation as principle takeaways for ESL students who experience interculturally competent practices in diverse classroom spaces.

Table 4.5 *Participants' Beliefs of the Importance of ICC Practices in Classroom Settings*

	Frequency	%
Students will feel accepted	8	67
Students will feel motivated	2	17
Students will learn more	1	8
Students will grow	1	8
Total	**12**	**100**

This data from this table shows participant believed ICC practices were vital to their success in the classroom. Their resounding responses confirmed their belief that ICC practices in the classroom caused students to feel accepted and motivated. Essentially when GenEd teachers move pass minimizing students' cultural difference toward acceptance, inclusion, and adaptation of students' cultural difference, students will fell accepted and motivated to learn in these spaces. To this end, Slown and Jill shared:

> So yeah, I can understand how we, you know, the things different and we can
>
> learn from y'all. I think that's really important to the student and the teacher get

78

the chance to know each other… Um, so that the relationship is more like not, not

close enough, but they know, they know how to get along… Building that relation

between your teacher and himself where you understanding your teacher and they

understand each student (Slown).

Teachers should be trained regularly about the intercultural. But if the government

give some program to teaching about that, the teachers can learn more easily the

best way to treat students from other cultures. But it, it is limited…I think if the

teachers don't have the intercultural sense, it makes racism issue sometimes (Jill).

While reflecting on how ICC practices in GenEd classrooms were vital, Jill extended her

explanation to include her observation of her daughters' experiences with teachers who

were not intentional about developing their intercultural knowledge and comprehension

of students' cultural practices:

So, America is made up of many people from other countries. So, yeah, because

my daughters are in high school, their teachers they don't know. They don't

understand why or how others do or thinking. So sometimes they don't care. Other

people, even they are American, they don't understand each other. That is

problem (Jill).

Essentially, Jill's observations of her daughters' high school teachers left her feeling their

teachers not only lacked understanding of her Korean daughters' behavior as related to

their cultures, rather her interpretation if this apparent disconnect was that these high

school teachers did not care enough to learn about others' cultures. Per Deardorff (2009),

the external display of teachers' ICC practices is contingent upon their cultural self-

awareness, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness. Consequentially,

when teachers lack ICC knowledge and comprehension herein, students (and their parents) will not feel accepted nor motivated. Tenny summarized Jill and Slown's responses beautifully by adding, "When teachers don't know the cultural practices from other country, they don't know the people you sometimes you make judgements and it's, it's very hard for us."

Focus Group Question 5 *Do interculturally competent practices influence students' learning? Why? Why not?*

This question was designed to capture counternarratives from participants' responses to Questions 1–4. The overwhelming pattern of the responses from participants supports the need for teachers to employ ICC practices in the classroom; however, in the midst of these affirmative responses, three students offered counter-perceptions for the value of ICC practices in the classroom. I referred to these remarks as "counternarratives" because the three participants who offered these responses also shared affirmative views concerning ICC practices.

Table 4.6 *Participants' Indifference toward Intercultural Competence Practices*

	Frequency	%
ICC is difficult to practice in multicultural settings	1	8
ICC in teachers in not necessary for learning	2	17
Total	**3**	**25**

This data was supported by the following responses:

> It's difficult. It's very difficult for a teacher to know all of our cultures … We
> come from so many different parts or different country. Sure. It's like a nice detail
> or something for teacher to so. Maybe for some, some commons that you may

know a little bit about their culture, but for some countries it's more difficult
(Rena)

It really depends on how you look at it to be real honest. Cause some people don't
like to tell everybody else about their culture…so if they don't share with their
teacher how will they know? (Slown)

I didn't have that nice teacher in my life growing up, but I still learned. So it may
be useful but not compulsory (Tina)

Though Rena, Slown, and Tina passionately affirmed ICC practices in the classrooms,
their responses here suggests allowances should be made for teachers who do not employ
ICC practices. These participants concluded these practices were difficult and not
mandatory for GenEd. Though only 3 of the 12 participants offered counternarratives for
ICC practices, their responses provide opposing perspectives that equally contribute to
their perceptions of ICC practices in GenEd classrooms.

Theme Topic A: Responses from Interviews and Observations

Stone was the only female student in the focus group who was enrolled in a
GenEd class. I asked her to share her experience.

Well, when she gave me work and I learned, I feel much confident. Yeah.
Because she don't make you feel nervous and you just feel free to do everything
with her. Yeah. And then that boost up your confidence, something like that.
Yeah. That's really nice of her.

Stone's account of her GenEd teacher references Deardorff's (2009) *external outcome* on
intercultural communication (see *Figure 3.1*). However, Stone's interactions with her
GenEd teacher per the field notes I recorded during my observations proved contradictory.

81

Instead of open dialogue, confidence, and self-directed ease, I found Stone withdrawn, and reclusive. And, since Ms. Dee did not offer alternative opportunities for response, including but not limited to nonverbal/ written responses, Stone maintained her dismissive posture—eyes lowered, hands folded, not taking notes.

Theme B: Impact of ICC Practices on ABE ESL Enrolling in GenEd Courses

The answers to Questions 3 and 4 from the semi-structured interviews and focus group aimed to address Research Question 2: What impact does the implementation of interculturally competent practices have on ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses?

Theme B: Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Question 3 What are some outcomes ESL students may experience from teachers who practice interculturally competent practices?

This question addressed ABE ESL students' perceptions of what happens when GenEd teachers exercise ICC practices. Participants responded with reflections of their prevailing beliefs about the impact of teachers' ICC practices on their GenEd enrollment. Four of the students shared from their individual experience and the other participants shared from what they observed from their peers and or children's experiences with GenEd teachers.

Table 4.7 *Perceived Outcomes of ICC Practices in GenEd Classroom Settings*

	Frequency	%
Increase GenEd enrollment	3	25
Built strong student–teacher relationship	4	33
Consistent student attendance	3	25
Helps students attain the academic/professional goals	2	16
Total	**12**	**100**

> Oh, Ms. Doris was an awesome teacher. She's very caring. She is sweet and I, I
>
> believe she, she cared about the people. She always thinking about that, the
>
> people that needed and to try to help that (Jae).

