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ABSTRACT

An overview of adult education programs and services for limited-English-proficient adults is offered. The population targeted by these programs and services is estimated at 4 to 6.5 million United States residents, refugees, and immigrants. Adults and out-of-school youth 16 years and older are eligible for federal adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs. Most of those currently served are immigrants, and the largest language group is Hispanic. Enrollment in the federal adult education program has risen from 396,000 in 1980 to over 1.5 million in 1993. ESL is the fastest-growing instructional area in the adult education program. Adults participate in the programs for a variety of reasons, including improved employment potential, better communication, greater participation in society, desire for citizenship, completion of academic objectives, and increased ability to help their children. A variety of approaches, methods, techniques, and technologies are used in the classroom, and generally at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. Instruction usually focuses on language functions, communicative competence, and grammar. A variety of formal and informal measures are used to determine student needs and progress. Eight organizational sources for further information are listed. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Adult Learning & Literacy Clearinghouse

Adult Education for Limited English Proficient Adults

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ADULT LEARNING & LITERACY

Clearinghouse

February 1995

Adult Education for Limited English Proficient Adults

Why Are ESL Services Needed?

According to the 1990 Census Report, an estimated 4 to 6.5 million residents of the United States either speak no English or have only limited English proficiency. Current figures may be higher. Additionally, a large number of new immigrants to the United States are illiterate in their native language or have few years of formal schooling in their home countries. Because of their limited language skills, non-English speakers are often confined to employment in entry level jobs or are unable to participate fully in an English language society.

As a result of these changing demographics, the demand for English as a Second Language services continues to rise, as do enrollments, class sizes and waiting lists in states such as California, Florida, Texas, New York, and Illinois.

Who Is Served?

Adults and out-of-school youth 16 years of age or older, who have limited ability in speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language or whose native language is not English are eligible for services offered in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs funded under the Adult Education Act, Public Law 100-297, as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, Public Law 102-73.

English as a Second Language programs are designed to help these adults learn to communicate in English so that they can meet their personal, vocational, academic, and employment goals. Adult ESL participants include permanent residents of the United States, refugees, migrant workers, and immigrants. Immigrants represent the largest group served in the Federal Adult Education Program. Participants come from a broad array of cultural, educational, and socio-economical backgrounds.

In Program Year 1993, more than 3.9 million adults were served in the Federal Adult Education Program. Enrollment in ESL classes increased from 396,000 (or 19 percent) in 1980 to over 1.5 million (or 40 percent) in 1993. English as a Second Language (ESL) is the fastest growing instructional area in the adult education program.

Currently the single largest language group served in adult ESL classes is Hispanics, who represent 31 percent of the total adult education enrollment. Asians, the other major group receiving ESL services, represent 14 percent of the total participants in the program.

Why Do Limited English Proficient Learners Participate in Adult Education Programs?

For a variety of reasons, adults enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Many want to learn the English language, some want to gain employability or improve job skills, others want to communicate in English with family, friends, or employers. Others want to pass the citizenship test, obtain a GED or complete their academic education. Factors that motivate adults to learn English include the desire to help their children with school, work, or to increase their own confidence and self-esteem as members of their communities.

What Type of Instruction is Offered?

Language and literacy teachers support teaching that is learner-centered and meets the needs of individual students. Teachers use a variety of approaches, methods, techniques, and technologies in the classroom. Instruction may be offered in a student's native language or exclusively in English. In most cases, instruction is provided for beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels with specified goals and objectives for each level.

Most of the approaches to teaching adult ESL classes focus on language functions, communicative competence, and grammatical forms or structures. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are taught using instructional materials with a life skills content, especially for beginning level ESL students. Program offerings vary and may include instruction in citizenship, ESL literacy, basic skills, vocational, and academic ESL.

How Are Students Assessed?

Most instructional programs assess student needs and progress at regular intervals. A needs assessment examines such things as native language, literacy, English skills of the student, the literacy context in which the student lives and works, and what the student wants and needs to learn.

Needs assessments for adult ESL students focus on students' goals, abilities, proficiencies, and accomplishments using a variety of formal and informal assessment measures. Some of the most widely used formal assessment instruments are the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), English as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA), and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Life Skills Listening Instrument. However, practitioners agree that no single assessment instrument currently exists that adequately measures student proficiencies. Therefore, a number of different assessment instruments must be used to measure student progress and achievements. The need to develop an ESL assessment for adults to measure oral and cognitive skills within language and community contexts is critical to measuring student progress.

Where Can I Find Resources for English as a Second Language Programs?

Fortunately, a number of resources for teachers and students of English as a Second Language programs now exist. More information on teaching adults with limited English skills can be obtained by consulting with the director of adult education in your state or by contacting the selected list of national resources listed below:

- ◆ National Clearinghouse on
ESL Literacy Education (NCLE)
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 429-9292

- ◆ Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL)
1600 Cameron Street, # 300
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 836-0774
- ◆ ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210
(800) 848-4815
- ◆ Illinois ESL Adult Education Service Center
1855 Mt. Prospect Road
Des Plaines, IL 60018
(708) 803-3535
- ◆ Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)
8910 Clairmont Mesa Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92123
(619) 292-2900
- ◆ Literacy Assistance Center, Inc.
84 William Street
New York, NY 10038
(212) 803-3300
- ◆ National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education
1118 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 467-0867
- ◆ The Staff Development Institute for
California Adult Education
9738 Lincoln Village Drive
Sacramento, CA 95827
(916) 228-2640

For Additional Information Contact:

Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse
600 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-7240
Fax: (202) 205-8973
Internet: Joyce_Campbell@ED.Gov