While on the surface it seems Jae's account of her teacher's behavior simply conveys her

teacher has a nice personality, Jae's response more specifically supports Ms. Doris's ICC

practices in the way in which she was intentional about acknowledging and meeting Jae's

needs. Essentially, because Ms. Doris helped Jae meet her needs in the classroom, Jae

was able to attain her academic/professional goals. Contrary to the reflections of my

observations of Slown in the next section, Ms. Doris did not respond to Jae's need with

sweeping affirmations without taking the time to determine how she could pragmatically

help. Instead, she recognized Jae's specific needs and adjusted her practices to met said

need. Consequently, Ms. Doris's interactions with Jae provides a clear distinction of what

it means to be a nice educator verses one who employs ICC practices in the classroom.

Similarly, Stone shared her experience with GenEd teacher, Ms. Dee, explaining

her interculturally competent practices were evident in the ways she exercised flexibility

and adaptability during her instruction:

83

…she has plan to help you. Or you want to change the learning plan, and then which way is better? It's better for you to help you…She always concerns that give you the best way to help you deal. You're coming here to get help, and now you feel comfortable here because we had just started with her (Stone).

The following quote addresses opportunity for GenEd teachers to strengthen their relationships with ABE ESL students outside of the classroom:

I really have a really close relationship with her. I all the time feel like she said she helped everyone. Last year on Thanksgiving, she invited my family and I to go to her house to have dinner. So it was very, very special. Yeah, I just feel like family with her (Angie)

Though all teachers may not have the resources, means, nor desire to invite ABE ESL students to their homes for the holidays, the broader takeaway here is developing strong student-teacher relations is not limited to the classroom. To Angie's point Penny affirmingly added,

If you don't come to schools she will contact and ask you are what's wrong and what's going on. Are you okay? And I feel safe with her. She always care about "are you doing good, are you doing okay with that?" (Penny)

Tim is a 49-year-old Level 5 ABE ESL computer engineer from Turkey, who upon enrolling at CSCAD was already enrolling in an online computer engineering course. He made the decision to enroll in this particular program in hopes he would be able to improve his spoken English because he planned to begin interviewing for jobs. Tim holds a master's degree in computer science from his native Turkey and felt rather

confident in his academic English abilities; however, he lacked confidence in his verbal communicative abilities.

During the focus group session, Tim insightfully explained his perception of how a teacher's ICC practices affected his decision to enroll in GenEd classes,

Academically, I believe I can teach myself anything … this is the reason why I have the confidence to take classes online. I am here to improve my conversational English skill… I could have taken GenEd classes so that I could learn from native English speakers—teachers and students—but I don't think I would get what I need… If my ESL teacher is a poor communicator, I will not improve. The same is true for GenEd teachers… they need to learn how to communicate with ESL students… they should have the skills to communicate with us.

Tim's response unveiled probative evidence that supports how his perception of GenEd teachers' ICC communicative abilities/inabilities affected his enrollment. Though he recognized he could have made greater improvement in his conversational English in GenEd classes, he did not believe GenEd teachers could effectively communicate with him. Additionally, Tim's reasoning concerning learning more in GenEd classes supports Lave's (1988, 1996) stance on situated learning discussed in Chapter 2. Essentially, if Tim chose to enroll in GenEd classes, he would have been surrounded by native English speakers and thereby increased his English language proficiency. Unfortunately, because he did not believe GenEd teachers would effectively communicate with him as an ESL student, he forfeited this learning opportunity.

Theme B: Responses from Interviews and Observations

During my semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) with Slown, I asked him to share his communicative experiences with his GenEd teacher and explain how these interactions impacted his learning. Slown expressed indifference about teacher-student relationships during the focus group, but he also stated in his interview, "It's not like she doesn't care. It's not like she's closeminded." Slown's response explained his GenEd teacher employs interculturally competent practices. Slown's observation of Ms. Li's open-mindedness correlates with the "*attitudes*" tenet of intercultural competence. Per Deardorff's (2006) ICC process model (Figure 3.1), Slown's verbal account of Ms. Li's openness verifies she employs intercultural practices. He also said Ms. Li's ICC practices have no bearings on his learning.

Nevertheless, my field notes from my observations of Slown with his GenEd teacher indicate otherwise (The italicized portions of my field notes are indicators of preliminary analyses I made during my observations):

Slown seemed eager to learn, but also a bit anxious—Ms. Li did not acknowledge his apparent anxiety.

Slown expressed, "All of this is hard for me to understand … my English vocabulary is poor." Ms. Li responded, "You'll understand it in time."

I wonder if Slown would have felt differently if Ms. Li had provided several examples of how to utilize different types of clues during her direct instruction … This may have been a great opportunity for her to field questions from Slown—I wonder why she didn't ask him what she could do to empower him during this instructional time?

86

Ms. Li finished reading a passage about *Roman Aqueducts* and asked the students to take the next 15 minutes to answer the eight accompanying context clues questions. The pace she used was appropriate for a native English language speaker and the vocabulary from the passage was appropriate for a student with a 1010L or high Lexile score.

I wonder why Ms. Li chose this particular passage. My interview with Slown revealed his Lexile score is equivalent to that of a 4th grader, 420L, so I wonder if Slown would have responded more favorably to the lesson if Ms. Li chose a passage closer to his literacy abilities. Additionally, best practices for read-alouds encourage readers to model talking to the text, so I wondered why Ms. Li did not employ this technique.

Slown appeared to be making an attempt to answer the questions. He repeatedly shook his head disconcertingly during this time of independent practice.

Though Slown expressed indifference toward GenEd teachers' ICC communicative abilities, the observations I recorded in my field notes were seemingly contradictory. Slown's apparent disconnect from his teacher's instructional delivery and Ms. Li's apparent inability to employ ICC instructional skills in terms of her attitude, knowledge, comprehension, and skills (Deardorff, 2006, 2008, 2009) substantiated there was a significant correlation between student–teacher ICC. Yet, Slown seemingly lacked the wherewithal to make this connection, and Ms. Li seemingly lacked the ICC attitude, knowledge, comprehension, and skills she needed to bridge this grave disconnect.

Theme C: The Impact of the Absence of Interculturally Competent Practices in GenEd Classroom

Theme C: Focus Group Responses

Focus Group Question 4

This question addressed ABE ESL students' perceptions of what happens when GenEd teachers are not intentional about using ICC practices. Students' responses regarding the oppositional outcomes of what occurs when teachers do not exercise ICC practices were all profoundly expressed.

Table 4.8 *Perceived Outcomes of Absence of ICC Practices in Classroom Settings*

	Frequency	%
Low GenEd enrollment	4	33
Poor student–teacher relationship	3	25
Sporadic student attendance	2	16
Little to no academic/professional growth	3	25
Total	**12**	**100**

When Demi (a 32-year-old, mechanical engineer from Turkey) initially enrolled at CSCAD, she took a test preparation GenEd class that would prepare her for the *Accuplacer* test (a college entry-level exam). Yet, after three weeks in this GenEd environment, she made the decision to quit the class and enrolled in my Level 4 ESL class. When asked why, she shared

> I was very distracted in that class…There was no time to talk in English… she did not understand my English and I did not understand her. Most of the time was on the computer… it was a waste of my time.

Demi's English language proficiency is Level 5, which means her language abilities are advanced. As a result, Demi's inability to effectively communicate with her GenEd teacher could be attributed to factors beyond language limitations.

Similarly, when educators fail to explicitly exhibit and utilize ICC practice, participants expressed, "If you tell me I do something wrong. I mean, next time I will do better, but you need to explain it to me. If I don't know what's wrong, what's going on… I will quite" (Angie). Angie's account of her student-teacher interaction is an example of who lacks the knowledge, comprehension, and skills necessary to shift her reference to meet this student's ICC needs. Inevitably, Angie's ability to engage and remain committed to this GenEd learning process suffered. The same disconnect is true for Jae's account of her experience in a GenEd stating, "He's awful. I don't like it... He thought we did it before. He said, you don't know the password. You don't know how..."

The result in this chart conversely correlates with participants' response from the previous chart to reflect, low GenEd enrollment, poor student teacher relationship, and little to no academic growth.

Theme C: Responses from Interviews and Observations

The interview and observation data presented for Theme Topic B inadvertently supports Theme Topic C. My preliminary analysis in the italicized portions of my field notes indicated ABE ESL students' academic growth is negatively impacted when teachers neglect to employ intercultural practices. Furthermore, upon completing the data collection portion of the study, I returned to my preliminary observations to expand my initial evaluation.

I wonder if Slown would have felt differently if Ms. Li had provided several examples of how to utilize different types of clues during her direct instruction … This may have been a great opportunity for her to field questions from Slown—I wonder why she didn't ask him what she could do to empower him during this instructional time?

I wonder why Ms. Li chose this particular passage. My interview with Slown revealed his Lexile score is equivalent to that of a 4th grader, 420L, so I wonder if Slown would have responded more favorably to the lesson if Ms. Li chose a passage closer to his literacy abilities. Additionally, best practices for read-alouds encourage readers to model talking to the text, so I wondered why Ms. Li did not employ this technique.

Since Ms. Li did not employ contextualization so that Slown could make meaningful connections with her instruction, Slown's understanding the context suffered. Likewise, Ms. Li's failure to draw from interculturally competent attitudes, knowledge, and comprehension stunted her *internal outcomes* (flexibility, adaptability, and empathy) thereby caused her to communicate ineffectively with Slown.

Incidental Finding

While the focus of this inquiry explored ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices at CSCAD, a number of participants also expressed their perceptions of their children's teachers' interculturally competent practices or lack thereof. To this point Jill shared, "When I go to my daughter in school I wear scarf and sometimes longer dress but sometimes I wear because I want to go to the mosque…they are very rude to me." Empathizing Stone added, "It's okay because

everybody has freedom to change what style they wear… Why you laugh at that? Just try to respect. Why you judge so? (Slown).

Implications

The implications herein suggest ABE ESL students are highly motivated by teachers' ICC practices. As such, CSCAD stakeholders should work toward ensuring this population's interculturally competent communicative needs are met.

Summary

Considering the results of the data analysis I ascertained from participants' points of view and experiences, I now have a clearer understanding of how adult ESL students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' ICC practices affect their decision to enroll in GenEd courses at CSCAD. The data from the transcripts and my field notes yielded three overarching findings:

- ABE ESL students have substantiated perceptions of the tenets of interculturally competent practices

- Interculturally competent practices have influenced ABE ESL GenEd enrollment

- The absence of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classroom negatively impact ABE ESL students learning experiences

Conclusively, reciprocal determinism theory (what we think about our environment directly affects our behavior [Bandura, 1978]) principally indicated how students' perceptions of ICC practices acutely impacted ABE ESL Level 4+ students' decision to enroll in GenEd classes. Their essential response suggests ABE ESL participants were apprehensive about enrolling in GenEd courses for fear of being

91

misunderstood. Hence, though the majority of them had no prior experience with GenEd teachers from this ABE program, their perceptions of being ill-received hindered their GenEd enrollment. Moreover, the students who had existing exposure to GenEd teachers exhibited signs of disconnect from these teachers.

This investigation implicates ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd interculturally competent practices are substantially significant. Quite ingenuously, perceptions derive from one's individual and communal experiences. Therefore, if the desired outcome is to change students' perspectives of GenEd teachers' ICC practices and the adverse impact on their GenEd enrollment, GenEd educators must practice ICC. Presumably, these educators would employ ICC practices if they knew how to—hence, knowledge/training of ICC instructional practices is a logical progression for intervention. This "new knowledge not only better enables teachers to understand students and their world but also empowers the learners themselves" (Hubbard & Power, 2003, p. 1).

Since action research aims to "understand a practice and articulate the rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve it (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 4), Chapter 5 offers specific interpretation and discussions of this data in correlation with the aforementioned theoretical applications. In doing so, I hope to present implications and recommendations from students' shared perspectives/experiences that would ultimately improve this adult education program.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction and Overview of Study

The specified purpose of this inquiry was to gain a robust understanding of adult ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent (ICC) practice in GenEd classrooms. Considering empirical studies emphasizing ICC instructional practices are fundamental motivators for ESL students (Boylan, 2018; Henry, 2014; Ollerhead, 2013), I endeavored to determine how ABE students' views of ICC affect their enrollment in GenEd classes. Chapter 4 presented findings to address the following research objectives:

- to identify ABE ESL students' perceptions of interculturally competent practices in the classroom

- to analyze how the implementation of interculturally competent practices impact ABE ESL students enrolling in GenEd courses

Since I aimed to understand ABE ESL lived experiences, I employed qualitative measures (focus group, semi-structured interviews, and field notes from GenEd classroom observations). These findings afforded me deeper understanding of students' perceptions as related to the theoretical framework and literature review.

Recap of Methodology

Hence, this phenomenological qualitative action research was designed to examine ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' ICC to unearth how

93

students' perceptions influence their GenEd enrollment. Though more than half of the student population at Central South Carolinian Adult Education Center (CSCAD) were ABE ESL, proficient English language ABE ESL learners rarely enrolled in GenEd courses. Determined to understand reasons for this apparent phenomenon, I recruited a purposive sample of 12 ABE ESL students to participate in a series of interviews, observations, and focus groups designed to explore this phenomenon.

Summary of Research Findings

The data collected from ABE ESL students illustrate how their perceptions of intercultural practices negatively impact their decision to enroll in GenEd classes. Per a constructivist approach, students' cultural identities and worldviews are directly linked to sociolinguistics (Deardorff, 2009; Emdin, 2016; Freire, 1998, 2017; hooks, 1994; Nieto & Booth, 2010; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014). Essentially, ABE ESL students' endeavor to embolden the English language proficiency has the potential to expand their cultural enlightenment. Unfortunately, this population of students has opted to forfeit this opportunity because they fear they will be misunderstood in GenEd settings.

When asked to express their perceptions of ICC practices in the classroom, they reflected upon their expresses with ESL ABE teachers versus the perceptions of GenEd teachers. As displayed in Figure 4.1, students expressed an ESL teacher's ICC practices in terms of how they value other cultures; withhold judgment; tolerate ambiguity; and demonstrate a depth of cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness, adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative views, and empathy that far exceeds that of GENED teachers. These perceptions were ultimately caused CSCAD Level 4 students to opt out of pursuing GenEd courses.

94

Moreover, in regard to reciprocal determinism, which is connected to social cognitive theory, ABE ESL students' adverse cognition of GENED environments causes them to abstain from GenEd classes. This perception was also expressed by student-parents pertaining to their children's teachers' ICC practices.

While the participants who engaged in the semi-structured interviews spoke favorably about their perceptions of GenEd teachers' intercultural practices, my field notes revealed student-teacher exchanges did not reflect ICC practices as described in Figure 3.1.

Evans (2001) posits, "over time, success depends crucially upon adaptability—so much so that the two are nearly synonymous" (p. 142). However, given the undependable account of CSCAD operational existence, I would argue adaptability is crucial to the survival; unfortunately, this survival does not equal success. Instead, all components of this system are obligated to acclimatize, but these adjustments are means of conservation, not innovation.

Description of Action Research as a Curriculum Leader

I will begin by inviting my director to present *why* we need to move toward this change, which at base is because the missed opportunity of fully engaging the Central South Carolinian Adult Education Center (CSCAD) ESL population limits our program's funding, which could lead to the closing of school. After she delineates the need for change, we will have one to two sessions in which faculty and staff will be encouraged to openly bear their grievances and work through the loss of being apathetic toward aiding in the process of encouraging ESL students to partake in general education courses.

95

Then I will organize a series of at least three 1- to 2 hour professional development sessions, during which teachers and administrative staff can openly explore their mental models around their perceptions of ESL students and more specifically their beliefs about why ESL students are disproportionally represented in general education courses (Senge et al., 2012).

Thereafter, with the full support of my director, I will use the foregoing sessions to direct our team's attention toward *what* we can do to fix this issue and, in so doing, transition toward team learning sessions to generate open dialogue around collaborative intervention(s) (Evans, 2001). Then I would invite teachers to collaboratively consider *what* interventions should be implemented to realize this change, while using my research on intercultural competence to propose specific initiatives. Once we agree upon specific interventions, I will commit to organizing ongoing training to walk each teacher and administrators through *how* to implement said initiative(s).

Analysis of Mental Models

These inherent assumptions and beliefs culminate to form several mental models (MM), or cyclical threads of thoughts cultivated by individual experiences to frame how individuals see the world and those in it (Senge et al., 2012). In other words, we see what we want to see because of what we have seen to justify present and subsequent thought processes. Hence, the following ladders of inferences as outlined by Senge (2012) seek to delve into the mental models of each of the components in my system.

Table 5.1 *MM 1- Administrator/ General Education Teacher*

I adopt the belief that ESL students' inclusion needs should be deprioritized.
↑
I conclude ESL students are not interested in professional/educational advancement.
↑
Lack of ESL students' participation denotes they do not want to explore additional academic and or employment-related programs available to them at the general education site.
↑
ESL students are prone to find comfort in exclusive settings with other ESL students.
↑
I observe only 12.5% of the ESL student population is involved in general education activities.

→ Start of causal reflexive loop

Per numerous conversations I have had with our administrative staff and general

education teachers concerning ESL students' lack of participation in general education

opportunities, they have reluctantly grown to accept their absence as a norm, as culturally

(and quite honestly, stereotypically) ESL students prefer learning with other ESL students.

Aware of the stereotypical connotation said projection of cultural exclusion may exude,

another major default is we are not in the same building, so the dearth of convenience

that proximity brings is a viable reason why there is a huge disparity in ESL students'

general education interests. However, this rationale is threatened by the 12.5% of ESL

students who choose to take the five-minute commute to the main campus to partake in

career and or educational developmental courses. Once location is tabled, the consensus

among administrative and general education staff surrounds the universal

cultural/personal presumption that if ESL students really desired professional and/or

academic growth, they would prioritize their commitment to this end. Consequently,

since the majority of them are not invested, they are not interested; so, administrators and general teachers shift their focus to other areas of our program. This mindset reinforces the reflexive loop of perpetually neglecting our ESL population because they seemingly willfully choose to forfeit inclusion.

Table 5.2 *MM 2-ESL Teacher*

I adopt the belief that ESL and general education students will remain detached and choose to neglect encouraging my students to pursue some of the opportunities available to them on the main campus.	→ Start of reflexive loop
↑	
I conclude the entire ESL population's existence and/or academic performance is of peripheral importance to the general education staff.	
↑	
Main campus staff are not particularly concerned about the daily operational needs of ESL teachers nor students.	
↑	
A lack of effective lines of communication implies distance/separation/division.	
↑	
I observe limited/fragmented lines of communication with the general education (main campus) staff.	

As I have recently stepped into the role of Family Literacy Coordinator, I have had the formative privilege of regularly meeting with our ESL population. Per my observations and in-person and electronic communicative efforts, ESL teachers seemingly exist on the outskirts of all things universally program driven. While they do have opportunities to collaborate with main campus staff during designated professional development sessions, they are often selectively disengaged as evidenced by their "off stage" comments, "None of this information applies to us" (Homan, 2017, p. 33). Essentially, their detachment from main campus initiatives is indirectly communicated to their students, who then involuntarily choose to be dismissive, absent, and/or disengaged from all general education proposals. Per this belief, they perpetuate the reflexive loop

built on the notion that all things ESL are inconsequential, so passive dismissiveness is their coping default.

Table 5.3 *MM 3- ESL Student*

I adopt the belief that per lack of language and confidence, I should refrain from taking advantage of additional academic/professional opportunities available to me at our main campus.	→ Start of reflexive loop
↑	
I conclude ESL classes are the only ones I have access to within our Adult Education Center.	
↑	
ESL students willingly isolate themselves because we believe our English language proficiency limits us to ESL portions.	
↑	
Limited English language proficiency is equivalent to limited opportunities.	
↑	
I observe most of my classmates only partake in ESL classes.	

The encounters I have had with ESL students at their site have reinforced this perception that I (like all other general education personnel) am a foreigner infringing upon their instructional space and time. Hence, in an effort to eliminate the distance, I have made concerted attempts to be more visible and verbal about opportunities available to them on the main campus. Nonetheless, most of my bids have been rejected as I have very little rapport with these students. In fact, the general consensus I receive from both ESL teachers and students leaves a taste of purposeless, dutiful box-checking in my wake—and when I exit their site, I often feel like they all exhale, as if to say, "Now let's get back to our status quo, which is void of anything related to the general education setting." Hence, this causes the reflexive loop to persist because ESL students seemingly

perceive they are ill-equipped to move beyond the scope of their settings—so they dismiss additional opportunities.

Table 5.4 *MM 4- Family Literacy Coordinator/ELA Instructor*

I adopt the belief that effective balanced inclusive GenEd courses at CSCAD are highly unlikely.
↑
I conclude most ESL students refuse general education opportunities because they lack the confidence and language required to join these courses.
↑
ESL students, because they lack language confidence, tend to avoid participating in programs where they may feel intimidated and misunderstood.
↑
The lack of language equals the inability to communicate.
↑
I observe few ESL students attend general education courses.

→ *Start of reflexive loop*

I have been given a unique opportunity to help facilitate family literacy initiatives at both sites. In so doing, I have identified several students at the ESL site who could greatly benefit from some of the other opportunities we offer at our main campus (i.e., high school equivalency preparatory classes, Exploring Career Pathways through Family Services, Writing Workshop, Computer Basics, and paid construction apprenticeships). However, when I have encouraged these students to enroll, the majority of them politely declined. Nonetheless, since I have been teaching at the main campus, we have seen an increase (though small) in ESL students' matriculation into the general education population. As a result, I am led to believe my influence has caused this slight shift—but the huge disproportion of the ESL students' representation in general education programs remains a glaring issue. Thus, my reflexive loop draws me back to the improbable

100

possibilities of experiencing an increase in ESL students' participation in general education programs because I find it difficult to see past the solid lines they have drawn.

Description per Advocacy/Inquiry

Post creating these ladders of inference for all the influential components of my system, I am equally terrified and intrigued at the thought of actually having the opportunity to present my assumptions to each contributing component. Our educational team generally tends to collaborate effectively; however, when portions of the team turn into factions, healthy "on stage" discussions are replaced by silence and "off stage" venting (Homan, 2017). Therefore, I would seek to procure a space in which we can collaboratively explore our mental models concerning ESL students' absence as a team, before revealing the ones I have formed. To this end, I would slowly walk our staff through the concept(s) behind the ladder of inference to offer them an overview of the influential nature of mental models. Then I will facilitate skillful discussion to encourage teachers to articulate their reasoning; asking for clarification when necessary; and collectively making assertions here (Senge et al., 2012, p. 107).

Team Learning Activity

As an introductory icebreaker for my proposed Team-Learning activity, I would show an animated depiction of mental models entitled "The power of mental models" (Cabrera Research Lab, 2015) to generate whole-group discussions around assumptions and perceptions versus reality. Thereafter, I would explain the theoretical definition of mental models per Senge et al. (2012) and share Homan's (2017) presentation entitled,

"Inner sides of organizational change" to stress our goal for this exercise is primarily to reflect upon systematic assumptions.

Then I would divide the team into groups based on how I have categorized them as instrumental components of our system; ask each group to solicit one observation they have made about our ESL population; and walk themselves up the rungs of the ladder of inference. Next, I would ask the groups to reconvene to share their conclusions/beliefs with the entire team; explore each other's assumptions in terms of discussing similarities and differences, opposing points of view, and lines of reasoning; consider designing an experiment to test assumptions together; and reflect upon all proceedings for continuous clarity (Senge et al., 2012, p. 109).

Through this, and other Team-Sharing sessions, I hope to facilitate meaningful dialogue that would encourage the realignment of each team member's focus to work toward one common goal of meeting the aspirations of our ESL student population.

Action Plan

One of the foundational steps associated with motivating ABE ESL language proficient learners toward GenEd opportunities is creating more adult career pathways courses (ACPC). Though resources may be scarce, teachers could be encouraged to use their professional development (PD) sessions to design ACPC opportunities (Egan & Andress, 2018). This process first evolves defining and describing ACPC and integrated education and training (IET) as stipulated by WIOA. Therefore, instructors should have the information they need to identify, modify, and create courses and pathways that meet federal and state requirements. Egan and Andress's (2018) ACPC PD model encourages: expanding and strengthening connections for ACP programming with various local

102

workforce entities, building relationships with employers within the target career pathway sector and engage them in various aspects of the program, and identifying and addressing possible barriers to full enrollment in ACPC programs and build strong referral/recruitment streams to build strong enrollments (p. 22).

Researchers posit one major skillset educators should utilize in culturally diverse settings is intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2008; Mezirow, 1978; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014). The rationale herein is that ICC affords teachers "the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitude that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural settings" (Deardorff, 2006, par. 3). Since ABE ESL students are expected to partake in general education courses, general education teachers must possess the aptitude to effectively engage these students.

Hence, I plan to partake in a series of intercultural competence training to improve my student-teacher relationships with ABE ESL students. As an ICC advocate, I will reflect upon the contradictory nature of embracing commonalities in differences to create operational means to exercise ICC as outlined by leading ICC standards (Deardorff, 2008). Thereafter, I hope to develop training modules worthy of establishing and/or reinforcing ICC skills within general teachers. During these professional development sessions, teachers will reflect upon the unique components in their lives that have influenced their current existence (i.e. familial, communal, educational, professional etc.), and share their experiences through various mediums; reflect upon ways in which their individuality could be and/or has been used to enrich shared spaces; and explore practical avenues to consider ESL students' cultural differences. Then I will outline what it means to exercise intercultural competence in terms of exploring specific ICC attitudes, skills,

103

and behaviors; then create mock scenarios so that teachers could contextualize what they have learned during the professional development sessions.

Finally, I will administer summative assessments to encourage teachers to evaluate how they have applied ICC while instructing ESL students. Additionally, as this vision is regenerative, teachers will be encouraged to revisit ICC concepts and practices in sequel professional development sessions quarterly to collaboratively assess how the implementation of ICC has influenced their instructional processes, specifically in terms of meeting ESL students' culturally diverse needs.
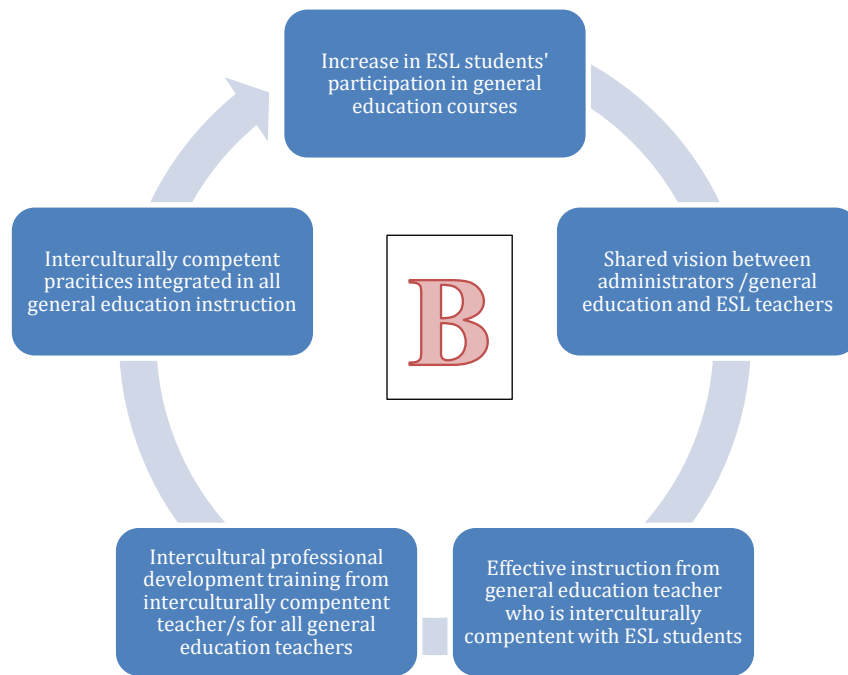

Figure 5.1. Systems thinking: Balancing processes

Consequently, shared vision herein will be implicated and realized because the primary purpose of this vision is to create collective spaces in which ABE ESL students experience respect, appreciation, and validation. Accomplishing this vision literally rests upon general education teachers' keen commitment to use ICC as an inclusive

instructional instrument. When this vision matures, the notion of "*ubuntu*: A person is a person because of other people," [which I initially absorbed through Dillard's (2012) work], will be reinforced to buttress the interconnectedness of all the components of my school's system (Senge et al., 2012).

Recognizing and Managing Complexities

Per the South Carolina Adult Basic Education (ABE) standards, when an ESL student displays promise of excelling in general education programs, teachers should encourage students to transition to general education courses, but these students are not required to transition (South Carolina Adult Education Assessment Policy, 2019). Subsequently, the ESL teachers are seemingly not pressed for strongly emboldening this transition, and ESL students apparently lack the confidence to seek additional opportunities beyond the walls of their classrooms.
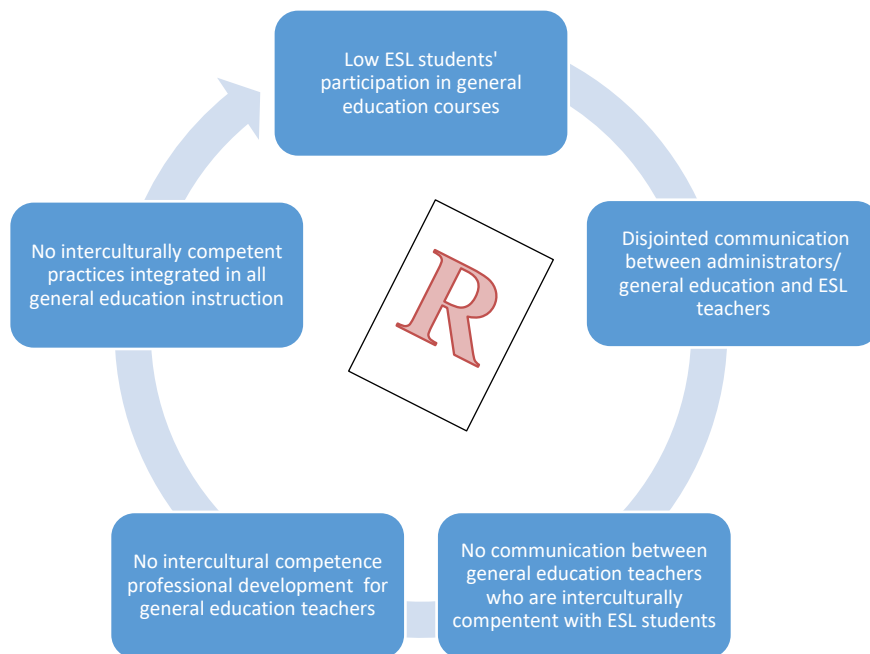

Figure 5.2. Systems thinking: Declining reinforcing processes.

Consequently, Senge et al.'s (2012) depiction of declining reinforcing processes is our present reality. Because ESL teachers are not required to encourage students to take advantage of additional opportunity and ESL students lack the confidence to seek GenEd opportunities, the significant potential for both ESL students and the entire school (especially in terms of funding) remains a moot opportunity. However, this undesirable causal loop could change direction if administrators created spaces for teachers to form a shared vision around prioritizing the sociolinguistic needs of the ABE ESL population.

Disconnect Between ESL and GenEd Population

Once the lines of communication are fragmented, the systematic relationships necessary for holistic success amongst all contributing parties face palpable decay (Senge et al., 2012). Our passionate administrative team seeks to engage and in few cases reengage the ESL population's interest with promising quick fixes like periodical visits and shared monthly events, but the "successive waves of school reform… fail to realize the improvements they promise" (Evans, 2001, p. 9). As a result, all contributing parties passively maintain disconnections— though recognizing the need to address this chronic pattern— as the norm.

Connection with ICC General Education Teacher

However, since I have been instructing the Reasoning through Language Arts High School Equivalency classes, most recently teaching a basic writing workshop course, and promoting Family Literacy initiatives amongst general and ESL students, our program has begun to see an increase in ESL students' involvement in general education

106

opportunities. Thus, a couple members of our administrative team have begun to question whether this increase is directly related to my teaching style.

Rodriguez-Garcia's (2014) dissertation study contends that two of the major reasons why adult ESL students display academic impassivity is because they are poorly engaged and do not feel personally supported nor connected to their instructors. Hence, I believe my ability to engage students through clear communicative measures, as evidenced by my interculturally competent practices, has contributed to this growing shift. So, if I am able to explore this proposition, ICC professional development training for general education instructors could be the "built-in intelligence" our system needs to find balance (Senge et al., 2012, p. 137).

Recommendations for Policy/Practice

Evans's (2001) definition of *unfreezing* the barriers that could impede change as "a matter of lessening one kind of anxiety, the fear of trying, but first of mobilizing another kind of anxiety, the fear of not trying" (p. 78) is a concept I must resolve with myself before I am able to passionately deliver my change proposal to the other influential components of my school's system. As an aspiring non-administrative agent of enduring change, I ultimately fear my vision will not garner the dedication necessary to mobilize my superior(s), peers, and/or students. However, given the severe loss our program will sustain if the ESL population is not more actively involved in general education programs, I fear our school will not be able to meet the required enrollment quota necessary to keep our doors open. Consequently, I progressively choose to move past this internal resistance, for the fear of trying could directly contribute to the cancellation of our entire program.

107

ESL Students' Resistance

Foremost, I plan to engage is our ESL students. The rationale behind this sequence is once our staff is fully invested, their pitch to students will yield desired results. For per Evans's (2013) expertise witness, "there is no curriculum content that can survive the way it's taught" (p. 107), meaning shared vision with adequate training is the formula for effective implementation. Thus, once our team grows to the place of sustainable commitment in which they cultivate the skills needed to realize our vision, we will infectiously earn the allegiance of our ESL students.

Director's Resistance

Initially, I plan to guide my Director through this unfreezing process, as her consent is necessary to begin addressing our entire educational team. She has not been able to convince District stakeholders that it is in our students' best interest to invest in a facility that would adequately house our entire population (ESL and general education), so I believe she maintains ESL students' detachment as one that is beyond her control. Thus, I will request a series of scheduled one-on-one meetings to discuss *why* she needs to release this no-building-crutch, *what* we can do in spite of deficient space, and *how* we can go about implementing this shift in our reality. In doing so, I trust she will be fully devoted to activating the untapped potential we have in purposefully working toward integrating our ESL students in the general education courses.

Teachers' Resistance

Following gaining her transition from loss to allegiance, I will ask her to coordinate a series of sessions with the entire staff and employ Senge's (2012) ladder of

108

inference to begin discussions around what they have observed about our ESL population, including their cultural/personal interpretations, assumptions, conclusions, and beliefs. I imagine these sessions will generate confusion and conflict as most of our general education staff have had very little open discussions about diligently pursuing our ESL students. As a result, I expect these sessions to vacillate between *apathy* and *grudging compliance* (Senge et al., 2012). Still, I believe the space between *apathy* and *grudging compliance* is precisely where our staff will have the opportunity to work through their bereavement. These sessions will afford them the opportunity to tussle with their individual and collective mental models to a state of exhaustion— and exhaustion will prove to be the most opportune chance for them to reluctantly move from *why* we should change to *what* we need to do (Evans, 2013).

Evans's (2001, 2013) second level of commitment in which staff ask, "Change to *what*?" envelops the next two levels of Senge's (2012) degrees of support: *grudging compliance* and *formal compliance* (Evans, 2001). Since compliance implies doing something, at this juncture, in addition to offering my and our Director's predetermined recommendation(s), I will solicit suggestions from the staff to offer them an opportunity to invest in the planning process because I believe if they are included in the building process, they will be more committed to the implementation phase. Naturally, this is where we will gradually transition to *genuine compliance* on to *commitment*— essentially, *how* to realize new competences to draw our ESL students in (Evans, 2001). After reaching a consensus on how to accomplish our vision, I will elicit the necessary training to include Mezirow's (1978) *Ten Stages of Transformation Learning Theory* to equip our

administrators and teachers with the skills and tools necessary to competently operate within progressive evolution.

Per Evans's (2001) description of one's career phases, the majority of teachers and administrative staff at my school are quite literally in the exit phase. In fact, of the five other general education teachers at our Adult Education Center, three are retirees who have opted to work part-time; another has a fulltime high school teaching position and teaches three nights a week with our evening students; and the other is eight years away from retirement. One of the major reasons why the majority of our faculty fits an older demographic is because most teachers prefer fulltime positions; however, due to budget constraints, our program is unable to afford more than two fulltime teachers. While it is yet possible for our primarily senior group of teachers to err on the more favorable leveling side of their exit from midcareer, presently they all display signs of "demotivation (boredom, a loss enthusiasm, diminished job interest)" (Evans, 2001, p. 103).

More pertinent to the conclusions I have drawn about their life experiences that could be a major source of their reluctance to adopt to my intercultural competence change proposal is that most of them have limited international travel experience, none of them have taught oversees, and none of them have taught whole groups of ESL students. Consequently, most of the conversations I have attempted to have around embracing a multicultural approach to education have mostly been one sided.

Implications for Future Research

Per constructivist principles, ESL ABE students are equal contributors of their learning environment(s). Therefore, it is necessary to explore ABE ESL students' ICC to

110

determine how their individual ICC impacts their educational experience in GenEd classrooms.

As the ABE ESL population continues to increase, so too should the research regarding understanding these students' needs. Conducting this study gave me greater insight into how ABE ESL students' perceptions of GenEd teachers' interculturally competent practices affect their enrollment. However, extensive research should be done to determine the impact ICC training has on ABE GenEd instructors. Once efficiency is determined, educators at CSCAD should employ ICC training and additional research should be conducted to explore the outcomes of the training for GenEd teachers who teach ABE ESL students. This proposed study should be quantitative so that stakeholders who are concerned about budgeting logistics could assess measurable results.

Furthermore, one major assumption regarding intercultural competence is that teachers who have developed their ICC will employ ICC instructional practices. However, additional research should explore whether educators' ICC is instinctively reflected in their instruction—this could be accomplished by engaging my colleagues in collaborative action research.

111

Concluding Remarks

The ABE ESL population's intercultural needs have been historically regarded as inconsequential to the success of ABE programs and individual students' holistic growth. However, their diverse needs should not be overlooked. If ABE GenEd educators aim to effectively serve their community, understanding ABE ESL perceptions of interculturally competent practices in GenEd classrooms is paramount. Hence, ABE ESL teachers should be intentional about developing and employing interculturally competent praxis.

Focus and Clarity

Upon further examination, it has become increasingly apparent that CSCAD educators can no longer continue to dismiss the disparity of ESL students involved in general education courses. For if we continue ignore this declining reinforcing path, our causal loop will accelerate our overall demise. ESL students historically have been unwilling to explore general education opportunities, but their unwillingness should motivate our educational team to create avenues to address this issue.

From a logistical standpoint, the reason *why* we need to intentionally work toward involving our ESL population is because their unwillingness to enroll in general education courses limits our program's overall funding (Evans, 2001). However, from a more holistic perspective, our entire school is seemingly squandering the opportunity to grow (academically and personally) through shared experiences. Hence, with the support of our Director, I will guide our entire team through a cooperative series of collaborative training to develop ICC skills that would cause all general education teachers to creating

112

classroom spaces in which our ESL students feel welcome, individually validated, and ultimately educated.

Scope and Complexity

The goal of this change proposal begins with the mental shift of my Director. Since she is the primary administrator who approves change initiatives, she must comprehend, commit to, and approve my proposal. Based on the discussions she and I have already begun regarding this vision; I am confident I will have her full support. Also, considering this change plan is intended to be disseminated throughout recursive semester-long phases, I will need her professional support to approve professional development sessions, and quite possibly financial support for ICC training material. My financial request(s) has/have the potential to complicate this proposal because as mentioned, our school's funds are limited, but I remain hopeful that my Director will agree to proceed accordingly because she seemingly refuses to accept ESL students' general education absence as the status quo (Evans, 2001), and recognizes this proposal is a means to ultimately increase funding.

Desirability

The very existence of our school is solely dependent upon all students' full commitment. As a result, at base, because our team hopes to maintain employment, our motivation to collectively work toward implementing this change is intrinsically probable. In terms of specific methods, (as expressed in the previous section) I plan to actively solicit our team's input on a continuum, so that they hold equal stakes in this process. Instead of looking to one change agent, we will all be asked to contribute to the planning

113

and execution process herein. This will potentially be desirable to teachers because they will first learn ESL students' needs, our Director will contextualize the potential for gain and/or loss regarding ESL students' participation, and they will offer collaborative intervention methods.

Furthermore, at base, I believe both teachers and administrators value their income, so if they could realize the direct correlation between ESL students' involvement in general education programs, their desire for committing to the change will increase. Correspondingly, most ESL students voluntarily enroll at our school because they desire to better themselves; hence, if additional opportunities are readily accessible to them, they are likely to utilize them.

Feasibility

One of the most effective ways to embrace another individual's culture is to learn that person's language. However, since we have eight different languages represented, it is completely unfeasible to ask our staff to seek unity through language acquisition. Alternatively, Freire (1998, 2000) proposed contextualizing content through shared culture(s) is an effective way to foster sustainable and impactful adult education. So given practical time frames, well-planned ICC training, and the overall support of administrators, I believe our team will "feel they can achieve" this change plan (Evans, 2001, p. 85).

Pragmatically, I will function as the primary facilitator who will contextualize teachers' recommendations and organize professional development training sessions. I will also use electronic instruments to share information when possible so as to eliminate unnecessary meetings. Ultimately, I will serve as the main liaison between ESL students,

114

teachers, and administrators. Consequently, respecting teachers' time by managing the

logistics will make this proposal feasible.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

These questions were developed for the students who participated in the focus group. Considering the session was semi-structured, students were encouraged to freely ask additional relevant questions.

1. How would you define the term intercultural?

2. Should teachers exercise interculturally competent practices in the classroom? Why?

3. What are some outcomes ESL students may experience from teachers who practice interculturally competent practices?

4. What are some outcomes ESL students may experience from teachers who do not practice interculturally competent practices?

5. Do interculturally competent practices influence students' learning? Why? Why not?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

These questions were developed for the students who participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Students were encouraged to freely ask additional relevant questions, as well as expound upon their responses.

1. Describe your communicative relationship with your GenEd teacher.

2. Does your GenEd teacher value other cultures? Explain.

3. Does your GenEd teacher withhold judgment of others' culture? Explain.

4. Does your GenEd teacher ask you to share some of your cultural experiences relating to the lesson? Explain.

5. Could you share an instance in which your GenEd teacher shared something specific about her cultural practices related to a lesson?

6. Do you think your GenEd teacher has a wealth of knowledge about others' culture? Explain.

Appendix C

IRB Certification

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
DECLARATION of NOT RESEARCH

Nelecia Murrell
Lexington Richland School District 5 Adult Education Center
6671 St. Andrews Road
Columbia, SC 29212 USA

Re: Pro00095790

Dear Nelecia Murrell:

This is to certify that research study entitled *Understanding The Intercultural Motivators That Encourage Adult Basic Education English as a Second Language Students to Pursue General Education Opportunities* was reviewed on **1/7/2020** by the Office of Research Compliance, which is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Office of Research Compliance, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, has determined that the referenced research study is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

No further oversight by the USC IRB is required. However, the investigator should inform the Office of Research Compliance prior to making any substantive changes in the research methods, as this may alter the status of the project and require another review.

If you have questions, contact Lisa M. Johnson at lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager