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Community College academic ESL program roles and purposes: perspectives from administrators, faculty, and students

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC ESL PROGRAM ROLES AND PURPOSES: PERSPECTIVES FROM ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY, AND STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my spouse, Amy, my daughter, Meredith, and to daughter #2 on the way. With much love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are owed to the many people who helped me to progress to this point. This includes foremost my family who supported me throughout the entire process. Thank you, Mom, for your willingness to read and revise my work. Thank you, Amy, for your constant support and love, and thank you, Meredith, for understanding that Daddy has a lot of work sometimes. I am also grateful to Dr. Kanno for her guidance, support, and expertise, and to my committee members for their insightful and thorough feedback. Thank you also to Kuang and Henry for being great colleagues and fellow travelers on the road to a PhD. And finally, thank you to all of the participants at my research site for your time and thoughtful comments.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC ESL PROGRAM ROLES AND PURPOSES: PERSPECTIVES FROM ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY, AND STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Community colleges serve a crucial role in providing higher education access for U.S. English learner (EL) populations. Many ELs are placed in community college academic ESL programs in order to prepare them to transition to taking courses in the wider college. Yet, the success of academic ESL programs has been mixed at best, with these programs appearing to function as barriers to EL student success rather than as pathways to higher education. This case study examines one community college's Academic ESL program in the northeastern United States to determine what is the intended role of the program and what role does the program actually play in the wider college and in individual student trajectories. To determine which factors impact the Academic ESL program's role, data collection included state and institutional-level documents, interviews with college administrators, faculty, and staff, and classroom observations. My theoretical framework included a modified version of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model in conjunction with raciolinguistic and orientations in language planning lenses.

The findings identify that the Academic ESL program did not function as intended, and that factors at each level of the program's ecological system (exo, outer-meso, inner-meso, and micro) contributed barriers to the Academic ESL program's success. First, policies regarding tuition, financial aid, and immigration all hindered Academic ESL program enrollment. Second, the program's structure, curriculum, lack of coordination between levels, and the divergent viewpoints of the faculty who taught in the program all created barriers to the program serving as a pathway for ELs into the wider college. EL students who managed to transition from the Academic ESL program to other college coursework faced additional barriers in the wider college, including a language support as accommodation discourse and a Nursing program which was hesitant to admit many linguistic minority (LM) students from entering due to accreditation concerns regarding whether they could contribute to low pass rates on national exams. An underlying reason for these factors was that administrators at the state and college level did not adequately address the role of language in higher education or prioritize the needs of linguistically diverse populations.

This study argues that traditional academic ESL programs are often ill-suited to serve many EL populations. In response, community colleges should not only seek to overhaul ineffective academic ESL programs, but also to create pathways for ELs of varied proficiency levels to better access already existing vocational training programs. Furthermore, community colleges serving diverse populations should create and adopt campus language plans that identify resources as well as the roles and expectations of faculty and staff in supporting student language development.

Finally, this study highlights the need for decision makers and researchers to consider the complex ways in which actions at one structural level (state Department of Higher Education, administration, classroom, etc.) reverberate across levels. Creating more equitable ESL programs and support for ELs can only occur when varied factors, many of which are beyond the control of any individual college or faculty member, are fully considered and accounted for.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Community colleges are an integral part of the higher education landscape in the United States. As of 2019, they enroll 41% of all U.S. undergraduates (AACC, 2021). These colleges offer open enrollment access to higher education at a fraction of the cost of universities, attracting a student body diverse in age, race, and socioeconomic status (Community College Research Center, 2021), some of whom may not otherwise have been able to attend college (e.g., Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dawson et al., 2021). An important component of many community colleges is an English as a second language (ESL) program. These programs are designed to serve English learners (ELs), defined in this study as students whose academic English proficiency is deemed by their college through placement measures to be insufficient for them to be successful in mainstream college courses without preliminary or concurrent language instruction and support.

ESL programs are ubiquitous among community colleges and can have different aims. David and Kanno (2021), in their study of nine U.S. states, found that over 80% of colleges in their sample offered some sort of ESL-specific coursework; some colleges provided survival English coursework for immigrants, vocational training to improve employment opportunities, or just an opportunity for increased English proficiency (see also Bergey et al., 2018; Crandall & Shepperd, 2004; and Raufman et al., 2019). However, the focus of this study is *academic ESL programs*—programs oriented towards providing ELs a pathway to mainstream college courses. As the U.S. becomes more linguistically diverse (Ryan, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), academic ESL programs at community colleges offer the promise of college access for all regardless of initial

English proficiency.

Yet, this promise of college access leading to degree attainment remains unfulfilled. Not only have ELs enrolled in ESL coursework been shown to have lower persistence and graduation rates than either community college students generally or students enrolled in developmental coursework (e.g., Almon, 2012; Hodara, 2015; Jiang, 2022; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005; Raufman et al., 2019), but some research indicates that enrolling in ESL coursework is detrimental to some community college ELs' outcomes (e.g., Hayward et al., 2022). As a result, some states have shortened ESL pathways (Rodriguez et al., 2019), and others have sought to eliminate community college ESL coursework altogether (e.g., Harklau & Baston, 2019). However, missing from the research is a thorough understanding of what factors might cause academic ESL programs to fall short of their aims or a clear sense of what roles these programs play within their respective colleges. While large scale studies of academic ESL program practices have been conducted in California (Bunch et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2019), very little research has examined individual academic ESL programs at community colleges as the unit of analysis (Miele, 2003; Song, 2006). Crucially missing from any of these studies is a case study methodology focused on what factors impact academic ESL program success. Additionally, missing are the combined insights of ESL students, faculty, and administrators regarding their college's ESL program.

This exploratory case study of Sweetwater (a pseudonym) Community College's Academic ESL program examines, what is the intended role of an academic ESL program versus what is the actual role the program plays within the college and in

individual student outcomes? To answer this question, I use state and institutional-level documents, interviews with college administrators, faculty, and students, and classroom observations as my data sources. The chapter continues with an overview of community college ESL programs, EL populations at community colleges, and EL student outcomes at community colleges. I then address my rationale for the study, the theoretical framework I use, my researcher positionality, and the potential significance of the study.

Community Colleges and ESL Programs

The existence of ESL programs at community colleges should not be surprising. A central mission of community colleges is to provide pathways to higher education for students who would otherwise be unable to attend college (Dougherty, 1994). Thus, democratizing college access for all populations is key to the identity of community colleges. The fact that David and Kanno (2021) found that 80% of community colleges in their nine-state sample had ESL programs is reflective of larger demographic trends in the United States. Just since 1990, the number of U.S. residents who are nonnative English speakers (NNES) has nearly doubled, from 31.8 million in 1990 to over 67 million, with more than one in five Americans speaking a language other than English at home (Ryan, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). English learners (ELs) comprise one of the fastest growing populations in U.S. education (National Education Association, 2020). In addition to the vast number of domestic ELs attending community colleges a significant number of international students attend community colleges on F1 visas. During the 2020–2021 school year, over 60,000 international students attended community colleges, a drop of 20,000 from the previous year, likely as a result of the

COVID pandemic (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021; Open Doors, 2021).

Definitions of EL Populations

ELs are not a monolithic group. Community colleges enroll ELs from diverse backgrounds, including US-educated ELs, adult immigrants to the United States, and international students on F1 visas (Bergey et al., 2018; Raufman et al., 2019). Despite the inherent differences among these three groups, community college ELs share some commonalities. First, community college ELs are as likely, if not more likely, than the general population to be from a racial minority background (Conway, 2010; Hodara, 2015), and U.S.-educated ELs and adult immigrant ELs tend to be older (e.g., Almon, 2012), and to have lower socioeconomic status (Jenkins & Weiss, 2011). However, the unifying characteristic of the EL term is that ELs are determined by the placement measures of their institutions as needing additional English support through ESL coursework before being permitted to enroll in only mainstream college courses.

Granted, there are limitations to this conceptualization of EL status. For instance, many potential ELs intentionally avoid identifying themselves as nonnative English speakers in order to avoid being directed towards ESL placement measures (Raufman et al., 2019). Such students may see ESL programs as an unnecessary hindrance, may not see themselves as ELs, or simply may not see the ESL program as serving their needs. Furthermore, flawed assessment criteria may place English proficient students in ESL coursework unnecessarily (e.g., Bunch et al., 2011). Moreover, this definition excludes students who have been identified through placement as needing to take ESL coursework

but who decide against taking ESL coursework. Thus, the definition I use for this study includes non-ELs who have mistakenly been placed in the ESL program and excludes ELs who have intentionally avoided being placed in the ESL program or who decide after being placed in ESL coursework to not enroll in classes. Of added note is that point that Ls who avoid being identified as such are challenging if not impossible to identify.

Since this study is focused primarily on the ESL program as the case to be studied and not prospective students themselves, I have chosen this institutionally-focused definition. To clarify that EL is an institutional definition, I also use two other terms to describe participants in my study. For students in the wider college that I know have completed ESL program coursework because they are my participants, I have given the designation of "former English learners" (former ELs). This term is simply meant to denote that the student indicated has formerly taken courses in the Academic ESL program and is not meant as a judgement on the student's level of English proficiency or whether additional institutional assistance is warranted. For all other students who speak a language other than English at home, including those who may have at one time been placed in Academic ESL coursework at Sweetwater Community College (SWCC) but are not direct participants in this study, I have designated as linguistic minority (LM) students (see Kanno & Harklau, 2012). This term will be used when talking about college and faculty responses to linguistically diverse students generally, not just those who have exited the Academic ESL program. While these additional terms are useful in discussing students not enrolled in the Academic ESL program, the main focus of my study is on the program itself.

In the paragraphs that follow, I describe the three main types of community college ELs that have been identified in the literature (Bergey et al., 2018, Raufman et al., 2019): U.S. educated ELs, adult immigrants to the United States, and international students on F1 visas.

US-educated ELs, sometimes labelled Generation 1.5 students, "consist . . . of immigrants and U.S. residents born abroad as well as indigenous language minority groups. . . . coming out of U.S. high schools" (Harklau et al., 1999, pp. i–viii). U.S.-educated ELs may have spent their entire lives in the United States or immigrated during their high school years (Raufman et al., 2019), but their language abilities and instructional needs differ from both U.S.-born monolinguals, and recent immigrants (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008). Many of these students or their parents were born in Latin America, and face the challenge of navigating a monolingual, English dominant school culture that differs from their family's (Masterson, 2007). A linguistic feature common to U.S.-educated ELs is aural/oral language proficiency that is sufficiently strong to mask that they are English learners but writing which demonstrates that they are still in the process of acquiring academic written English (Nuñez et al., 2016). Consequently, much of the literature on these students relates to the teaching and acquisition of academic writing (e.g., Harklau et al., 1999; Oudenhoven, 2006; Roberge et al., 2009).

Adult immigrants to the United States who were not educated in U.S. high schools (e.g., Tuliao et al., 2017) comprise the second group of ELs. In the literature, this group is sometimes labelled as English as a second language students, or *ESL students* (Freeman et al., 2016). However, in this study the term ESL will only apply to courses

offered to ELs, not to the students themselves. Adult EL immigrants resemble one another because they are in the process of acquiring English, but they diverge in nearly any other category. For instance, recent immigrants to the U.S. are both more likely to have less than a ninth-grade education and more likely to have a bachelor's degree than U.S.-born adults (Batalova et al., 2020). Many of these students have college degrees from their home countries, while others are not literate in their first languages. Some are in their early 20s, and others are much older. Some are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, while others are undocumented. Students may come from differing economic situations and have widely varying educational plans and goals, some just trying to converse in the language, while others are attempting to attain academic language proficiency (Zong & Batalova, 2016). In sum, adult immigrant ELs vary in age, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, educational background, level of literacy in their first language, immigration status, and educational goals (e.g., Conway, 2010; Oropeza et al., 2010).

The third group of ELs attending community colleges is international students on F1 visas who plan to return to their home countries after completing U.S. higher education (e.g., Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Unlike the other groups, the exact number of international students at community colleges is known: 60,170 international students attended community colleges during the 2020–2021 school year (Open Doors, 2021). Over 15% of these students are from China, and common countries of origin include China, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, and Mexico (Open Doors, 2021). A major difference between international students and other community college ELs is that

international students must attend community colleges full time to fulfill visa requirements, while 60% of community college students attend part-time (Smith, 2017). Additionally, international students differ from other ELs because international students must prove beforehand that they can cover the entire cost of their U.S. stay, including health insurance (e.g., U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022).

While international student enrollment is becoming an increasingly important source of revenue for community colleges in some states (Wheeler, 2021), I have chosen not to directly address this population in my study. First, international ELs differ so substantially in their educational background and socioeconomic status from U.S.-educated ELs and immigrant ELs that they are essentially dissimilar beyond the fact that they desire to acquire English. Second, I believe that their presence at community colleges is tangential to the primary mission of community colleges: serving the people of the immediate community (Dougherty, 1994).

Although the number of ELs community colleges serve is unknown, based on the number of international students in community colleges (Open Doors, 2021), coupled with demographic trends in K–12 education (NCES, 2021) and the likelihood that high school ELs attend community colleges (Kanno & Cromley, 2015), community colleges enroll hundreds of thousands of ELs every year. Therefore, the impact of ESL programs on community college enrollment is significant and will become increasingly so as current demographic trends continue (Ryan, 2013; Nuñez et al., 2016).

Community College EL Outcomes

The success of academic ESL programs is mixed at best. One group often used to compare outcomes with ELs in ESL programs has been students placed in developmental education, since both groups are placed into preliminary or supplementary coursework before qualifying to take mainstream college classes (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Hodara, 2015). While ELs in ESL programs and non-EL students in developmental education may be similar in that they are identified as needing additional college support, they differ in a number of ways, including in their educational outcomes. Across numerous studies, ELs enrolled in ESL coursework have lower persistence and graduation rates than either community college students generally or non-ELs enrolled in developmental coursework (e.g., Almon, 2012; Hodara, 2015; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005).

Two largescale studies demonstrate this clearly. Jenkins and Weiss (2011) found in their analysis of Washington state community colleges that just 5% of students enrolled in ESL coursework went on to earn a college level credential, had transferred, or were still enrolled seven years after entry, half the rate of those enrolled in developmental or adult basic education coursework. Similarly, a study of the course-taking practices of over 200,000 California community college students by Patthey-Chavez, Dillon, and Thomas-Spiegel (2005) found that 62.2% of ELs placed in beginning ESL courses (two to five levels below ESL program exit) never progressed out of the ESL program. Furthermore, only 8% of these students went on to pass a college English course that could be used for transfer credit at another California college (i.e., English 101). Advanced ESL program students did better (one to two levels below ESL program exit),

with 28.9% of students passing transfer-level English courses, but both groups still lagged behind native English speaker developmental education students, 40% of whom passed transfer-level English composition courses.

Unsurprisingly, EL outcomes at community colleges are also lower than the general community college student population. For instance, Kanno and Cromley (2016), in their nationwide analysis, found that 22.6% of US-educated ELs who aspired to attain a bachelor's degree did so, as compared to 31.7% of native speakers of English. Almon (2012), using transcript data from a Pennsylvania community college, found that only 37% of students placed in this ESL program eventually completed ESL coursework, and just 13% of these students went on to receive an associate degree, significantly below the college's general graduation rate of 23%. Similarly, Razfar and Simon's (2011) study of Latinx ELs at a California community college found that 62.5% of students in their study never progressed beyond one level of ESL coursework, with only 37.9% of their sample taking more than two semesters of ESL coursework. In short, multiple studies point to lower community college EL persistence and graduation rates compared with general or developmental education community college populations (e.g., Hodara, 2015; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Rationale for the Study

Academic ESL programs at community colleges are designed as pathways for EL students to access courses in the wider college. However, ESL programs often seem to act instead as barriers to EL success (e.g., Hayward et al., 2022; Hodara, 2015). Studies which have contributed to our understanding of academic ESL programs have had a

variety of foci. Some have emphasized EL student factors which impact persistence and graduation (e.g., Artiaga, 2013; Nye, 2006; Ruecker, 2015), students' sense of marginalization (e.g., Almon, 2015; Harklau, 2000), or administrator-level issues of placement (e.g., Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Research regarding length of course sequence and curricular structure (e.g., Bunch & Kibler, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2019) has also been particularly impactful, contributing to policy changes and recent legislation in California (Seymour-Campbell Student Success ActAB705, 2017). Other emerging research has focused on how state-level initiatives impact community college ESL programs (Harklau & Baston, 2019; Key, 2022)

Yet each of these studies only gives glimpses as to why community college academic ESL programs often fall short of what they intend to accomplish. In many instances, the research has focused on one group of participants—EL students (e.g., Almon, 2015; Artiaga, 2013), ESL faculty (Johnson & Marchwick, 2008; Jones, 2008), or ESL faculty and administrators (e.g., Bunch et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2019). Additionally, little research has examined participant perspectives in the light of state-level policies or initiatives (e.g., Bunch et al., 2011; Harklau & Baston, 2019). No study has sought to synthesize the viewpoints of all three groups of participants (ELs, ESL faculty, and administrators) and connect these viewpoints with state-level influences. Until these data sources are combined, research concerning academic ESL programs can only partly get at the factors that are impacting academic ESL program success. Such research is urgently needed given both the number of community college ESL programs in the U.S. (David & Kanno, 2021), and demographic trends that portend increasing

numbers of ELs in U.S. higher education (Nuñez et al., 2016; Ryan, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Examining academic ESL programs in such a way requires utilizing a research methodology that allows for the analysis of multiple sources of data, where there are an unknown number of possible variables, and where there is an in-depth focus around a single phenomenon (in this case, an academic ESL program). Therefore, a case study methodology is ideal for this situation (Yin, 2018), and will be utilized for this study.

This case study examines the intended role of one Academic ESL program versus the actual role of the program through document analysis, interviews with administrators, faculty, staff, and students, and classroom observations. The theoretical framework I will use for this study is explained below.

Theoretical Framework

A preliminary step to exploring the role that community college ESL programs play is recognizing that any study of the "role" of ESL programs presupposes the program's existence within an organizational structure. In truth, academic ESL programs are rarely freestanding, but operate within one of a variety of possible departments (English, foreign language education, adult education, etc.) within a community college (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). Each community college is in turn governed by a board of trustees and overseen by its state's Department of Higher Education. Therefore, understanding the roles ESL programs play means examining the specific context and environment in which the program operates. To that purpose, I have utilized Walqui's (2022) and van Lier's (2004) conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological

Framework (1979) as the first lens of my theoretical framework.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework initially was conceived of to address methodological and theoretical failings in the then-current research regarding human development (1979). At the time, psychology research was often conducted in what Bronfenbrenner saw as sterile, decontextualized lab settings, a world away from the authentic, lived settings in which human development actually occurs. He posited that psychological research findings conducted in laboratory settings were often invalid because participants interacted in an unfamiliar setting, which led to them behaving in non-typical ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). He also saw studying phenomena in authentic contexts as essential.

But more fundamentally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) saw approaches to understanding human development that did not consider human interactions with their social environment as profoundly inadequate. Drawing from environmental ecology, which seeks to understand organisms within their environmental systems, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework foregrounds the environment in which human development occurs. Furthermore, not only did Bronfenbrenner posit that the environment in which one lives impacts development, but that the environment itself could be conceptualized as a series of nested systems (micro, meso, exo, macro, chrono) that interact with one another and the individual. He explains the micro system as "the immediate setting containing the developing person" (p. 3), then moving outward, the connections that person has, then events and influences not present, and extending further, social and cultural trends and changes over time.

While naming and categorizing these systems is useful, as van Lier (2004) explains, “The value of Bronfenbrenner’s models lies not in a nested set of systems, but in the focus on the relationship between them” (p. 210). Thus, each ecosystem (micro, meso, etc.), impacts one another, and Bronfenbrenner’s model provides a framework within which researchers can study the effect of systems on one another and on individuals.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model has also been utilized in studying language acquisition. van Lier (2004) described applications of this model for studying language acquisition in *The Ecology of Semiotics and Language Learning*. His conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner’s model labels the classroom as a microsystem, the school as the mesosystem, and the school district as the exosystem. By thus labeling the systems, van Lier’s model allows researchers to not only study the language acquisition of individuals, but to examine how systems which impact the conditions of language acquisition interact, are interconnected, and influence one another. This conceptualization is especially helpful in the present study, where the topic of analysis is not an individual learner or groups of learners, but an ESL program.

While van Lier’s formulation is beneficial, an even clearer description of what constitutes the systems of language ecology in education has been proposed by Walqui (2022). She conceptualized these systems as, “the microsystem (the classroom, its activities, teacher, etc.), the mesosystem (the school, principal, neighborhood) and the exosystem (the district, the state, policies)” (p. 1). While Walqui’s conceptualization is designed with a K–12 educational context in mind (i.e., principals and districts, see

Figure 1), I argue that the same type of system works for a higher education setting.

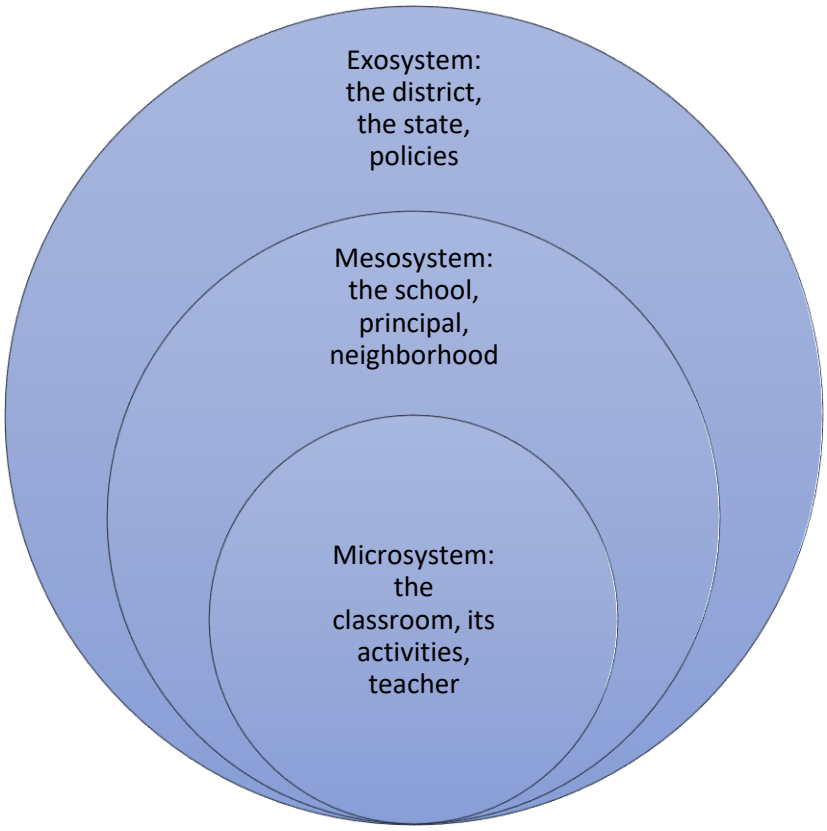

Figure 1. Walqui's Conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's Framework

Utilizing Walqui's framework allows me to structure my data collection so I can investigate each of the systems of influence within the ecology I am studying. I adopt Walqui's framework with a few modifications. First, I have modified the terms, which are geared towards a K–12 setting, to better match the community college context I investigated. Thus, instead of a principal, there are administrators (Academic Vice-President, Deans, etc.). Additionally, this community colleges did not have a district-level organizational oversight, so that term was deleted. However, both community colleges and K–12 education have state-level supervision (i.e., the Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education versus the Department of Higher Education). Thus, many of the levels are roughly equivalent.

I posit that one exception is that the academic ESL program I am studying functions within two sets of meso-level administrative systems. Classroom instruction, or the microsystem level, is impacted not only by college-wide policies and administrative influences (termed here the outer-mesosystem), but also by the structure of the academic ESL program's sequence, its outcomes, coordination between levels, and overall governance (the inner-mesosystem). In making this modification, I am not arguing for a theory-level change to Bronfenbrenner model or van Lier's or Walqui's conceptualization of the model. Rather, I see this change as an adaptation of the meso-level schema to better reflect the reality of the ecology I am studying.

I specify what I am categorizing as each of the systems (micro, inner-meso, outer-meso, and exo) for this study below in Figure 2. At the micro-level are those directly involved with classroom instruction—teachers and students, and the actual classroom experience. At the inner-meso level is the ESL program, structurally and organizationally. At the outer-meso level are college staff, administrators, wider college faculty, college policies, as well as community-level influences. At the exo-level is the state Department of Higher Education as well as other state or national-level policies or influences.

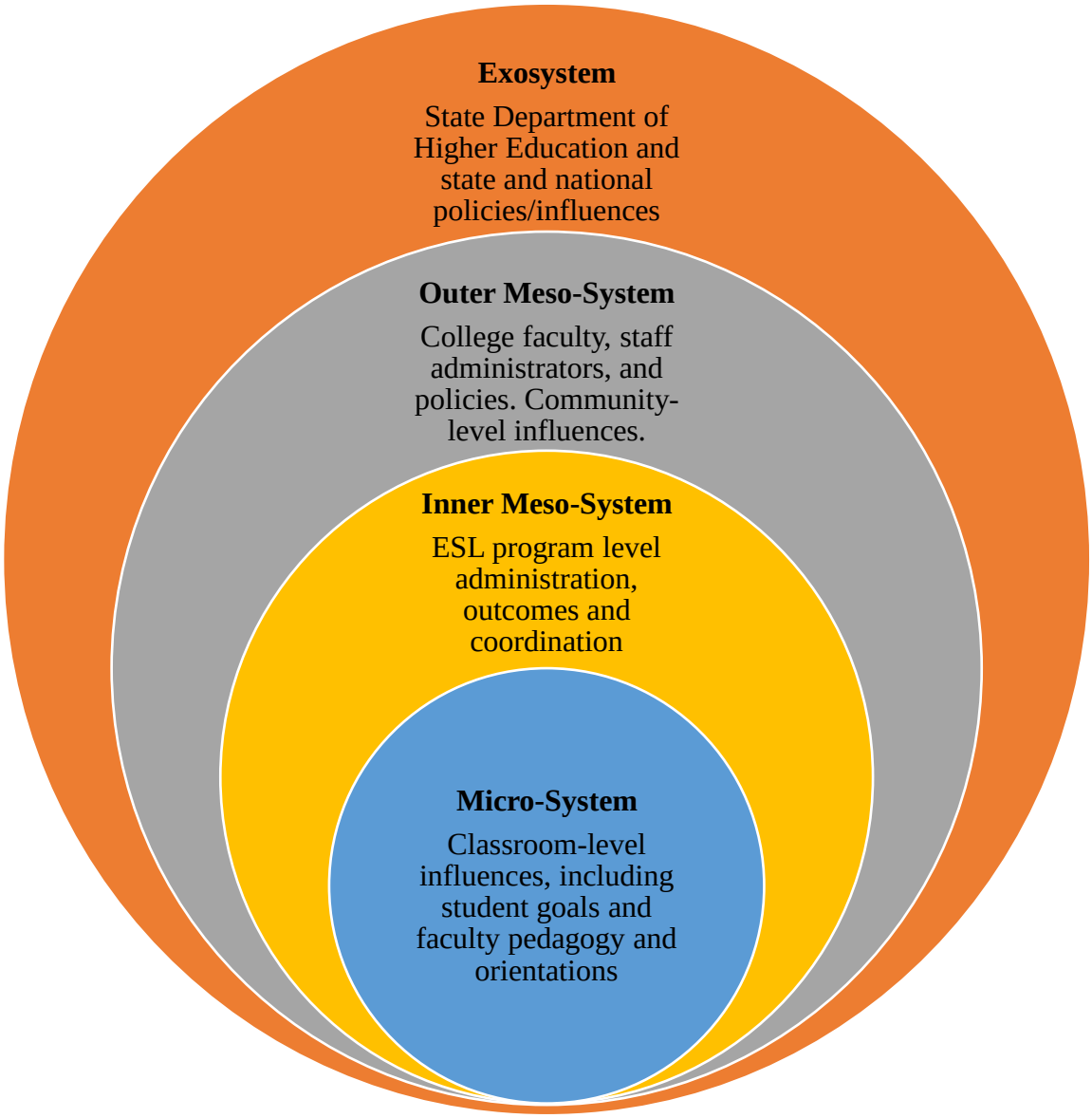

Figure 2. David's Conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's Framework

Thus, Bronfenbrenner's framework provides a basic structure through which I can examine the influences that impact community college ESL programs. However, the framework does not provide a clear basis for analyzing disjunctions between ESL program aim and actual outcomes. Therefore, I turn to two further lenses, raciolinguistics

and orientations in language planning, to explore these disjunctions.

Raciolinguistics

While the first lens of my theoretical framework focused on the context in which a community college ESL program operates, the second lens critically analyzes the language and norms around the language that students in ESL programs are expected to learn (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Rather than seeing the creation and use of what is termed "academic English" or "Standard American English" as apolitical, raciolinguistics examines the historical and cultural undercurrents that have led to the promotion of certain types of communication and the denigration of others, even to the point that some individuals are considered to be languageless (Rosa, 2016; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Furthermore, raciolinguistics boldly questions whether full acquisition of academic English is even possible for nonwhite bodies due to the role of the "White listening subject" in evaluating language proficiency and subsequently judging as "foreign," nonwhite speech (Rosa & Flores, 2017). The second lens of my analysis comes from the field of raciolinguistics.

At the heart of the raciolinguistic perspective is a recognition of the oppressive influence of white European colonialism worldwide and how perceptions of language and race have become co-naturalized over time (Rosa & Flores, 2017). The co-naturalization of language and race have caused Alim (2016) to argue the need for "languaging race" and "racing language," or in other words, recognizing and analyzing the role of language in recreating and reaffirming racial identity, while at the same time seeing how race illuminates sociolinguistic differences.

Of particular importance to raciolinguistics is recognizing how historical forces have created expectations and norms regarding language, including what is termed, "academic language." One of these ideas is the European conception of the single language monoglot nation-state. In practice, this concept marginalizes bilinguals and multilinguals of color as being languageless (Rosa, 2016), especially U.S.-educated ELs, who are a major demographic in community college ESL programs. Furthermore, because race and language are deeply entwined, Flores and Rosa (2015) ask whether individuals of color can ever be seen by the "White listening subject" as achieving mastery in academic language. In making this argument, they point out that many language practices that speakers of color use are seen as inferior, even when those same language practices would be seen as acceptable if produced by White speakers. Thus, an academic ESL program's ostensible goal of increasing English proficiency in order to transition to the wider college would not so much be an exercise in increasing academic language proficiency, but in determining the extent to which the students' language is acceptable to the "White listening subject" (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

One reason why I have chosen raciolinguistics as the second lens of my theoretical framework arises from the theory's interpretive and analytical power. Because previous studies have shown that community college ELs are more likely to be racially diverse than the general community college student population (e.g., Conway, 2010; Hodara, 2015), and that ELs have been shown to have lower student outcomes than other groups (e.g., Almon, 2012; Hodara, 2015; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005; Raufman et al., 2019), this research context calls for an examination of the co-construction of language

proficiency and race. A raciolinguistic lens is especially appropriate for the examination of ESL program aims versus outcomes because it critically examines the entire rationale of creating ESL programs. This lens asks if many of the challenges related to the acquisition of what is framed as advanced English language proficiency are at their heart actually the purpose of ESL programs: maintaining the existing colonial system by requiring multilingual students of color to fulfill the language expectations of the White listening subject. Furthermore, ESL programs could be seen as legitimizing discrimination by providing a reason for disbarring students of color from full college access and by offering what could be seen as a band aid solution to make ELs fit into a system of education based on White supremacy. This lens asks the question whether the observed disjunction I study is not a disjunction at all, but possibly a revelation of the actual intent of these programs.

Finally, I made the decision to use this lens for my framework in part because it forces me, as a White researcher, to critically examine constructs that I may subconsciously accept uncritically. At the very least, a raciolinguistic perspective will allow me to more critically examine the extent of academic English acquisition that ELs are expected to achieve.

Orientations in Language Planning

The third and final lens I will use for my theoretical framework draws heavily upon Richard Ruiz's paper, *Orientations in Language Planning* (1984). The paper is most famous for Ruiz's conceptions of the Language as Problem, Language as Right, and Language as Resource orientations to describe viewpoints towards language and its role

in society. Ruiz defines orientations to mean, "a complex of dispositions towards language and its role, and to languages and their role in society" (p. 14); these same three orientations continue to be used by modern researchers (e.g., Johnson & Richards, 2017).

However, the piece is not without its criticisms. For instance, Ricento (2005) claimed that the language as resource orientation Ruiz proposed, and which subsequently was common in the literature, was ultimately insufficient to being about the intended effect. Part of this criticism relates to Ricento's argument that this orientation commodifies language and separates language and identity. However, I do not see Ricento's criticism as reducing the usefulness of the orientation's framework as a heuristic tool for researchers.

For instance, Olga Bever, in her research regarding post-Soviet Ukraine, found that a "language as catalyst" orientation best described the linguistic and societal tension she witnessed (2017). In a similar vein, I am examining existing policies and practices to discover underlying attitudes and orientations towards language and language use, which I believe is a valid and fruitful analytical process. Furthermore, my data analysis will use Ruiz's framework to determine not only whether the orientations I find fall within the three orientations he initially labelled, but also whether other, new orientations altogether better describe what I am observing.

Examining the orientations already described by Ruiz is illustrative. For instance, a community college ESL program which holds a language as problem orientation would frame ELs as inherently deficient and would see them as needing correction through additional English instruction. From a policy perspective, a language as problem

orientation towards ESL programs would likely not lead to the awarding of credit for ESL coursework. In other words, the intended role of the ESL program would be viewed as the remediation of a problem: the limited English proficiency of ELs. Consequently, ESL programs would not be regarded as equal to or integrated with the rest of the college.

Conversely, a language as resource orientation would view ELs not as inherently deficient, but rather as already possessing something of value: proficiency in a language other than English. For example, rather than focusing on transitioning away from students' first language proficiency, ESL coursework would seek to build upon students' knowledge in their first language. Furthermore, a language as resource orientation would see the role of the ESL program as beneficial to the wider college, and its purpose would be to preserve and promote the ability and knowledge students already have in other languages while growing students' proficiency in English.

My reasons for using this third lens in my framework relate to the theory's interpretive power in crystalizing the sometimes-unstated orientations and assumptions behind viewpoints. The theory encourages a deep level of analysis and reflection in order to unearth the underlying orientations of those in power regarding the nature and role of language and language acquisition. This allows me to be able to see disparate college policies, practices, and opinions from a more grounded, wholistic viewpoint.

How These Lenses Interact

I believe that Ruiz's orientations framework will build upon my other two lenses: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework and raciolinguistics, and that the three will work in harmony with one another. The Ecological Framework lens provides analytical power in determining sources of influence which may impact ESL program aims and outcomes. In other words, the Ecological Framework helps a) provide a structural perspective on ESL programs, and b) assists in conceptualizing how to look at the ESL program. Second, a raciolinguistic viewpoint allows for a more critical vantagepoint of what ESL programs are designed to do, questioning the very heart of why ESL programs exist. Raciolinguistics additionally brings to the forefront historical forces and trends that I, as a White male researcher, may not initially consider. The third lens of orientations in language planning, fosters a close, insightful analysis of data in order to determine the underlying orientations towards language and language acquisition that those in positions of power hold. Furthermore, the third lens helps to create connections and bring a unifying framework to what might at its face be seen as a dissimilar set of data by looking for shared underlying assumptions and orientations.

Finally, the three lenses work together to provide a theoretical framework which answers the research topic of what is the intended role of the Academic ESL program and what is the actual role the program plays within the college and in student outcomes. The first lens allows for a clear conceptualization of the components to examine in the Academic ESL program by identifying the systems of influence at play (exo, outer-meso, inner-meso, and micro). The second lens critically addresses the intended aims versus the

actual impact of ESL programs from the exo-level down. This is accomplished in part by questioning whether the designed aim of ESL programs, conscious or not, is the reason for low student outcomes, not an aberration. Furthermore, the lens brings in the co-naturalization of race and language to the foreground. Finally, the third framework examines the orientations that state-level policy, school administrators, faculty, and staff express towards language and its role in society filtered from the exo-level down to the micro-level. Examining these orientations can allow me to determine how the orientations might influence the program's actual role within the college despite its intended role.

In summary, the three lenses that I have chosen create a theoretical framework which provides the analytical tools I need to provide a rich analysis of the data to answer my research question.

Researcher Positionality

As I examine the intended versus actual roles that community college ESL programs play, I recognize the need to reveal my own perspectives and positionality and how those factors impact my findings. I am White and grew up in rural Arizona. My mother and maternal grandfather both spent their careers as community college English teachers, with my mother teaching at the community college near my hometown. I saw our community college as a gateway to the wider world in terms of culture and education, and I attended many of the concerts, events, and performances at the college, but the only classes I took at the college were distance courses offered at my high school. My mother and maternal grandfather both instilled in me their belief in the open-access mission of

community colleges.

More recently, I have worked as an ESL instructor at the community college level and have accepted a position as an ESL program supervisor at community college in the area. However, I have never worked at the site where I conducted my case study. I already knew two administrators previous to the start of the study, but I have no direct impact on the governance and operation of the Academic ESL program of study, which ensures that I have had "little to no control over behavioral events" (Yin, 2018, p. 2) at the research site.

Two other items are worthy of note. First, I recognize that I am a White, male, native English-speaking researcher looking into issues that concern multilingual students of color. My background and the background of students enrolled in the ESL program are deeply dissimilar. Furthermore, I visited the school as a doctoral student from an R1 institution. Both conditions could lead to a large perceived power imbalance between myself and the students, faculty, and administrators I work with. I hope that highlighting my personal connection to the mission of community colleges can mitigate the power dynamic to some extent. However, I recognize that this alone is insufficient, and part of the reason I have chosen raciolinguistics as a lens in my theoretical framework is to foreground inherent power imbalances that involve language and race. The lens also serves and as a reminder of my own privileged position. Despite these efforts, I also realize that inherent power imbalances related to existing power structures and my own educational status, race, sexuality, language use and other elements may impact my findings and analysis in unanticipated and negative ways. Thus, my background and

preconceptions serve as a limitation of the study.

Potential Significance

More than twenty years ago, *The Report on the Community College Employment Standards Task Force* declared that "community colleges are major providers of academic ESL instruction" (Ellis, 1999, p. 4). However, in the years since, we have found that many academic ESL programs, rather than increasing EL's likelihood to transition to mainstream college courses, can inhibit students' academic trajectories (e.g., Hodara, 2015; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005). Better understanding community college academic ESL programs themselves is thus critical to determining how to improve EL student educational outcomes. This case study of one Academic ESL program sheds light on disjunctions between ESL program aims and actual impact as well as the role the program plays within the wider college. These findings could assist in determining how to ameliorate educational inequalities for ELs. The study's findings also may have implications which extend beyond the community college context to university ESL programs and to educational language planning as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

Understanding the need for research specific to community college Academic ESL program roles requires first understanding the larger context of U.S. community colleges. Community colleges seek to provide diverse populations with a pathway to college and career success, and linguistically diverse students are more likely to enroll in community colleges than in universities (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). Yet student outcomes at community colleges, especially for English learner (EL) students, are disappointingly low (e.g., Jenkins & Weiss, 2011; Jiang, 2022; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005). Some reasons why ELs have lower outcomes could be attributed to demographic risk factors or enrollment trends shared with other community college populations but which are tangential to English proficiency. For instance, EL students tend to be older than other community college students generally (Hodara, 2015; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011), have lower incomes (Kanno & Cromley, 2016), and have parents with lower education levels (Kanno & Cromley, 2015).

However, independent of these demographic risk factors, placement into ESL programs seems to have a mostly negative impact on at least some student outcomes (e.g., Almon, 2012; Hayward et al., 2022; Hodara, 2015). A number of curricular and policy factors have been identified as contributing to lower ESL program student outcomes. These include utilizing invalid placement policies (Bunch et al., 2011), offering overly long course sequences before allowing students to take mainstream coursework (Park, 2019), failing to award college credit for ESL program coursework

(TESOL, 2012), and providing ESL course content that fails to prepare ELs for genres they will experience in the wider college (Bunch et al., 2020). ESL program curricular shortcomings can furthermore lead to poor transitions into the wider college for ELs. For example, ELs seeking careers in healthcare and nursing have generally struggled (Gudhe, 2003; Mbulu, 2015; Onovo, 2019).

Missing, though, from the wider literature is a thorough examination of ESL program aims versus actual impact, or an in-depth, single case study approach to academic ESL programs where the program itself serves as the case. Previous studies of community college ESL programs have focused either on student perspectives (e.g., Almon, 2015; Artiaga, 2013) or teacher and administrator perspectives (e.g., Rodriguez et al., 2019) but never a combination of all three. Synthesizing these perspectives could illuminate whether there are mismatched views as to the role or even value of such programs, which in turn could expose additional underlying causes for low student outcomes, for which poor curricular practices or inequitable policies are simply symptomatic. This chapter reviews the literature regarding community college ESL programs with the intent of highlighting the need for the current study and its potential significance.

Community Colleges and Student Outcomes

Community colleges in the United States enroll over 11.8 million students at more than 1,000 campuses (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). They are lauded for increasing access to higher education (e.g., Dawson et al., 2021; Obama, 2015) and playing a key role in U.S. higher education. Yet, these colleges also struggle with

lower student persistence and graduation rates than universities. After 6 years, only 40.8% of community college students graduate or receive a credential (Community College Research Center, 2021) compared to 60% of university students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This is even though an associate's degree is designed to take two years, only half the time of a bachelor's degree (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022). Furthermore, the one-year persistence rate for full-time community college students is 66.7%, 20 percent lower than the one-year persistence rate for full-time students at four-year colleges (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). In short, the community college promise of higher education access leading to degree attainment remains unrealized.

Some reasons for lower community college student outcomes relate to demographic differences between community college and university students. Community college students are more likely than university students to be low income (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019), work full time (Levin et al., 2010), and attend college part time (Juszkiewicz, 2016). Community college students also tend to be less prepared for postsecondary education than are university students (e.g., Butrymowicz, 2017; Chen, 2020). However, even after accounting for multiple demographic factors, community college students have lower outcomes than their university-going peers (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Parsing out how demographic factors and structural factors impact community college student outcomes, then, is a crucial first step for understanding the independent impact that community colleges have on student achievement. Furthermore, examining this topic provides a backdrop to the confluence of factors impacting ELs and

ESL programs at community colleges.

Community College Risk Factors and Behaviors

Several demographic factors have been shown to negatively impact community college student outcomes. Non-traditional students, minority students, older students raising children (e.g., Attewell et al., 2011), first-generation college students (firstgen.napsa.org, 2019), and students at or near the poverty line (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019) are all more likely to attend community colleges, and all have lower outcomes than their community college peers. The risk factors community college students face also often intersect and impact student behavior in complex ways (Nuñez et al., 2016). For instance, one reason community college students fail to persist or graduate in a timely manner relates to enrolling in fewer credits for just their first semester (Attewell et al., 2012) or attending part time over multiple semesters (Juszkiewicz, 2016). However, student reasons for not enrolling full time could include pressing family responsibilities (Juszkiewicz, 2016; Ruecker, 2015), working full time (Levin et al., 2010), not being aware of financial aid (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016), or a host of other social, cultural, and demographic factors (e.g., Artiaga, 2013).

U.S. resident community college EL students and adult immigrant EL students are more likely to be part of demographic risk factor groups than the general population. Kanno and Cromley (2016) found using a nationwide database that U.S.-educated EL students had lower incomes than English proficient students or native speakers. Community college ELs generally are also just as likely if not more likely than the wider population to be from a racial minority background (Conway, 2010; Hodara, 2015), and

to have lower socioeconomic status (Almon, 2012; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011). ELs also tend to be older than other community college students (Hodara, 2015; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011), and U.S.-educated ELs have parents with lower education levels (Kanno & Cromley, 2015; 2016), meaning that many ELs are more likely to be first-generation college students and be unfamiliar with how to navigate the U.S. college system.

An additional factor impacting EL student enrollment and completion in community colleges is immigration status. An estimated two percent of all students in U.S. higher education are undocumented (Redden, 2020), with undocumented students being much more likely to enroll in community colleges than universities (Teranishi, Suarez-Orosco, & Suarez-Orosco, 2011). However, the impact of being undocumented on college outcomes goes far beyond just the fear of being deported. Undocumented students are unable to access federal student financial aid (Federal Student Aid, 2021), and are simultaneously more likely to struggle with finding stable employment opportunities, making it less likely for them to enroll continuously in college coursework when compared with other immigrants (Terriquez, 2015). Furthermore, over 30 states charge undocumented students out of state tuition rates for enrolling in higher education, with two states, Alabama and South Carolina, prohibiting any undocumented student from enrolling in public higher education (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). Recent findings by the Pew Research Center (Passell & Cohn, 2019) indicate that two-thirds of U.S. undocumented immigrants do not rate themselves as speaking English very well, suggesting that many of these students seeking higher education at U.S. community colleges would initially be placed in ESL programs. The impact of these

factors together suggests that undocumented ELs enrolled in ESL programs face additional challenges that negatively impact their educational outcomes.

Thus, the lower student outcomes that community college EL students achieve can, in part, be attributed to their demographic differences with community college students as a whole or due to immigration status. However, carefully constructed studies of community college ELs that account for demographics (e.g., Almon, 2012; Hayward et al., 2022; Hodara, 2015) argue that enrollment in ESL programs can have an independent, negative effect on student outcomes. Furthermore, fully understanding the effect that ESL programs have requires more than just examining statistical differences between student populations. Rather, it means getting to the heart of what ESL programs are designed to do, and what roles the ESL program plays within the larger college.

Addressing academic ESL program aims also means addressing assumptions regarding the nature of language and language acquisition, and how ESL programs are structured to provide language instruction. Five areas in the literature where the assumptions regarding the nature of second language acquisition impact the purposes and roles of ESL programs are a) ESL program placement policies, b) ESL program course sequence length, c) ESL program course content and structure, d) ESL course credit policies, and e) student transitions from the ESL program into the wider college.

Community College ESL Placement Policies

One aspect of community college ESL programs that has received attention in the literature is the placement process (e.g., Bunch et al., 2011; Bunch & Endris, 2012). Research on this topic is key because how colleges identify which students need

additional language support directly impacts those students' progression towards a degree. Unfortunately, the literature has shown that both general community college placement processes as well as ESL placement processes can be problematic (e.g., Llosa & Bunch, 2011; Scott-Clayton, 2015).

One practice common to community colleges and their ESL programs is the failure to use multiple methods in determining placement. Both community colleges and ESL programs tend to use relatively short, commercially available placement tests such as the ACCUPLACER, or ESL-specific versions of these tests (Llosa & Bunch, 2011; Scott-Clayton, 2015), and while the rate of severe misplacement among ESL placement tests has not been specifically measured, Belfield and Crosta (2012) found for the ACCUPLACER and COMPASS tests that misplacement rates ranged from one fourth to one third of test takers. Scott-Clayton (2012) has argued that using multiple measures of proficiency would cut down severe misplacements by 15 percent, and relying solely on high school GPA for placement was a better predictor of future student success than placement test scores alone. Of added note is that underplacement is much more common than overplacement when students are misplaced (Scott-Clayton, 2015), meaning college students are much more likely to be put into developmental coursework that is too low rather than too high.

In addition to general concerns about community college placement validity are problems unique to community college ESL programs. One threat to validity is the process by which potential ELs are identified for placement testing. On the one hand, ELs may intentionally avoid placement into ESL coursework because of the stigma attached

to these classes (Raufman et al., 2019). On the other, community colleges may have all self-identified nonnative English speakers take the ESL placement test, regardless of English proficiency. Yet one innate problem with this practice is that ESL placement tests are designed to determine which level of ESL coursework students should be placed in, not whether they should be placed in ESL coursework (Bunch et al., 2011).

Even where ESL programs utilize placement instruments that validly measure language proficiency, there are host of other factors that impact whether the placement process is equitable. For instance, some ESL programs have also been shown to use placement tests incongruent with program aims and to misapply test findings (Bunch et al., 2011). Moreover, ESL faculty and administrators may lack training regarding placement test design and purpose, creating appropriate cut off scores, and understanding how limitations within the tests themselves could wrongly place proficient multilinguals in ESL coursework (Llosa & Bunch, 2011). These factors could also lead ELs to being underplaced or overplaced within ESL programs (Bunch et al., 2011).

Moreover, even colleges with valid placement tests aligned with program objectives may have inequitable and invalid placement when students are not informed of the placement process, how to prepare, and how to challenge placement results. This problem appears to be endemic. Bunch and Endris' (2012) analysis of 25 California CC websites found just over half included the name of the ESL placement test, and fewer than half guided students to where to study for the test. David and Kanno (2021) similarly found that nearly half of all community college ESL programs in nine states failed to publish which ESL placement assessments were used, either in college catalogs or online.

When colleges fail to provide this information to students, the placement process can end up being more a measure of student familiarity with the testing process or the format of the test than actual language proficiency.

Finally, criteria for determining ESL program placement have at their heart the question of what it means to know English sufficiently to succeed at the college level. Such questions pose theoretical questions concerning the nature of the academic English used for the test (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015). As Flores and Rosa (2015) have argued students of color may never have their language practices seen as acceptable, even when they use constructions that are considered appropriate when used by White, monolingual English speakers. Furthermore, as Alim (2016) argues, race and language are connaturalized, meaning that decisions regarding the language used in placement tests are essentially decisions regarding race and power, further questioning whether ESL placement processes can ever be objectively valid or apolitical.

Community College ESL Program Sequence

A second area of study, related to ESL placement, is ESL program length. Simply put, the longer ELs spend in ESL programs, the less likely they are to progress out of the ESL program (e.g., Almon, 2012). This is especially true for those placed in lower-level ESL coursework (Park, 2019). Hodara (2015), along with others (e.g., Park, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2019), have argued against lengthy ESL program sequences because they negatively impact EL student trajectories. For instance, a study by Patthey-Chavez et al. (2005) of over 200,000 students at nine California community colleges found that students placed in lower-level ESL coursework were highly unlikely to graduate or even

progress beyond ESL coursework.

However, providing multi-level community college course sequences does speak to the community college promise of providing college access for all (Dougherty, 1994) and addresses the reality that acquiring college-level academic English takes years (Butler & Hakuta, 2004; Hakuta et al., 2000). Navigating these competing interests has led to multiple approaches to ESL course length. Some community colleges see their ESL programs as part of adult basic education or literacy programs instead of as a pathway to the college (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). Others are committed to transitioning ELs to the wider college as quickly as possible. Thus, ESL course sequence lengths vary widely among institutions and states, likely in part due to varying orientations towards language and language acquisition (Ruiz, 1984), laws regulating the length of ESL program sequences (e.g., AB705, 2017; TX HB 2223, 2017), and differences regarding the perceived purpose of ESL programs (David, 2022). Rodriguez et al. (2019) found that 70% of the ESL programs in California offered 5 or more levels, while David and Kanno (2021) found in their nine-state study that ESL programs ranged on average from 4.7 semesters in length in Illinois to just 2.3 semesters in Minnesota and Tennessee. Overly long ESL program course sequences, in turn, also speak to issues raised by raciolinguistics, and whether lengthy academic ESL programs are simply a manifestation of the unreasonable demands of the "White listening subject" (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Yet measuring ESL program course sequence length is not a straightforward process. Complicating any measure of ESL course sequence length are factors such as separate models of ESL course offerings, with some that are solely adult education,

noncredit tracks, while others are intended to lead to college enrollment, or a mix of the two. Additionally, some ESL programs transition students to developmental level coursework after program completion rather than to mainstream college courses, further lengthening the time to graduation, though not strictly within the ESL program (Rodriguez et. al., 2019). Another complicating factor is that some programs assign students to only ESL coursework, while others allow students to take ESL coursework while concurrently taking courses in the wider college, sometimes in grouped learning community courses (e.g., Bunch & Kibler, 2015; Rodriguez et. Al., 2019). The rationale behind these different programmatic models also speak to questions regarding the intended role of the ESL program in the wider college.

In contrast to lengthy ESL program sequences, the limited research we have on concurrent student enrollment in ESL coursework and mainstream college coursework has been positive. Razfar and Simon (2011), found that Latinx EL students who took mainstreamed college courses with ESL coursework concurrently were much more likely to meet their academic goals than ELs who took ESL coursework linearly before taking mainstream college coursework. Huerta, Garza, and Garcia (2019) similarly found increased student outcomes for community college EL students who were organized into learning communities or that took multiple courses together, including both ESL and mainstream college classes concurrently.

Finally, the psychological impact on students placed in ESL coursework should also be noted. Rodriguez et al. (2019) found that placement in ESL coursework for U.S. high school graduates had a demoralizing effect, contributing to lower student

persistence. Harklau (2000) chronicled how EL high school graduates who were seen positively by high school teachers and administrators over time became labelled “the worst” by community college teachers and administrators. Students in her study expressed frustration about irrelevant ESL course content and often acted out in class in protest. Such behaviors may be especially likely for students who exited out of ESL programs in high school, only to be placed in ESL coursework in college, suddenly “rebecoming ESL” (Marshall, 2009).

Community College Course Content and Structure

A third focus of ESL programs analysis has been the types of ESL courses offered. Raufman and colleagues’ (2019) literature review stated that ESL classes are most often organized by separate skill area instruction (i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking), rather than around content-based instruction. Their claim is verified by research in California (Bunch et al., 2011; Rodriguez, 2019), and in other states (David & Kanno, 2021). Despite being the most common approach to ESL coursework, separate skill instruction has its drawbacks. First, it delays access to college content (Bunch & Kibler, 2015), causing students to often work with less cognitively demanding work. Furthermore, teachers may be more likely to use a remedial pedagogies approach when language instruction is disconnected from a foundational topic or content area (Bunch et al., 2020; Grubb & Gabriner, 2013). Remedial pedagogies cause students to receive decontextualized, unengaging instruction which does not lead to higher level thinking or disciplinary mastery and can cause their content knowledge to lag behind other community college students (Song, 2006).

In contrast, teaching English in an integrated, content-based manner has shown promising results. Content-based ESL instruction can prepare ELs for writing and reading in discipline-specific genres and allows for more authentic language practice and better exposure to academic content (e.g., Bunch et al., 2020; Valdés et al., 2014). Bunch and Kibler (2015) reported increased student satisfaction and higher college English passing rates for one ESL program which adopted a content-based approach. Research by Song (2006) went further, arguing that content-based instruction created long-term increases in graduation rates, retention, and GPA.

Finally, content-based coursework need not be solely academic, but can also be vocationally targeted. Artiaga (2013) documented how one community college ESL program in the Southwest provided early childhood education training and certifications for those already employed in the field, leading not just to better educational training, but likely a better standard of childcare in the community. Other content-based coursework has been oriented around assisting students with acquiring U.S. citizenship, receiving a GED, training on becoming a certified mechanic, and navigating American culture for new arrivals (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004; David & Kanno, 2021). Bunch and Kibler (2015) have also highlighted positive outcomes for content-based ESL programs in health and U.S. history.

Credit Policies and ESL Coursework

A fourth factor that intersects with ESL program length and ESL course offerings is whether ESL courses are offered for college credit, and if so, what type of credit. Unfortunately, current research on this topic is limited, in part because community

college policies relating to the awarding of credit for ESL coursework can be not just hard to find and understand (Bunch & Endris, 2015), but sometimes impossible to ascertain based just on publicly available information in college catalogs and on websites (David & Kanno, 2021). Rodriguez et al. (2019) found that most of the California community colleges they studied do provide college credit ESL courses, but that this credit usually does not transfer nor meets degree requirements. As a result, ESL program placement invariably extends graduation times and in turn impacts students financially (e.g., Artiaga, 2013, Ruecker, 2015). This practice seems inequitable since foreign language courses for students of a similar proficiency are often offered for college credit while similar courses for students studying English are not (e.g., TESOL, 2012).

Issues regarding the awarding of college credit for ESL coursework also tie into orientations towards ESL instruction (Ruiz, 1984). For instance, an orientation towards ESL programs as the fixing of a problem may lead to the conclusion that awarding credit for ESL coursework is inappropriate. In contrast, an orientation towards ESL programs that sees the learning of English as similar to the learning of any language would come to an opposite conclusion, since foreign language credit is awarded for courses in other languages and the completion of foreign language courses can even be a graduation requirement. The perceived value that institutions give to ESL programs as evidenced in credit policies also goes deeper than questioning the value of second language acquisition, to questioning the value the institution gives to ELs as individuals.

Student Transitions into the Wider College

A fifth area of focus in the literature has been on how students fare after leaving the ESL program (labeled here as linguistic minority (LM) students), and transition into the wider university. While I have previously addressed EL and LM student outcomes generally, here I discuss LM student transitions within the healthcare and nursing field. I emphasize this career track specifically because they are both an area of interest for many LM students (Li, 2021), and these programs have significant LM student enrollment (Mbulu, 2015). In multiple publications, LM students who enroll in nursing programs have been found to have higher attrition rates than their peers (Gudhe, 2003; Mbulu, 2015; Onovo, 2019). This finding brings greater urgency to problems related to lack of diversity already within the nursing field (Phillips & Malone, 2014), and that efforts towards increasing diversity within the nursing field have fallen short of stated goals (Covner et al., 2018).

One reason LM students struggle may relate to a lack of curricular preparation by the colleges themselves. For instance, even after transitioning into the wider college, some LM students are not provided the instruction they need in discipline-specific literacy practices in the healthcare field, and are instead taught more generalized literacy and study strategies (Bunch et al., 2020). Being placed in multiple semesters of ESL or developmental coursework before being able to enroll in science coursework may also cause many U.S.-educated ELs to forget much of the discipline-specific science content they took in high school (Li, 2021). Additional challenges addressed in the literature include ongoing language challenges with the content, a lack of faculty mentoring,

faculty that fail to understand the needs of linguistically diverse populations, and racism (Mbulu, 2015; Onovo, 2019). Thus, even after transitioning out of English-support courses, or sometimes as a result of transitioning out of English-support courses, some LM students struggle with the language demands of college coursework as well as face other challenges that colleges do not sufficiently address.

Conversely, one common resource for LM students at community colleges is the campus writing center. The frequency with which LM students use writing centers has led Blau and Hall (2002) to point out that writing centers have become "de facto centers for English language teaching" (p. 43). This assertion has been reaffirmed by Moussu and David (2015), who found that nearly two-thirds of the community college tutors they surveyed worked with EL students in at least 20% of all tutorials.

While no study has found a statistically significant difference in student writing ability or outcomes as a result of frequent writing center visits, (Jones, 2001), the handful of studies that follow LM students who successfully complete community colleges often describe frequent student use of writing centers (i.e., Artiaga, 2013; Nye, 2006). Whether this is a case of writing centers making the difference in student persistence, or whether students who are already likely to persist tend to use the writing center is not known. Either way, many writing centers function in large measure as centers for LM support (e.g., Moussu & David, 2015).

In summary, the literature has shown that community college ELs are more likely to have demographic risk factors than their community college peers, but that ELs' lower student outcomes are not due to demographic reasons alone (e.g., Raufman et al., 2019).

Rather, there appears to be an independent negative effect for enrolling in ESL coursework (Almon, 2012; Hayward et al., 2022; Hodara, 2015), at least for some learners. Thus, research exploring academic ESL programs' intended purposes (providing ELs language support to transition to the wider college) versus their actual impact is warranted. Previous studies on community college ESL programs have focused on the placement process, course sequence length, types of ESL courses offered, policies related to the awarding of college credit, and student transitions into the wider college. In the sections that follow, I examine how the intended role of ESL programs at community colleges has been framed at the national, state, and individual college level. I begin with examining statements by professional organizations and national leaders, then state-level legislation and policies, followed by research that focuses on the roles and purposes of individual community college ESL programs. The review of literature ends with establishing the gap in the research.

Professional Organizations and Community College ESL Programs

Because community colleges arose from local and state initiatives rather than a national coordinated effort and continued to be governed at the state and local level (Dougherty, 1994), national policies regarding community colleges are rare. However, professional organizations have from time to time made policy recommendations or statements regarding community college ESL programs, which have in turn, positioned ESL programs. The first included here is from the 1999 *Community College Employment Standards Task Force's Report*, which declared that "community colleges are major providers of academic ESL instruction" (Ellis, 1999, p. 4). While this statement is more

of a comment on reality than a call to action or change in the vision of community colleges, it does position the role of ESL instruction as part of the work of community colleges instead of as the responsibility of other institutions.

Two documents that much more directly impact community colleges are statements by the College Conference on Composition and Communication (CCCC) and TESOL International regarding the awarding of credit for higher education ESL coursework. The CCCC Statement on Second Language Writers (2001) argues, "Prerequisite [ESL] composition courses should be offered for credit that can be used toward satisfying the foreign-language requirement and should receive the same credit accorded other prerequisite composition courses" (p. 2). TESOL International's (2012) position statement on *Academic and Degree Granting Credit in ESOL Courses in Postsecondary Education*, similarly posits, "Nonnative English speakers enrolled in ESOL courses are . . . entitled to academic credit for their study of English as a second or foreign language" (p. 1). It further argues, "Postsecondary ESOL coursework . . . does not equate with remediating first language skills" (p. 1), distinguishing between developmental coursework and ESL coursework.

By arguing that ESL coursework should receive college credit, and that postsecondary ESL coursework is distinct from developmental coursework, the CCCC and TESOL statements are, in essence, arguing that the role and purpose of ESL courses are separate from developmental education courses and are more in line with the field of foreign language instruction. This is despite many ESL programs being housed in developmental education departments (Raufman et al., 2019), indicating a language as

problem orientation towards ELs. The higher prestige of foreign language instruction compared to ESL instruction in the United States was commented on by Richard Ruiz (2008). He saw the phenomenon as part of the larger paradox within U.S. education, "Other languages are to be pursued by those who don't have them, but are to be abandoned by those who do" (p.182). In other words, educational systems value attempts towards bilingualism by monolingual English speakers, but marginalizes the bilingualism of nonnative English speakers. This positioning demonstrates in clear relief the normative stance of White monolingualism to the marginalization of multilingual learners of color (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015). Both position statements seek to push against that narrative in part by arguing that college ESL coursework should receive college credit.

State Policies and Legislation

How ESL programs are conceptualized has also been impacted by recent legislative and policy efforts in four states, Texas, California, Connecticut, and Georgia. First, House Bill 2223, passed as law in Texas in 2017, positions ELs differently than do the CCCC or TESOL statements. The Texas bill identifies ELs as "students whose performance falls significantly below college readiness standards," grouping them with developmental education students. The impact of the bill is manifold. First, it provides state funding for up to 27 credit hours of community college ESL coursework, easing the financial burden that many ELs face. It additionally mandates a corequisite model for ESL coursework, pairing ESL courses with mainstream college courses to shorten the time between placement in ESL coursework and taking mainstream college courses. Of note is the implementation timeline, which states that 50% of community college ESL

programs must be in compliance with this new model within a year, and 75% of within two years. In all, the full impact of the Texas legislation is yet to be seen, but from an orientation standpoint, it labels ESL courses as fixing deficiencies (or problems) (Ruiz, 1984) positioning students in a deficit-based framework while simultaneously putting ESL students and faculty in greater contact with the wider college due to the corequisite model, limiting the segregation of ELs from the wider college.

California's recent legislation, (Assembly Bill 705, 2017), is both similar to and different from the Texas bill. For instance, Assembly Bill 705 states ESL instruction is "distinct from remediation in English," and labels ELs as "foreign language learners," again attempting to impart greater prestige to the programs and learners by distinguishing them from developmental education. Important elements of the bill include revising the placement process so that students are less likely to be placed in ESL coursework unnecessarily, and mandating that colleges maximize the possibility that ELs can enter mainstream college coursework within a year's time. In summary, the legislation may not necessarily shorten ESL programs, but it requires that community colleges ensure that they maximize the throughput rate for ELs. Additionally, the legislation may also confer greater prestige to the programs themselves. Again, policies such as those enacted in Texas and California speak volumes regarding the significant role that ESL programs play at community colleges.

Connecticut's community college ESL programs have also been impacted by state-level influences. For instance, due to low student enrollment, the president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities announced that the state's community

colleges would be consolidating. As part of the merger, ESL programs were combined with developmental education programs and only the highest two levels of ESL coursework in each community college were allowed to remain (Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, 2017). As Key has emphasized (2020, 2022), this consolidation has negatively impacted both EL access to ESL coursework and has limited instructor and departmental autonomy.

Georgia's policy efforts also differ significantly from other states' because they are the result, not of legislation or of administrative consolidation, but of a partnering with a nonprofit organization, Complete College America. Since Georgia's college and university system's partnership with Complete College America began in 2011, Harklau (2019) has found that "reforms have had the rather drastic result of eliminating almost all classes, tutoring, and advising support for English learners" (p. 1). In an effort to improve community college student persistence and graduation rates, many ESL programs have simply been eliminated while some of the remaining community college ESL programs have been subsumed under university control (Harklau & Baston, 2019). Even more alarmingly, college administrators in Georgia have even been advised not to collect data on college ELs (Harklau, 2019). These policy changes have become such a fait accompli that teachers and administrators are hesitant to even talk with researchers anonymously for fear of losing their jobs (Harklau & Baston, 2019). Such a drastic policy change, perhaps intended to eliminate overly long ESL course sequences, has had the effect of both stigmatizing ESL programs as barriers to remove and ELs themselves as populations to ignore. In short, while all four states seek to address overly long ESL course

sequences, some reform efforts stigmatize ESL programs and ELs more than others.

Individual Community College ESL Program Roles

Finally, the role that ESL programs play within community colleges also speaks to how colleges view the students enrolled in these programs, the faculty who teach these courses, and essentially, their orientation towards the language acquisition process (e.g., Ruiz, 1984). Some ESL programs face marginalization on campus and lack any firm institutional home (Raufman et al., 2019). Other colleges do not offer any credit bearing ESL courses, even if these courses are academically rigorous (TESOL, 2012). And still other programs have the full support of the college (e.g., Miele, 2003), including awarding ESL coursework college credit (Rodriguez et al., 2019), and recognizing ESL program initiatives as beneficial to the college as a whole (Artiaga, 2013).

However, previous studies of ESL program roles within the wider community college have had limitations. One issue of note is that studies focused on ESL programs as the unit of measure tend to highlight curricular reforms due to the awarding of an outside grant (e.g., Miele, 2003). Since a major issue for many ESL programs is funding (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004), the intended roles and purposes of the ESL program could change substantially in relation to the specifications of the grant. Moreover, such programs face structural instability if the grant money highlighted in such articles is not continually awarded. Other articles about ESL programs and programmatic innovation seem just more focused on arguing for the value of the innovation than describing how the program actually works (e.g., Song, 2006).

Studies on community college ESL programs have also not collected the

combined perspectives of students, faculty, and administrators. Most studies have focused mainly on student perspectives (e.g., Harklau, 2000; Ruecker, 2015). Where faculty and administrator perspectives are included, they speak more on specific issues and individual students rather than the functioning of the program as a whole (e.g., Almon, 2015). Other articles have looked just at the challenges that ESL faculty face, such as feeling marginalized by English faculty (Johnson & Marchwick, 2008), having larger course workloads than their college faculty peers (Sun, 2008), and not being consulted by administrators regarding the governance of their own program (Jones, 2008). In short, these studies speak to specific issues, not the ESL programs as a whole.

Lastly, two major studies that examine how ESL programs function (Bunch et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2019) deserve to be addressed individually. Bunch and colleagues' study (2011) of California community colleges included examining 25 college websites, interviewing 50 college faculty, administrators, and staff at ten different colleges, and conducting site visits at five. While an excellent analysis of testing, placement, and curricular issues, the study did not include student interviews or classroom observations as part of their data collection. Therefore, missing from this study are student perspectives regarding ESL program purpose, placement processes, and their reasons for enrolling. Similarly, Rodriguez and colleagues' (2019) study of California community college student outcomes includes a valuable analysis of a vast amount of statewide student transcript data as well as interviews with faculty and administrators at 13 different community colleges. However, again missing are interviews with students or classroom observations to ground these broad findings within the lived experiences of the

students themselves.

Gap in the Research

This study seeks to expand on previous research findings by being the first case study analysis of a community college ESL program that includes interviews with administrators, faculty, and students, as well as classroom observations and document analysis. The study focuses on intended ESL program roles versus the role the ESL program actually played in the wider college and in student outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Introduction

This chapter overviews the research method that I used to examine the intended role of one academic ESL program versus the actual role the program played within the college. First, I provide a short overview of the research site followed by my reasons for its selection. Next, I describe my data collection method and participants. I then discuss my recruitments methods and data analysis procedure.

Sweetwater Community College

My dissertation study site is Sweetwater Community College (a pseudonym). Located near a small city in the northeastern United States, the college serves a primarily rural, coastal area where the main industry is tourism. The college has two major campuses and a handful of small satellite centers, but these smaller centers are focused around specific academic programs or are very small-scale distance outreach centers. The two main campuses where this study took place are a study in contrast, including in how their ESL programs are structured.

Main Campus

The larger of the two campuses houses the academic programs and administrative offices of the college and is located a few hundred yards off of a commuter highway exit. The ambiance of the campus is of quiet and seclusion, further augmented by the low student attendance due to COVID. This campus is self-contained within a road that encircles the college with parking that fans out from the outer circumference. Tall trees, mostly evergreens, are dotted throughout the campus, and approximately a dozen brick or

cinder block buildings of various oblong shapes surround a small courtyard in the center. When the weather is fair, students eat their lunches outside or in a large cafeteria with artwork from college art classes adorning the walls. Most of the artwork is decidedly political, reminding students of marginalized populations.

In general, the buildings have a strictly utilitarian feel: long hallways with faculty offices or classrooms on either side, fluorescent lighting, a little rust on any exposed metal due to the college's proximity to the ocean, and some, but not much, natural light. The administration building particularly feels like any prototypical 1980s-era office building with brown carpets, narrow hallways, and administrative offices placed close to one another in a mazelike winding of hallways. The two exceptions to the homogenous building design are the library, which juts up at an angle and has vast interior ceilings, and the new science building, which is more glass and polished steel than brick and mortar. The campus itself is a good five miles away from the center of the nearby city and seems to be placed to attract commuters from many of the nearby towns rather than to be housed in a centralized location within the city.

The main campus location enrolls around 4,000 credit-seeking students a year, making it one of the four smallest community colleges in the state. Nevertheless, the college offers more than 40 associate's or 50 certificate programs. Around a fifth of students come from the closest city, and the rest from nearby towns and other locations. Similar to a number of rural community colleges in the region, the main population enrolled is White students, which make up around 75% of all students. Approximately 10% of students are Hispanic/Latinx, 10% multiracial or other, and 5% African

American. Nearly two thirds of students are female, and the mean age of students is 25, with the median age of 22. The most popular programs are business administration and nursing. The first-year retention or transfer rate for students is around 66%, nearly the mean of other colleges in the area, and the course completion rate is above 80%, slightly above the average for other community colleges in the region. The three-year graduation rate (16%) and transfer out rate (20%) are also close to the median of community colleges in the state. A table highlighting demographic information about my research site can be found below.

Location	Northeastern U.S., rural
Enrollment	4,000+ credit students a year
Degree Programs	40 associates' program 50 certificate programs
Racial Diversity	75% White 10% Hispanic/Latinx 10% Multiracial or other 5% African-American
First Year Retention Rate	66%
Course Completion Rate	80%
3 Year Graduation Rate	16%
Transfer Out Rate	20%
Male/Female	66% Female, 33% Male

Table 1. Demographic Information about SWCC Credit Programs

Community Center Campus

In contrast, the community outreach/adult education center is located on the main city thoroughfare and at first glance could be easily mistaken for a shopping center. With a white façade, large windows, and life-sized photos of students on the exterior walls, the center feels newer, brighter, and more modern. The center's parking lot is shared with a nearby fast-food restaurant, law office, and fitness center. The glass entryway leads to a

front reception desk where students attending classes are directed to turn left past the front desk and into a long hallway with eight or so classrooms, a computer lab, and a large map of the world. The classrooms are inviting, the desks are new, the ceilings high, and a light, airy feel pervades the building. However, the impact of COVID can be seen everywhere, from a reminder to wear a mask and a large disinfectant dispenser in the entryway, to the abnormally spread-out desks in each classroom, to a lounge area once used for dining that is now filled with desks, tables, and chairs that have been moved from classrooms to make space for social distancing measures.

The main functions of the Community Center are to provide Community ESL classes and test prep for high school equivalency exams. Over 400 students are enrolled in Community Center classes each semester, around half in ESL coursework, and the other half in GED prep coursework.

ESL Programs

ESL programs are offered at both locations, but they differ in substantial ways. Five differences are central to understanding their contrasting roles within the wider college: program cost, program enrollment, program governance, the awarding of college credit, and program structure. Reviewing both ESL programs helps to situate the Academic ESL program, the focus of this study, within its proper context.

Community ESL Program

Community ESL courses are offered free to members of the wider community, but finding an open spot is challenging. Over 200 students are currently enrolled, but despite the program offering both morning and the evening sections of all levels, the

waiting list exceeds 700 students. Thus, students seeking to enroll in the program face a wait time of two to three years. Students enrolled in the ESL program are most often first-generation immigrants to the U.S., and generally hail from Brazil, Central America, the Caribbean, and sometimes Eastern Europe or elsewhere. Most students are older students (mid 20s and 30s and older) who already have families and full-time jobs, with many working in the tourism industry (restaurants, hotel staff) or the healthcare field (home care nurses). While no statistics are collected on student documentation status, administrators and faculty guess that around half of all students are undocumented.

Classes meet twice a week, for three hours at a time, in one of five levels. Classes are offered only in-person, except for a brief time during the COVID pandemic, during which students who lacked access to technology were provided laptops and internet connections so they could log in remotely. Each level is nine months in length, from September to May. The courses are all integrated skills, meaning that the skill areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking are all utilized during class meetings. The highest-level course is approximately equivalent in reading level to a 7th grade English class in the U.S., while the lowest level is meant for those in the very beginning stages of learning English.

The program design, including the number of levels, is mandated through a state and national-level grant which funds the program (US Department of Education, 2022). However, whether a community college is awarded the grant is a state-level decision. The purpose of the program is not to provide a pathway to higher education, but instead to offer ESL instruction to the community free of charge. The courses are not credit bearing,

and while the program uses a space owned by the college and the college's enrollment system, accountability for the success of the program is not solely with the college, but with the state-level grant awarding agency. The governance for the program is also largely separate from the academic programs of the college. The director of the program does not meet or collaborate directly with the Academic ESL program; rather, she reports to the Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education. Faculty members who teach at the Community ESL program, all of whom teach part-time, do not meet with the wider college. Overall, the separate governance, teaching, and funding structure of the Community ESL program mirrors the physical distance of the Community Center from the main college campus.

Academic ESL Program

The Academic ESL program offers three levels: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. Each level is one semester long, and classes meet for three hours once a week. Students in the Intermediate and Advanced courses earn 3 college credits, but those credits do not count towards any graduation requirements. Students in the Advanced level may also take a select number of courses in the wider college concurrently. Enrollment numbers have declined in recent years, and that trend has accelerated during the pandemic. After enrolling more than 70 students fewer than five years ago, the program enrolled only 15 students in the Fall of 2021, a slight increase from the previous semester. Due to low enrollment, only the Basic and Intermediate levels were offered during the Fall 2021 semester, when data collection took place. The Basic level was offered in-person one night a week, and the Intermediate course was offered remotely one

night a week. The three-credit ESL courses cost $650 for in-state residents and $1,300 for nonresidents per semester, and courses were taught by adjunct faculty within the English department. The immediate governance structure for Academic ESL program courses is primarily the chair of the English department, followed by the Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education.

Students enrolled in the Academic ESL program during the fall 2021 semester were predominantly women, the vast majority from Latin America or the Caribbean. The main countries of origin for students were Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico. Only one student was from Asia, and only two of the 15 students were male. Again, students tended to be older than the college median or mean, with most having families and some with adult children. An overview of the two programs, their structure, enrollment, cost, and format can be found in the table below.

Program	**Community ESL program**	**Academic ESL Program**
Fall 2021 Enrollment	Approximately 200 waiting list of 700 + students	Approximately 15
Levels Offered	5 (all levels carried)	3 (2 levels carried)
Course Length	3-hour classes, twice a week, Each level is one year	3-hour classes, once a week Each level is one semester
Format of Courses	Only in-person classes Day and evening courses offered	Low-level, in-person, evening Mid-level, remote, evening
Cost of Coursework Per Semester	Free	$650, in-state $1,300 out-of-state
Program Governance	Through the Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education, not via a department	English department

Table 2. SWCC Academic and Community ESL Programs

SWCC Support Services for ELs and LM Students

While ESL courses are the central component of EL student support offered at SWCC, they are not the only one. Students enrolled in academic ESL courses are considered matriculated students and qualify for common college support services such as academic advising, tutoring, financial advising, and career services; students in the Community ESL program do not qualify for these services. Three separate tutoring centers provide one-on-one support that Academic ESL program students can access. However, their usefulness to students within the ESL program varies. The Tutoring Center offers support specific for most content courses (e.g., biology, sociology, and history), the Math Tutoring Center provides help specific to mathematics, and unsurprisingly, the Writing Center assists with students with the writing and revision process. Additionally, there are some course and program-specific supports. For instance, the Bone Lab is available for students enrolled in anatomy courses, and the college's Nursing program offers supplemental instruction through assigned mentors who review the material taught in courses.

Nevertheless, none of these services are specifically oriented towards assisting LM students except for a single, specialized tutor at the Writing Center. The specialized tutor works around 15 hours a week and was also the instructor for the Intermediate-level Academic ESL course during the Fall 2021 semester. Thus, while other support services on campus serve Academic ESL program students, no specific mention of these students is made in any of their materials, with the exception of the Writing Center.

International Students and SWCC

Another group of students that deserve mention is international students who attend SWCC. These students are not identified as ELs within the operational definition I use for this study because they are not enrolled in either the Community or Academic ESL programs. Furthermore, neither program is designed with this population in mind. One reason for not including international students in this study is that neither ESL program offers enough time in class per level to fulfill the full-time enrollment requirement of an F1 Visa. Another reason is that a condition of international student enrollment at the college is that students must demonstrate English proficiency through the TOEFL, IELTS, or other placement test. Like a number of other community colleges in the state, international student numbers are quite small (the highest enrollment in any one semester within the last five years was fewer than 5 students total); during the semester of this study, no international students attended SWCC.

Reasons for Selecting this College

While the selection of any community college ESL program would improve our understanding of the roles and purposes of academic ESL programs, Sweetwater Community College (SWCC) can serve as a typical or common case of an academic ESL program for this case study. Specifically, the structure of the community college and the college's ESL program are typical of the state and of the wider geographic area. However, the community that SWCC serves does not qualify as a typical case.

The Academic ESL program at the community college is typical in numerous ways. For example, the length of the Academic ESL program is within one standard

deviation of the mean of community colleges in Massachusetts, the northeastern state David and Kanno (2021) included in their nine-state sample. Additionally, instruction for the ESL program uses an integrated skills approach, which was also found in the Massachusetts sample for David and Kanno's (2021) study. The program uses the ACCUPLACER ESL test for placement, which is one of the most commonly used placement tests for community college ESL programs (Bunch et al., 2011; Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Like other community colleges in Bunch et al.'s (2011) and David & Kanno's (2021) study, information about ESL placement procedures were nowhere to be found online. All of these speak to the ESL program being a typical case.

Other elements of the program also make it worthy of study. For one, the Academic ESL program at SWCC is completely separate from the Community ESL program and is part of a completely different governance structure. Thus, the purposes and roles of this academic program are likely to be more focused than if the community and academic programs were deeply connected. Second, the academic program offers college credit for the two higher-level ESL courses taken, a policy recommended by TESOL (2012) and the College Conference on Composition and Communication (2001). Students in the highest-level ESL course can also take some courses within the wider college, a practice that has been found to increase student likelihood to reach academic goals (e.g., Razfar & Simon, 2011).

Together, these elements all point towards a common case of an academic ESL program at a community college, specifically a common case for an ESL program at a rural community college. While some practices are current with the major

recommendations from the literature, such as the awarding of academic credit for ESL coursework (e.g., TESOL, 2012), other practices, such as not including easily accessible information about ESL program placement (Bunch et al., 2011) do not. This is to be expected of a common case, and serves to strengthen its selection as part of my case study methodology.

In contrast, the community around SWCC would not be considered as a typical case for a number of reasons. For instance, unlike most rural areas, the area around SWCC serves as both a tourism hotspot and a retirement destination, so the demographics of the area are shifted older and away from families with children. As a result, rather than drawing their student body from large nearby feeder high schools, SWCC must take in students from a wide geographic area, with only 20% of its students being from the closest city. Furthermore, the major industry of the community that SWCC serves is tourism, and that tourism is seasonal. This leads to large population shifts in the area from summer to winter. Property values are also unusually high for a rural community, with a median home price of over $500,000 for the city closest to the college, with many secluded homes closer to the coast costing much more. Despite the high cost of these homes, many of them are used only as dwellings places during the summer months, and are vacation rentals or Airbnb homes the rest of the year. There is also a large disparity between home values and median income, with the median income for an individual being a bit more than $35,000 and a bit above $70,000 for families.

This disparity suggests a large difference in the economic makeup of the tourists and wealthy families who live or visit there seasonally, and the population who lives in

the area year-round. Furthermore, since the tourism industry is seasonal, those seeking to live in the area continuously often find full-time employment or additional employment elsewhere. Two other major industries are construction, which also tends to not be year-round, and healthcare, where there is constant demand for more nurses due to the area's aging population. All of these elements are atypical for most rural areas in the U.S. Nevertheless, much like U.S. populations generally (Nuñez et al., 2016; Ryan, 2013), the number of individuals in the community who speak a language other than English at home has dramatically increased, doubling within the past twenty years and accounting for 10% of the population.

Study Design

I examined the intended role of Sweetwater Community College's Academic ESL program versus the actual role of the program plays using a single, exploratory, case study (Yin, 2018). The study is a single case study in that I am only examining one college's academic ESL program. Furthermore, my purpose in this case study is exploratory in that I am interested in exploring the intended versus the actual role of the ESL program rather than providing a definitive cause and effect relationship. I am also not attempting to track how ESL program roles or outcomes have changed over time.

My reasons for choosing a case study methodology rather than other research methods relate to the research question I want to ask, and the rich data I hope to obtain. Case study research provides a strong framework from which I can study a single phenomenon in depth (in this case a community college academic ESL program), where there are more variables to consider than there are data points, and where I can use a

variety of methods (Yin, 2018). While there are drawbacks to case study research, I believe that this research question at this stage of the literature on academic community college ESL programs is best served using a case study.

At the same time, the flexibility and unstandardized nature of case study research can lead to sloppiness if not carefully constructed. Thus, in the paragraphs that follow I describe a) my study's overall design, b) how I address questions regarding validity and reliability, c) how I collected data, and d) principles regarding how I analyzed the data I collected.

Overall Case Study Design

A hallmark of case study methodology is the collection and triangulation of data from multiple sources, and my study involves collecting data via six sources. I gathered and analyzed data from state level documents and institutional-level documents, classroom observations, and administrator, faculty, and student interviews. First, I collected online documents from the state's Department of Higher Education regarding initiatives, aims, and community colleges. Second, I collected online and print documents from Sweetwater Community College, including any specifically concerning the Academic ESL program. Third, I conducted observations of Academic ESL program classes as well as of other classes in the English department, the Community ESL program, and the college's Nursing program. Fourth, I interviewed college staff and administrators as well as ESL program administrators. Fifth, I interviewed ESL program faculty and select faculty members of the wider college. And sixth, I conducted interviews with four groups of students: a) students enrolled in the Basic level of the

Academic ESL program, b) students enrolled in the Intermediate level of the Academic ESL program, c) students who have transitioned from the ESL program into the wider college, and d) students who are not originally from the United States and did not place into the ESL program, but enrolled in the wider college. These data represent three of the six sources of evidence mentioned by Yin (2018) (documents, interviews, and direct observation).

Addressing Validity and Reliability

Because data collection and analysis procedures in a case study are not as standardized as they are in other methodologies, concerns regarding the validity and reliability of the study need to be addressed in a straightforward way. Four areas outlined by Yin (2018) that I address are construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

First, the construct that I am studying, that of an academic community college ESL program, does not originate with me, and has been previously mentioned in Raufman et al.'s (2019) literature review, Crandall and Sheppard's (2004) review of community college ESL program types, and is generally understood in the literature. Second, while concerns about internal validity in this case study are less than it would be were it an explanatory case study (Yin, 2018), I have sought to maintain internal validity through the use of pattern matching in the analysis phase of my study. This process involves examining the patterns I have found in the study findings with those predicted by my theoretical frameworks. Third, I have sought for external validity to my study through tying my findings closely to the theoretical frameworks I have selected and in

only seeking to make analytical generalizations, and not statistical generalizations. Finally, I have addressed concerns of reliability by strictly adhering to clearly articulated protocols for all of my data collection, writing reflections within the same day after each interview and observation and having a strong theoretical base for my data analysis procedures. In these ways I hope to maintain methodological rigor and conduct a valid and reliable study.

Data Collection

Fully studying the Academic ESL program at Sweetwater Community College required following the core data collection principles outlined by Yin's (2018) case study methodology: collect multiple sources of evidence, create a data corpus, and maintain a clear chain of evidence. This section of my dissertation focuses on the collect multiple sources of evidence principle, while later sections examine the other principles. The sources of evidence I used to collect data included a) institutional-level documents, b) documents from the state Department of Higher Education, c) interviews with college administrators and staff, d) interviews with faculty, e) interviews with students, and f) classroom observations. How I collected each of these sources of evidence is detailed below.

Institutional Document Collection

The initial phase of data collection for this study involved the collection and storage of institutional documents from SWCC. Data collection began in March 2021 before wider IRB approval was granted because the documents I sought to obtain at the college and state level were already available on their respective websites and publicly

accessible, and their analysis did not require IRB approval. Once downloaded, these documents were stored first in an online, secure Google drive account that I used specifically for this study. These documents were later coded using Nvivo software. I sought to analyze three levels of institutional documents to gain insights into the intended role of the Academic ESL program.

First, I collected documents at the administrative level that addressed the whole of Sweetwater Community College. I sought to capture in these documents the priorities and overall goals of the college. These documents included the college catalog, the college strategic plan, the two most recent college accreditation reports, the college mission statement, meetings from the Board of Trustees, college budgets, and any other publicly available documents relating to the institutional-level mission of the college.

Second, I collected documents from SWCC that related to perspectives and purposes of the foreign language education courses, the English department, and the Nursing program prerequisites and courses. This helped me to better understand the Academic ESL program's courses in relation to the wider college. I began with collecting syllabi for the two developmental English courses, the syllabus from the first-year writing course, syllabi from all other language courses offered at the college (ASL, French, German, Spanish, etc.), the syllabi of any courses that students could take concurrently while enrolled in ESL program courses, and all syllabi from Nursing program coursework. I also collected all college website materials regarding the Nursing program and descriptions of college support services such as the Tutoring Center and the Writing Center. Finally, any handouts, documents, or pictures I collected during my campus visits

were also included in my document analysis to better understand the intended and actual roles of the Academic ESL program within the wider college.

Lastly, I collected all online documents specific to the Academic ESL program or the Community ESL program at SWCC. However, one challenge was that there was no dedicated website which overviews the Academic ESL program, and the website information for the Community ESL program is very limited. A total of 94 documents were collected and analyzed for this phase of the study.

State Department of Higher Education Document Collection

In addition to institutional-level documents, I sought out publicly available documents from the state Department of Higher Education regarding current initiatives, priorities, and mission. These documents provide the backdrop of larger statewide administrative pressures to which the college must respond. Put another way, these documents provide data towards understanding the exo-level factors which impact the college and the Academic ESL program. Collecting and analyzing these documents also allows institutional and departmental documents to be foregrounded within their proper environment. The statewide documents I collected and analyzed included the Department of Higher Education's mission statement as well as documents relating to five relevant initiatives: a) equity and inclusion, b) adult transitions to college, c) improving developmental education, d) workforce training and development, and e) assessment. A total of 18 documents were collected and analyzed.

Interviews with College Administrators and Staff

In addition to document collection, I sought to hear from college administrators and staff regarding their views on the intended versus the actual role of the Academic ESL program. Therefore, I first ensured that I interviewed the administrators that directly oversaw the college's Community ESL program and Academic ESL program. These four individuals (the Vice-President of Student and Academic Affairs, the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education, the Director of the Community ESL program, and the English department chair) are shown below within their respective governance structure in Figure 3.

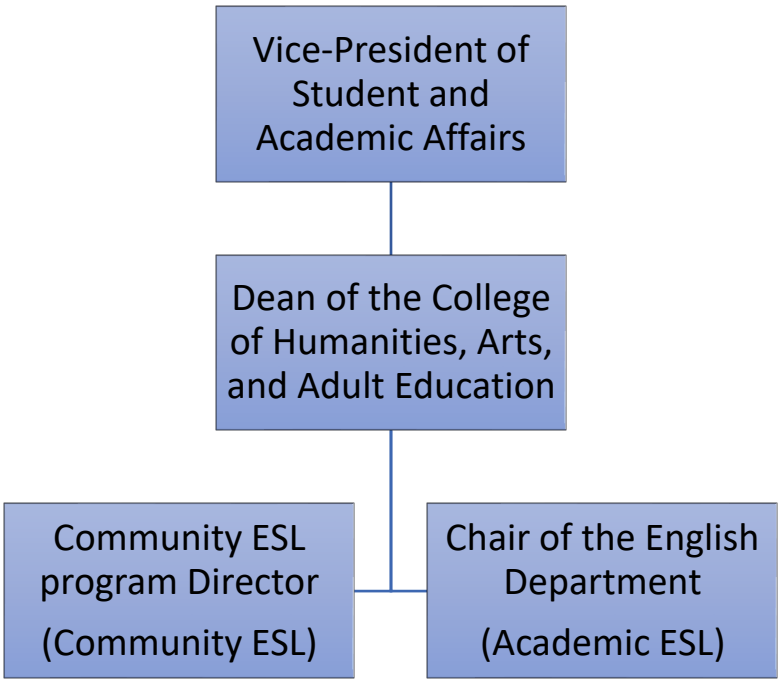

Figure 3. Governance for SWCC's Community and Academic ESL programs

Along with interviewing these key administrators, I sought out college staff and administrators who might be directly in contact with the students or faculty of the Academic ESL program. For example, one administrator employed by the college oversaw the Noncredit to Credit College Transitions Initiative (called here the STEP program, a pseudonym). This state-funded program sought to assist older than traditionally-aged college students with transitioning to college. Other individuals I interviewed included the director of the college's Tutoring Center and Writing Center, a former college math faculty member recently charged with overseeing a state grant focused on increasing college equity, and an adjunct psychology faculty member who served as a student enrollment advisor. Table 3 details the administrators, faculty, and staff members I interviewed for this study. In all, seven of the nine interviews were recorded, and the average length of each recorded interview was 40 minutes long. Interviews with administrators and staff were conducted from July to December 2021 via Zoom or by phone except for the interview with the Director of the Tutoring Center and Writing Center, which occurred in-person.

These semi-structured interviews included questions about their job responsibilities, participants' knowledge and perceptions regarding the Academic ESL program's structure and success, their perceptions regarding when ESL program students are ready to transition into the wider college, and most importantly, their perceptions of the intended role of the Academic ESL program and the role the program actually plays within the wider college. The questions for these interviews can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F.

Interviews with College Faculty

A second group I interviewed were Academic ESL program faculty and faculty within the wider college. The faculty I included in this study were: first, faculty who actually taught the Academic ESL courses the college offered; second, English department faculty who taught the composition courses ESL students would take once they exited the program and who interacted with ESL faculty as their departmental colleagues; third, faculty within the nursing track of courses (i.e., biology and nursing) who would interact with former ESL program students enrolled in the Nursing program. In total, I interviewed nine faculty members: two ESL faculty members currently teaching courses (a third faculty member, who had previously taught academic ESL courses, was now the department chair), two English department faculty, three Biology department faculty, and two Nursing program faculty. Five of the interviewed faculty were full-time faculty, and four were adjunct. All interviews took place by phone or Zoom, and the average interview length was 42 minutes. These semi-structured interviews took place from July to December 2021. Table 3 lists the faculty members I interviewed and their roles within the college.

The questions I asked for during interviews with Academic ESL program faculty and other college faculty differed in important ways. For mainstream college faculty, I began by asking questions regarding their educational history and teaching experience at SWCC. Next, I asked about their experiences with LM students, the perceived success of the ESL program, and what they saw as the role of the ESL program and their own role regarding assisting LM students. Academic ESL program faculty were asked much more

in-depth questions regarding the structure of the ESL program, the placement process, and what they saw as their role and the ESL program's role within the wider college. They were also asked how they felt the ESL program could improve and what they thought were appropriate criteria in determining whether a student was ready to leave the ESL program. These interview questions I used can be found in Appendices C and D.

Administrator, Faculty, or Staff	**Responsibility in the College**
Administrator	Vice-President of Student and Academic Affairs
Administrator	Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education
Administrator	Director of Community ESL program
*Administrator**	Director of the Writing Center and the Tutoring Center
Administrator/Faculty	Chair of the English department
Administrator/Faculty	Chair of the Biology department
Administrator/Staff	Coordinator of Noncredit to Credit Transitions Initiative (STEP Program)
Administrator/Staff	Nursing Retention Coordinator
Administrator/Staff	Equity Grant Coordinator
Faculty	Full-time biology faculty
Faculty	Adjunct biology faculty
Faculty	Full-time English faculty
Faculty	Adjunct English faculty
Faculty	Adjunct ESL faculty
Faculty	Full-time nursing faculty
Faculty	Full-time nursing faculty
Faculty/Staff	Adjunct ESL faculty and tutor at Writing Center
Faculty/Staff	Adjunct Psychology faculty and student advisor
Total	4 Administrators, 2 Administrator/Faculty, 3 Administrator/Staff, 7 Faculty (4 full-time, 3 adjunct), 2 Faculty/Staff

*Non-recorded interview

Table 3. SWCC Administrators, Faculty, and Staff Interviewed

Interviews with Students

The third group I interviewed was students, both within and outside the Academic ESL program. In selecting which students to interview, I first sought representation from within the ESL program. Because the highest level of the ESL program did not carry during the Fall 2021 semester, I was especially interested in recruiting students who had taken the highest level of ESL coursework. In all, I recruited and interviewed two students from the Basic-level ESL course and two from the Intermediate course. I also interviewed three former ESL program students, all of whom had completed the highest level of coursework and were still enrolled at SWCC. Finally, I sought to interview multilingual immigrant students who were otherwise similar to ESL program students but who were not placed into the ESL program. I interviewed two of these students. In all, I interviewed nine students, all of them female. Furthermore, none of the students had taken Community ESL coursework. Each interview was conducted via Zoom, and the average interview length was 22 minutes. A list of the students I interviewed can be seen in Table 4.

Pseudonym	Bio
Sofia	Basic-level enrolled Academic ESL program student
Alicia	Basic-level enrolled Academic ESL program student
Camila	Intermediate-level enrolled Academic ESL program student
Mariana	Intermediate-level enrolled Academic ESL program student
Margarita	Former ESL program student, currently enrolled at SWCC
Luna	Former ESL program student, currently enrolled at SWCC
Anna	Former ESL program student, currently enrolled at SWCC
Kaya	Never ESL program student. Immigrant from Kenya. Transferred from SWCC and joined the US Air Force.
Mislande	Never ESL program student. Immigrant from Haiti. Currently enrolled at SWCC. Told English proficiency was insufficient for enrollment in the LPN program
TOTAL	9 interviews (2 lowest level ESL students), (2 mid-level ESL program students), (3 former ESL program students), and (2 multilingual students never placed into ESL program). Average interview length: 22 min

Table 4. SWCC Students Interviewed

Interviews with students currently or formerly enrolled in the ESL program focused on their educational backgrounds, their reasons for taking ESL classes, and the placement process they encountered. Additionally, I asked about whether ESL courses matched their expectations, how they felt a language was best learned, and the role of the ESL program within their individual education or work goals. For students who had transitioned from the ESL program into the wider college, I asked about their experiences with college faculty, whether they received ongoing language support, and whether they felt the ESL program sufficiently prepared them to be successful in the college. Interviews with students never enrolled in the ESL program focused on their experiences

with faculty in the college, whether they faced challenges related to their language proficiency, and whether they contemplated enrolling in ESL coursework. The questions used in these interviews can be found in Appendix B.

Classroom Observations

Finally, investigating the actual role the Academic ESL program played within the college entailed classroom observations. The main focus of my observations was the two Academic ESL program courses that carried the semester of the study, but I additionally observed a developmental English support course, a freshman English composition course, a microbiology lab class, a beginning nursing course, and a course in the highest level of the Community ESL program. Each of the observations will be briefly described next.

I observed courses in both of the two Academic ESL levels which carried the Fall 2021 semester. Each level had three classroom observations apiece. Each course period was three hours long, so my observations of the Academic ESL program totaled 18 hours. I observed the Basic-level ESL course beginning with two class meetings in mid-October, and I was surprised at the low proficiency level of language instruction. I decided that a third observation closer to the end of the semester would help confirm or conflict with what I had observed, and my third observation took place in early December. All of these observations were in-person and were non-participatory observations in that I observed the class rather than assisted with instruction. The only exception to this practice occurred during my last observation when I told students about the STEP Program since I believed that it would be of great interest and benefit for many

of them. After three observations, I felt I had reached saturation.

I observed the Intermediate-level ESL course three times from early November to early December. All observations were remote, and I did not generally participate in whole class discussions unless asked to by students or faculty. When this occurred, I responded directly to questions but attempted to not interact much further. The one exception to this was when the class discussed immigration into the United States and the border wall. Since a family member of mine owns a ranch that partly includes where the border wall was erected, I shared my insights. Additionally, before and after these observations, as well as sometimes during student group work, I conducted member checks with the instructor of the course regarding emerging themes in my data. After three observations of the course, I felt that I had reached saturation.

In addition to observing the two Academic ESL program courses, I wanted to get an in-person view of the Community ESL program. As a result, I observed one morning class of the highest level the Community ESL program offered. This observation was conducted in-person in mid-December and lasted for three hours. The course was taught by a regular faculty member within the Community ESL program and took place at the Community Center campus location.

Moreover, I also observed composition courses that students exiting the ESL program might take. One observation was of a developmental-level class paired with the first-year writing class to offer support for Freshman Composition, and three observations were of the Freshman Composition course. Each of these observations were conducted online from mid-November to early December. All four English courses were taught by

the chair of the English department. My rationale in observing English courses all from the same faculty member was that the viewpoints of the English department chair likely carried more weight at the departmental and institutional level. Furthermore, I believed that having multiple observations of the same individual would allow for a more in-depth understanding of the curriculum than single observations of multiple English department faculty. One added benefit of observing the English department chair was that I was able to discuss initial trends in the data that I was seeing and thus do member checks regarding the validity of those themes.

Since I wanted to learn more about the coursework in the Nursing program as well as perspectives from nursing and biology faculty regarding LM students and the ESL program, I observed two required courses within the Nursing major. The first observation was of a Basics of Nursing course, and the three-hour course took place in the college's auditorium with all Nursing program students within that year's cohort attending (about 70 students). Two different full-time nursing faculty lectured during this meeting, and the observation took place in late October. The second nursing track course I observed was a microbiology lab class taught by the chair of the Biology department. The course was in-person, and took place in mid-November, with the class period lasting an hour and a half. An overview of these observations can be found in Table 5.

Course Observed	# of Observations	In-person or Remote	Total Hours
Community ESL Highest Level	1	In-person	3
Low-Level Academic ESL	3	In-person	9
Intermediate-Level Academic ESL	3	Remote	9
English Composition 101	3	Remote	4.5
Critical Reading and Writing	1	Remote	1.5
Basics of Nursing	1	In-person	3
Microbiology Lab	1	In-person	1.5
Total	13	6 In-person 7 Remote	31.5 hours

Table 5. Classroom Observations

Observation Protocol

Both my in-person and remote Zoom observations followed similar protocols. None of the observations were recorded, and I took notes on my laptop the entire time during both types of classes. For all observations, I arrived early so that I could greet the teacher and introduce myself to incoming students. I also stayed after the class ended in order to have a brief chat with the teacher and to see what questions or comments students might have. For in-person observations, I sat in an inconspicuous seat near the back of the room so that I could have all students within my view. To ensure that I similarly had a chance to view all of the students in the class during online observations, I changed the students visible on the sidebar in Zoom every fifteen minutes.

For times where there was group work during a class period, I took slightly different approaches depending on whether the class was online or in-person. For in-person observations, where I was sitting usually enabled me to hear the one or two groups closest to me, and my observation notes focused on these students, but I still surveyed the whole classroom. When group work occurred during my online observations, I was

assigned to join a breakout room by the instructor, and during these times my observation notes focused on just those students.

My goal in writing observation notes during class time was to provide a rich, descriptive, narrative account of what was happening in the classroom, including the content covered, activities, student interactions, and any other on-the-spot observations. These raw observation notes constitute one facet of my observation data collection protocol. Moreover, observations were critical in determining the actual role of the ESL program in that they were glimpses of the ESL program in action. Thus, during observations and afterwards in my analysis I sought to uncover teacher priorities, instructional philosophies, and assumptions about the role of the ESL program through data gathered from actual observations. To assist with this purpose of my observation, I created a list of guiding observation reflection questions, found in Appendix A, and I periodically reviewed these questions to assist not only in data collection, but also in the analysis phase of my observations.

Third, after conducting each observation, I wrote a memo the same day that summarized what I had seen and my overall reflections. All three types of documents (observation notes, reflection guiding questions, and memo) were saved in my data corpus and utilized in the analysis.

COVID-19 and Data Collection

One major impact to all of higher education starting in 2020 and continuing through 2021 has been the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleges faced huge disruptions, and many classes went remote for the first time ever, often with very little notice. Partly as a

result of the pandemic, community college enrollment nationwide has also declined (Nadworny, 2020). Because of the far-reaching effects of the pandemic, arguments can be made that data collected during this time would diverge significantly from pre-pandemic and or post-pandemic realities. However, because the COVID-19 pandemic is of indeterminate length, it is not practical to wait until conditions "return to normal," if this ever occurs. Second, future trends will undoubtably be shaped by lessons learned during the pandemic, making this an important hinge point in examining how colleges function. Third, times of crisis, like the pandemic, often reveal underlying structural inequities better than at other times. For instance, socioeconomic and infrastructure issues such as students having reliable internet access, while important before the pandemic, became crucial for college students during the pandemic. For these reasons and others, I still conducted my study despite the upheaval caused by the pandemic.

As mentioned, one way that the pandemic impacted SWCC was that around 80% of all coursework was offered online, a huge uptick from previous semesters. Many faculty taught entirely remotely for the first time, and students, especially students who lived in rural areas with poor internet connections, faced challenges fully accessing or participating in remote courses. While the data collection for the study was conducted in the Fall of 2021, meaning that the college itself had operated under a mostly or all online model for over a year, COVID certainly impacted how the college operated, and in turn, how I collected data. I address some of these impacts below.

First, to the extent possible, I balanced conducting online observations with in-person classroom observations and college visits. This was important for me to be able to

get a sense of the "environment" of SWCC beyond the four corners of my own laptop screen. During all campus visits or in-person observations I remained fully masked, followed safety protocols, and maintained social distancing. However, to reduce the risk of possible infection, both to myself and to participants, I decided beforehand that I would try to conduct all interviews remotely. The one exception was my interview with the Director of the Tutoring Center and Writing Center, which unexpectedly occurred during a campus visit. The interview was conducted with social distancing measures in place. While it is true that participants may have been more open or shared different perspectives had these interviews been in person, I believe that at least faculty, administrators, and staff were already quite used to the format of interacting through video calls. Students, especially those who were enrolled in the lower level, in-person ESL course may have been less comfortable with this interview format, so I provided them, and all participants the option of conducting interviews by phone instead of through Zoom. In response, all administrators and students, and all but one faculty member chose to have their interviews via Zoom. Finally, the pandemic likely has impacted my study in ways that I may not currently understand, and that is a limitation on my findings. However, this will be a limitation of the findings for all studies conducted during this time, and I have attempted to account for this unusual time to the extent possible.

Participant Recruitment Procedures

The means by which I recruited student participants differed from how I recruited administrator, staff, or faculty participants. Current ESL program students were recruited

through announcements I made during class observations and by passing around signup sheets or through the chat feature of Zoom. While I initially had eight students from the Basic-level of the Academic ESL program and three students in the Intermediate-level ESL course express a willingness to participate in the study, only two students from each level ultimately responded to follow-up requests and were interviewed. Former ESL program students were recruited via an introductory email from the chair of the English department to his former students, and then by email, from me. In these emails the chair of the English department emphasized that all participation was completely voluntary, but I recognize the power dynamic involved, and I sought to emphasize the confidential and voluntary nature of participation before interviewing each student. I also recognize that the students the English department chair reached out to likely had positive relationships with him, and likewise their Academic ESL courses, and so this is a limitation to this study. Three former ESL program students were recruited this way.

Student participants who were multilingual immigrants but never enrolled in the ESL program were recruited differently still. While observing the microbiology lab class, the instructor explained who I was and the study I was conducting. After class, a student sought me out to learn more, and I later interviewed her. During our interview she also volunteered a friend's name, stating that she felt that this friend could add to the perspectives that she had already shared. After an introductory email by her friend, I emailed her as well and interviewed her about a week later.

Administrator, staff, and faculty participants were recruited in one of two ways. Because I have ongoing close contact with the Dean of Arts, Humanities, and Adult

Education at SWCC, she volunteered to assist me in recruitment. She did this through emailing other administrators, including the Vice-President of Student and Academic Affairs as well as the chair of the English department, to inform them of my study. This introductory email allowed me to be a known quantity before sending a follow-up email requesting participation. The chair of the English department similarly emailed the faculty teaching the Academic ESL program courses before the semester started to let them know about my study beforehand. Thus, all of these participants knew about the study before I contacted them.

However, most of my recruitment of faculty and other administrators within the wider college meant cold contacting possible participants via email. I accessed faculty emails using the college's publicly available online directory, and I began by sending emails introducing myself and my study to all faculty members on the SWCC college directory in the English and Math Departments and additional staff/administrators such as the director of the Community ESL program. From these emails, and two follow up emails spaced two weeks apart, two English faculty members agreed to participate, and I subsequently interviewed them. The same was true of the additional administrators I interviewed. However, no math faculty agreed to participate, citing either that they did not know about the Academic ESL program or did not usually work with LM students as their reasons for declining. From the math department, I moved onto the other faculty within other departments in the college, including psychology and anthropology. These recruitment efforts only led to interviewing one additional faculty member despite two follow-up emails to each faculty member. I then focused my efforts and recruitment

efforts towards faculty within the Nursing program track of courses, since my interviews with ESL program faculty suggested that enrolling in the Nursing program was a common aspiration for many EL students. After similarly emailing all nursing and biology faculty, five additional faculty members agreed to participate and were interviewed.

All observation recruitment came as a result of interview recruitment efforts. Participants who agreed to be interviewed were asked at the end of their interview whether they would be willing to have me observe one of their classes. Those who agreed were later observed as part of the study.

First Phase of Data Analysis

The three types of the data: institutional and state-level documents, classroom observations, and interviews with students, faculty, and administrators, were each initially analyzed separately, using NVivo. The guiding strategy I employed in this first phase is described as "working from the ground up" in Yin's (2018) methodology. This strategy involves the open coding of data sources to uncover patterns and themes in the data. I begin by describing the preliminary analysis and coding procedure for each of my data sources individually. In subsequent sections, I overview the process by which I began the second phase of my analysis.

Institutional Documents

Once the institutional and state Department of Higher Education documents I collected were uploaded onto my Google Drive data corpus for safekeeping, they were then copied into the analytic software NVivo for analysis. Like the observation prompt

questions mentioned earlier, I created a document analysis protocol to assist in focusing my analysis and determining initial codes. This protocol can be found in Appendix G.

For each larger document, I conducted a preliminary key word search, using the search feature of NVivo. The key terms I used were “English”, “language”, “ESOL”, “ESL”, “EL”, “diverse”, “diversity”, and “bilingual” to access any mention of the ESL program within the documents. Wherever these terms occurred, I then went to the relevant section of the text and began initial open coding. For all but one document I simply read through the entire piece and coded them for themes. For the college catalog, after the key word search phase of document analysis was completed, I then examined the table of contents and index to determine if I may have missed any sections that could relate to the ESL program that was not captured in the search words. I then read or skimmed over each section which I found promising, and conducted open coding on these selected sections of the larger documents. After conducting open coding on all institutional documents, I then conducted axial coding. In doing so, I combined related codes across state and institutional documents into more central themes.

Observation Data Analysis

For the preliminary data analysis for classroom observations, I first loaded my observation notes, observation memos, and observation protocol questions in my Google Drive data corpus, and then into NVivo for analysis. I read each observation and observational memo at least three times. I then performed open coding for each observation and observation memo, using the observational protocol questions for guidance. Afterwards, I then conducted two types of axial coding (Merriam & Tisdale,

2016) using NVivo software. The first type of axial coding focused on the three courses I observed multiple times (i.e., the Basic-level ESL course, the Intermediate- level ESL course, and the Freshman Composition course). In this stage of axial coding, I compared the themes found in one observation of the class with the other observations of the same class. Next, I conducted axial coding for themes within three groups of observations a) ESL program classes (i.e., Community and Academic ESL course), b) English classes (i.e., developmental English and Freshman Composition), and c) nursing classes (i.e., Basics of Nursing and Microbiology).

Interview Data Analysis

For the data analysis of the interviews, I listened to each recorded interview three times as part of the transcribing process. Next, I uploaded the interview transcripts and the interview reflection memos onto NVivo for coding. After completing open coding on each of the interviews, I performed two types of axial coding (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The first type of axial coding compared themes within each of the participant groups (i.e., administrators and staff, ESL faculty, nursing and biology faculty, and English college faculty). The second type of axial coding compared axial codes across participant groups.

Second Phase of Data Analysis

At this point in the analysis, I had completed individual axial coding for each of my data sources (i.e., documents, observations, and interviews). Next, after saving a separate NVivo file for each of the data sources, I then uploaded all of the documents with their coded themes into a single NVivo document. This allowed me to examine connections not only within individual data sources but between different sets of data and

codes. At the same time, each coded section still indicated its initial source. After I had completed this axial coding and gathered a combined set of themes, I then used the analytic technique of pattern matching (Yin, 2018). This entailed comparing and contrasting the themes found in disparate data sources to one another and triangulating the data across participants and data sources. After completing pattern matching across codes and themes, I then looked to see which themes had more than just one or two references from my data set. I read through each reference coded under these larger themes to better understand my data findings.

After this step, I then used the strategy of "relying on theoretical propositions" as specified in Yin's (2018) case study methodology. This strategy involved creating a list of theoretical propositions and then comparing the propositions from the theoretical framework with the initial themes from axial coding. This list of propositions from my theoretical framework can be seen in Appendix H, and how I used this "relying on theoretical propositions" viewpoint is described next.

For instance, during my data analysis, I often found statements regarding language that spoke of the concept of accommodation. I checked this theme against Ruiz's idea of language as problem (1984), but found that while other data I had collected could speak to a language as problem orientation, this type of discourse was a different type of orientation altogether. Additionally, I found a recurring theme related to faculty perceptions towards EL students' language proficiency. Some faculty saw ELs as essentially similar to native speaker students, while others saw ELs as essentially lower in proficiency. In seeking to understand this theme, I used the lens of raciolinguistics. Upon

doing so, I shifted in my thinking concerning this theme. While it did indicate that students with different levels of English proficiency were enrolled in the college, much more important and relevant to my study was the fact that these comments revealed more about college faculty, how they saw their students, and their assumptions and biases.

Furthermore, this portion of my data analysis involved the contrasting of data sources against one another. In general, student, faculty, and administrator perceptions tended to agree and supported what I found in institutional and state-level documents. However, there were also times where these data sources disagreed. For instance, at times course outcomes did not match instructor practices, or faculty and students disagreed about the extent to which ELs were supported. These areas of contrast provided further granularity to my level of data analysis.

Organizing the Themes and Triangulating the Data

After completing the steps of "relying on theoretical propositions" and using the technique of "pattern matching" (Yin, 2018), I then needed to organize the themes and to triangulate the data. In order to do this, I used Walqui (2022) and van Lier's (2004) conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological framework to determine within which of the nested systems the findings operated. The ecological framework lens also assisted in determining how to triangulate the data. After positioning each of the major individual themes from the data within the correct ecological system, the triangulation portion of the data analysis consisted of how these nested systems interacted with one another.

For example, I found that the college's Community ESL program was intended at

least in part to transition students into the Academic ESL program, but it did not function as intended. Using an ecological lens allowed me to see how exosystem decisions regarding the amount of funding the state provided for the Community ESL program impacted the college at multiple levels. At the outer-meso level, it impacted how the wider college structured the intended pathway for EL students. Furthermore, at the inner-meso level, the Community ESL program competed with the Academic ESL program for students, and at the micro, classroom level, many students were left confused about the differences between the programs.

At this point, I had a) determined the most salient themes, b) investigated how they related to my theoretical framework, c) explored at which level(s) of my ecological lens they functioned, and d) triangulated the data across multiple sources. Finally, I made judgements regarding which themes to include, and the main criterion for inclusion in the study was whether the theme directly addressed my research question.

Member Checks

A final practice that I utilized throughout the data analysis process was conducting member checks. Many of these occurred informally with the chair of the English department and the instructor for the Intermediate-level ESL course. Member checks often took place before or after classroom observations, and I selected these two individuals for member checks of themes because they had worked as ESL instructors at SWCC the longest. Most of the member checks took place in the data collection stage, but the final member check was near the end of my data analysis. At the final member check, I provided a preliminary report for feedback for the Academic ESL program

instructors, the English department chair, and the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education. The feedback they provided regarding the themes I presented assisted in providing validation to findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

This section details the intended purpose of the Academic ESL program at Sweetwater Community College, as well as the actual role that the program fulfilled within the college and in student outcomes. I begin with an introduction to the two ESL programs at SWCC and their intended role according to institutional documents and administrators. I then address factors that impact the Academic ESL program's intended role within each of the nested systems of my Ecological Framework (exo, outer-meso, inner-meso, and micro).

Intended Academic ESL program Role

Sweetwater Community College's Academic ESL program was designed for the purpose of providing English learners in the area a pathway into the wider college. The importance of this pathway and its connection to the wider mission of community colleges was summarized by SWCC's Academic Vice-President, who stated,

> We are an open access community college . . . and we communicate in standard English . . . so . . . we have a responsibility to provide [students] a pathway that will get them to the credit-bearing courses that they aspire to. . . . to provide that level of skill in the English language for them to move along.

A similar sentiment was echoed by the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education, who said, "One growth area [in the community] is the immigrant population . . . and I feel like if we truly want to serve our mission, we need to take care of these students." The pathway that Sweetwater currently has structured to provide college access for linguistically diverse populations (labelled here as "Community EL

Population") is outlined in the Figure 4. Each component of this structure is discussed in turn.

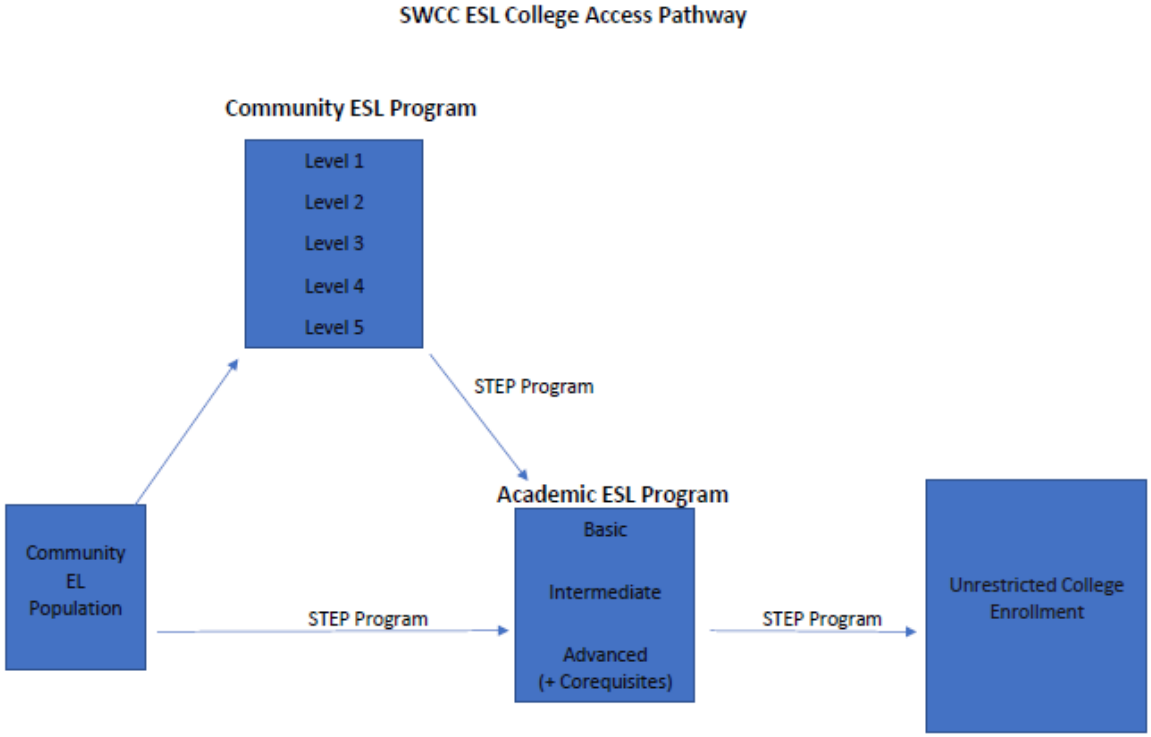

Figure 4. SWCC's ESL Program Pathway

Community ESL program

First, while not the direct focus of this study, the Community ESL program serves as part of the intended pipeline for the Academic ESL program and wider college. Sweetwater's Academic Vice-President explained that, "The idea is that [the Community ESL program] would be a pathway or a transition to the [main] campus and other credit bearing courses and programs." The Community ESL program offers free ESL courses to community members across five levels, from beginning to advanced. Classes are not held on the main college campus, but at the nearby Community Center location. Day and

evening classes are offered twice a week for three hours at a time. The focus of the program is not college preparation, but rather the teaching of English so that students can successfully live in the community, or as the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education summarized, "Getting basic English skills . . . learning how to converse . . . how to go food shopping, how to fill out your taxes, whatever it is . . . just so that you can negotiate life."

While beginner students are welcome, students who demonstrate more than a 7th grade English reading level are referred out of the program. In addition to language instruction, higher-level students are also taught about soft and hard job skills, digital literacy, and college and career readiness. Courses are administered through the Adult Education wing of the college, which reports to the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education.

Academic ESL Program

The second ESL program, the Academic ESL program, offers three levels of instruction (Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced) at the college's main campus and more recently, remotely for the Intermediate and Advanced levels. The Academic ESL program is administered through the English department. Students enrolled in these courses are considered matriculated college students, and as such pay full college tuition for the courses they take ($650 per class for resident students, and $1,300 for nonresident students). While the lowest level in the Academic ESL program is a noncredit course, the Intermediate and Advanced courses offer graduation credit. Each course meets three hours a week in the evenings. Students in the Intermediate level are allowed to take

developmental-level reading and writing and an orientation to college class concurrently. Students who enroll in Advanced ESL are allowed to register for courses that have no prerequisite as well as some general education coursework such as Freshman Composition, Intro to Psychology, and Intro to Sociology. Students who complete the Advanced course can then enroll in freshman-level English and are in essence then free to take whatever coursework they desire.

The Academic ESL program is intended for students seeking college credentials or postsecondary vocational training at the main college campus. The course sequence is structured around three levels, and each of the three levels has objectives and outcomes centered on building student language and writing proficiency until students are sufficiently prepared to take Freshman Composition. In the following paragraphs I outline the main objectives and outcomes for each of the three courses as specified in the departmental syllabus for each class, since these documents clearly describe these courses' intended content and structure. These objectives are also included in Table 6.

	Basic Level	Intermediate Level	Advanced Level
Reading	Read simple texts in English with the help of a dictionary	Read academic, non-fiction works in English with the aid of a dictionary and clarification by an instructor	Read a college textbook and other academic prose with little need of a dictionary or clarification from an instructor
Listening	Comprehend carefully spoken classroom English with frequent repetition or clarification	Comprehend classroom English spoken at moderate to normal speed with occasional repetition or clarification	Comprehend . . . academic English in normal, sometimes rapid, speech with very little repetition or clarification
Speaking	Express ideas about familiar topics in Standard American English	Express ideas about academic or complex topics in Standard American English	Ability to discuss materials written at the college level
Writing	Write a basic paragraph	Compose cohesive, coherent narrative and descriptive paragraphs	Write academic English sentences with near native accuracy. . . . Write short essays

Table 6. Selected Academic ESL Program Level Outcomes

The Basic level has no minimum English proficiency requirements for enrollment, so students with little to no English ability qualify to take the course. This also means that students do not need to enroll in Community ESL courses before enrolling in Academic ESL courses. The objectives for the course reference being able to use all four skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) at a "high elementary level." This involves being able to "read simple texts in English with the help of a dictionary," "comprehend carefully spoken classroom English with frequent repetition or clarification," "express ideas about familiar topics in Standard American English," and write a "basic paragraph." In addition to language-specific tasks, students are expected to

understand the basic concept of plagiarism, send and receive emails, use a computer, and know about and use various college resources (i.e., the Tutoring Center, the Advising and Counseling Center, and the Writing Center). Students in the Basic level are charged the same tuition costs as the other two levels, but the class itself is not for college credit. Furthermore, because these courses are noncredit, students have options in how their grade is reported because it is not a credit-bearing course. So, students may receive a letter grade (A–C), a "Pass" grade, or a "Repeat" grade if insufficient linguistic progress is made. Students who fail the course because of not turning in assignments do not receive a "Repeat," but an "F." Finally, the syllabus for the course ends with the caveat, "The content of the course varies widely in response to student needs."

The Intermediate-level course is designed "as a continuation of [Basic ESL]", and students receive three college credits for successful course completion. Similar to the Basic course, the objectives relate to all four language skills. Some of these objectives include being able to "compose cohesive, coherent narrative and descriptive paragraphs," "comprehend classroom English spoken at moderate to normal speed with occasional repetition or clarification," "express ideas about academic or complex topics in Standard American English," and "read academic, non-fiction works in English with the aid of a dictionary and clarification by an instructor." In addition to the language elements of the course, students are expected to understand the concept of intellectual property, know about and use college resources, send and receive email, and use word processing software. Similar to the Basic level, "content of the course varies widely in response to student needs, interests, and abilities." Students in the Intermediate level were also

allowed to take a very limited number of courses in the wider college. Two of these classes were the College Experience class and a Reading and Writing Development course, which one student (Camila) took concurrently with her Intermediate ESL course.

The Advanced-level course, like the Intermediate course, is offered for three credits, but the course signals a transition from an equal emphasis on all four skills to "developing the ability to read and write essays from college-level English." Furthermore, the course has significant expectations for student English proficiency, indicating that students will, "Write academic English sentences with near native accuracy" and, "Read a college textbook and other academic prose with little need of a dictionary or clarification from an instructor." In terms of oral communication, students will "Comprehend . . . academic English in normal, sometimes rapid, speech with very little repetition or clarification." Students are also tasked with learning and utilizing MLA citation format, using rhetorical modes and arguments, conducting research, and "tak[ing] full advantage" of all college resources. Like the Intermediate course, "Content of the course varies in response to student needs, interests, and abilities." Students who receive a C grade or above are considered ready to enroll in Freshman Composition.

As stated earlier, the Advanced ESL course did not carry the semester of my data collection, and the students placed into Intermediate ESL, even if they would have been placed in the Advanced ESL course had that course carried, were not allowed to enroll in any of these other courses. After students complete the highest level of Academic ESL program, they are then free to enroll in all other introductory college courses.

Taken together, the proposed pathway for EL students to transition to the wider

college is as follows. First, students may or may not take Community ESL courses in preparation for enrolling in Academic ESL courses. Once students complete the Academic ESL program sequence, they can transition to the wider college.

How the ESL Program Actually Functions

However, as the Academic Vice-President admitted, the proposed pathway, "hasn't worked out that way." The Community ESL program has seen skyrocketing enrollment with a waiting list of over 800 students, meaning new prospective students must wait two and a half to three years to start classes. In contrast, Academic ESL program enrollment has stagnated from a high of about 70 five years ago to less than 15 students total during the Fall 2021 semester, with only two of the three listed classes having enough enrolled students to be able to carry. The sheer disparity in enrollment leads to the question of whether a viable college pathway exists for EL students at all.

This chapter examines the factors that impact the Academic ESL program and cause its actual role to differ from its intended role. To highlight the larger context in which the Academic ESL program exists and how ESL programs are impacted by national, state, and college-level factors beyond their immediate control, I begin first by describing the exosystem of this ecological framework. I then move inward to the outer-mesosystem, the inner-mesosystem, and then the microsystem. To review, each nested system and the level of influence for each system are included in Figure 5. Later in Chapter 5, I discuss interactions across the nested systems.

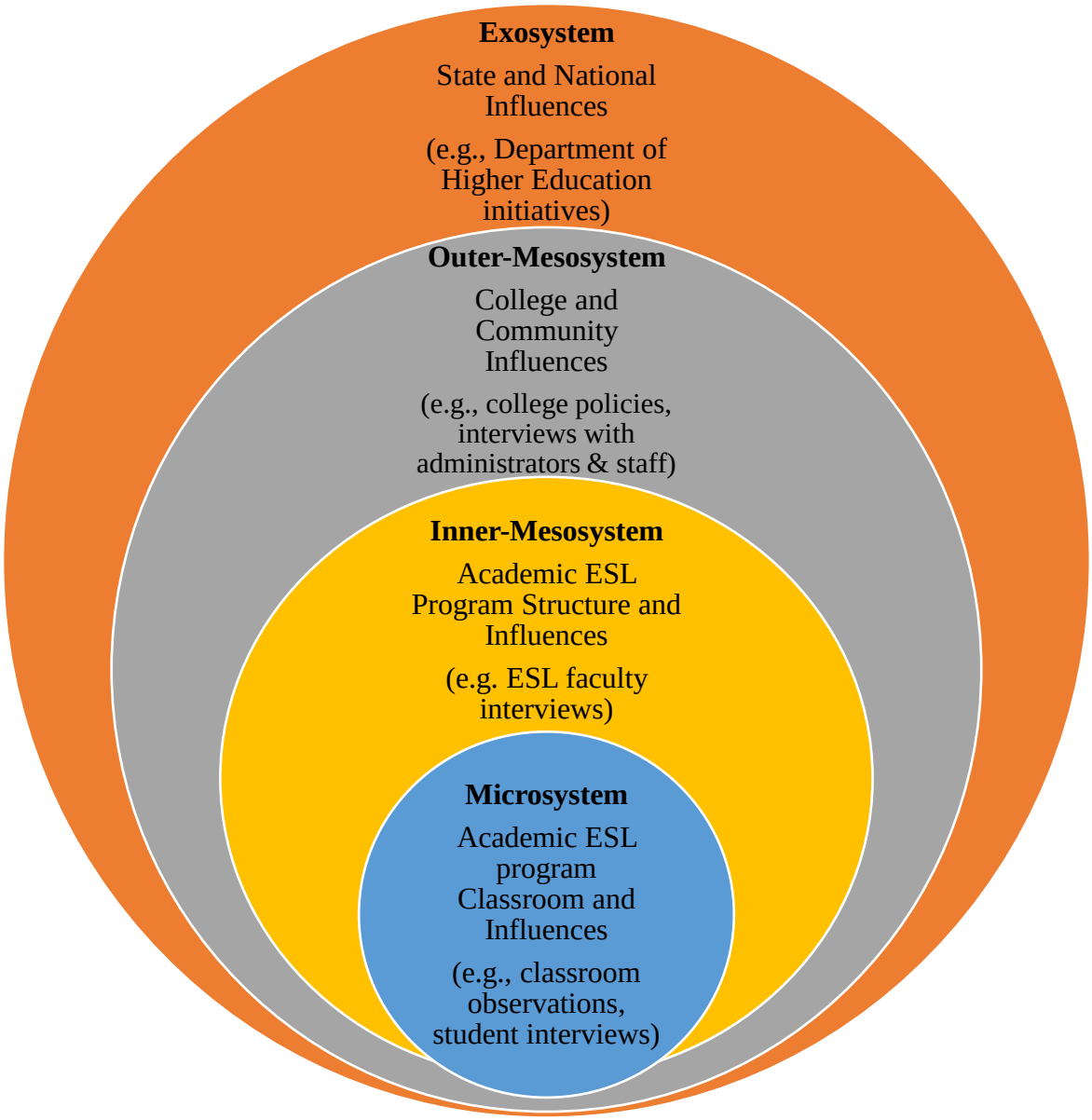

Figure 5. Ecological Framework for this Study

The Exosystem

The exosystem for this study is defined as state and national policies and influences, including those directly from the state's Department of Higher Education. Six factors were identified during data collection, a) national immigration enforcement, b)

national and state tuition policies relative to documentation status, c) state Department of Higher Education focus on diversity that ignores linguistic diversity, d) grants administered through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, e) national and state-level exams which impact student access into the college's Nursing program and determine whether students can graduate with certification f) the COVID pandemic. These factors are shown in Figure 6 below.

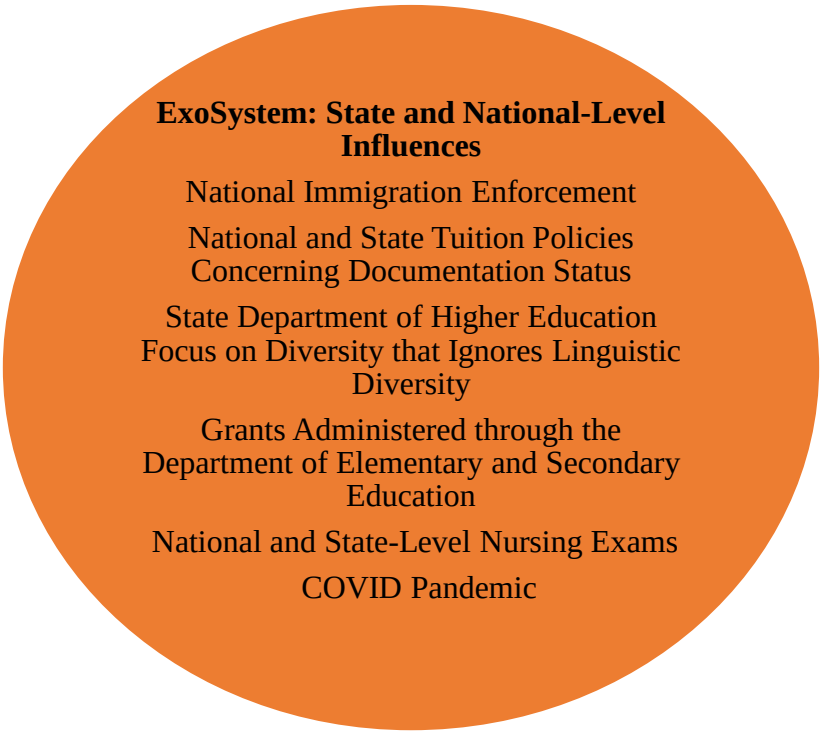

Figure 6. Exosystem Factors

Immigration and Documentation Enforcement

One reason identified by teachers and administrators to explain low Academic ESL program enrollment was that the college registration process involves having students reveal their documentation status. SWCC's purpose in having students identify their immigration status is to determine what tuition rates to charge, but students likely do

not know about college data privacy policies, and fear that the college could share this information with law enforcement. This concern was exacerbated by increased immigration enforcement during the Trump presidency. The Community ESL program director shared,

> There was such fear when Trump was in office . . . people would say, "Oh my God, we heard that there are agents at the [traffic] rotary trying to stop cars to get illegal people. So, you don't go over to the rotary" when there was no such thing going on…everybody was so paranoid.

These fears led some ELs to choose to enroll in the Community ESL program over the Academic ESL program because registration in noncredit classes does not entail revealing their documentation status. The Academic Vice President commented, "Our adult education center is booming, you know. . . .Students do not have to share their status, right? [They can enroll] . . . with very few questions asked." Such fears about deportation were not unfounded. A longtime math tutor and teacher at the college who just began work overseeing an equity grant recalled the experience of how a student in a mathematics review workshop came up to her in tears because her husband was being deported. With such dire consequences at stake, it is no wonder undocumented students would think twice before enrolling in a program that requires sharing their documentation status.

Federal and State Tuition Policies and Documentation Status

Furthermore, revealing documentation status, or even how long one has resided in state, profoundly impacts ELs attempting to enroll in coursework. First, the cost for resident students to enroll in college coursework is fairly significant. Resident students

taking an Academic ESL program course must pay $650. The school's new equity grant coordinator reflected on these high tuition costs, sharing, "Not all community colleges are so underfunded as we are [in this state]. The tuition is very high here, comparatively."

Moreover, current state law provides no process by which undocumented students can qualify for in-state tuition. As a result, nonresident students have to pay $1,300 per three credit ESL course, twice the tuition rate of resident students, creating additional financial pressure for these students. The English department chair put it this way, "Only a really intrepid person is going to come and pay the 1,400 bucks . . . you'd have to be pretty financially secure and have the time to take like three hours out of your evening." The Community ESL program director shared that students interested in the Academic ESL program often ask, "Why is it so much . . . money for one class?" Moreover, undocumented students do not qualify for federal or state financial aid. Thus, the sticker price for college for almost all undocumented students is the price to be paid.

Yet, despite this high rate, a few resident and nonresident EL students alike will pay that tuition rate rather than wait the two to three years needed to enroll in free Community ESL program classes. Mariana, an Intermediate-level student, shared, "I have a friend. They, they tried [to enroll in the Community ESL program] . . . and I said, 'No, go and pay, because . . . maybe they never call you.' Cause there so many in the line. . . .I said to her, 'Go and pay because it's for your learning.'" The instructor for the Intermediate ESL program similarly shared, "I really think [the tuition cost] is inhibiting a lot of [ELs] from coming to the college . . . and, and the amazing thing is that so many of them will pay double because they are so devoted to their goal."

However, persistence at such a price is expensive, and as a result, the cost of attending the Academic ESL program serves a financial gatekeeping function, especially for undocumented students. The Intermediate-level ESL instructor further commented, "That's a horrible way to treat people living among us . . . whether they've got the right papers or not, you know . . .it does inhibit our enrollment. I know it does." In the past, SWCC attempted workarounds to these policies to make college more affordable. Two temporary efforts included charging in-state tuition for classes taught by adjuncts, and charging only in-state tuition for all evening coursework. Both efforts for a time boosted enrollment. This second policy specifically benefitted Academic ESL program students because Academic ESL courses have only ever been able to carry at night. Yet, both efforts were discontinued about six years ago when the state clamped down on their policies regarding tuition rates and residency. These policies and their enforcement negatively impact diverse communities in particular.

State Department of Higher Education Focus on Diversity, but not Linguistic Diversity

At the same time that documentation status impacts higher education access, the state's Department of Higher Education has proclaimed that "racial equity is the top policy and performance priority." However, missing from almost all state-level initiatives is any mention of linguistic diversity. In fact, student English proficiency is conspicuously absent in press releases or documents which herald their new, equity-focused agenda. For instance, one press release expresses, "We can't overcome enrollment challenges without addressing persistent opportunity gaps identified by race, gender and ZIP code." A comprehensive explanation of their new priorities speaks of

"opportunity and achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and geography." A third document indicates the need to "focus on two major identifiers: race and geography." At the same time, according to census data, the state's population that speaks English less than "very well" (9.2%) is nearly equal that of the state's total African-American (not including multiracial) population (9.3%).

This pattern of ignoring discussions regarding the impact of English proficiency on higher education access and outcomes can be seen not only in the Department of Higher Education's new social justice focus, but in almost all other initiatives it undertakes (e.g., assessment, STEM program access, and workforce development). Additionally, while some ESL programs have qualified and received grants related to the equity initiative, assisting ELs has never been the primary focus of any of these grants. The only exception has been the department's workforce plan for healthcare fields. The plan highlights how healthcare jobs could provide economic mobility and opportunities for English learner immigrants and also calls for the state to streamline the process by which foreign trained immigrants receive certification. Even more directly, the plan calls for coordination among, "community-based training programs, adult basic education (ABE) and English as a second language (ESOL) programs, career vocational and technical education (CVTE) and the community college system" to meet the demand for a skilled healthcare workforce.

The impact of the Department of Higher Education prioritizing diversity as defined by race, gender, and geography, but not by language trickles down to state colleges and universities and their priorities. As a result, the pressure to improve the

outcomes for diverse student populations is passed on from the state level (exo) to the college level (outer-meso), but especially in the categories specified by the state (e.g., race, socioeconomic status). As a result, linguistically diverse students and the colleges which serve them are left to address linguistic challenges and opportunities on their own without coordinated statewide support. Seemingly, then, issues of language and language education appear not to be primarily a postsecondary concern at the state level unless they relate to shortages in an important labor field. In summary, at the state level, addressing inequity in higher education is a race and socioeconomic issue, not a language one, a perspective that contrasts sharply with a raciolinguistic perspective (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2016)

State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Grants

In marked contrast to the state's Department of Higher Education, the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in part because of federal level funding from the US Department of Education, provides two grants which impact educational access and outcomes for ELs at SWCC. The first of these is a grant that funds SWCC's Community ESL program, and the second is the STEP Program.

The Community ESL program is funded primarily by a grant administered through the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, though the rent for the building where the program is housed, utilities, etc., are paid for by the college. Not only are all tuition and enrollment costs waived, but students are provided books free of charge, and the grant funding is sufficiently large that during the time the program was conducted remotely due to COVID, students in need were provided laptops and internet

connections as well.

Placement criteria into the program is determined by the guidelines specified in the grant, and the curriculum follows standards which tie into the Common Core framework. However, as mentioned previously, students who demonstrate higher than a 7th grade reading level are not eligible to participate. Therefore, the gap in English proficiency level between the highest level of the Community ESL program and the wider college is intentional. As a result, ELs who complete the Community ESL program are left near the threshold of higher education, but not provided instructional assistance beyond that point. Again, as SWCC's Vice-President indicated, this is where the Academic ESL program could provide that access, but because of various reasons, does not.

While the focus of the program is English for functioning in the community and not college preparation, higher-level students do receive some instruction regarding college readiness. The free program provides English instruction to many in the community, but at the same time provides a competition for services with the Academic ESL program. Moreover, as discussed later, the separate structure, aims, and governance of the Community ESL program inhibit it from being fully integrated into the wider college or effectively serving as a pathway to higher education.

In contrast, facilitating the transition of students from the Community ESL program to the credit Academic ESL program, and in turn the Academic ESL program to the rest of the college, is the STEP program. This program is another grant-funded initiative from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education oriented towards

older than traditionally-aged students. Funding through the program includes free tuition for five college courses spread throughout three semesters. Students are recruited into the STEP program by the program coordinator, who makes periodic visits into Community ESL, Academic ESL, and developmental education courses to tell students about the program. Tuition costs for the Academic ESL program can also be paid through the STEP program, and as a condition of participating in the program, students are required to take the College Experience course, which informs them about how the college operates and provides guidance on accessing college resources such as financial aid, registration, advising, etc. Enrollment in the program is capped at around 10 to 15 students a semester. Despite the limited scope and funding of the program, the STEP coordinator at the same time ensures that there is room in the program's budget to cover the nonresident tuition costs for a handful of undocumented students. That being said, the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education commented, "[It's] one way to get them in the door, but it's, you know, it's a pretty small program."

Two student participants in this study were either currently or formerly enrolled in the STEP program, and both had very positive experiences. Camila, a student enrolled in the Intermediate level of the Academic ESL program, was currently participating in the STEP program. She felt that the program was great, and she was grateful for how it helped her afford college. Nadia, who is now obtaining her bookkeeping certificate at SWCC, had exited the Academic ESL program a few years earlier. She indicated that the STEP program was crucial in her college-going identity. She stated, "You know, what really helped me to understand . . . to feel like I was a part of the college: STEP

program." Nadia went on to explain that the required College Experience course she took as part of the STEP program gave her enough information about how the college works and what her options within the college were to consider herself a full-fledged college student. After completing her bookkeeping certificate, she hopes to go on to become a Certified Personal Accountant (CPA).

National-Level Exams for Nursing Majors

As stated earlier, eventual enrollment in the Nursing program at SWCC is the most sought-after goal for students enrolling in the Academic ESL program. However, acceptance into the program and eventual graduation are significantly influenced by how students perform on two tests. First, students are required take the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) as part of applying to the program. Then, at the end of the Nursing program, students must pass the nursing board examination to become a Registered Nurse (RN). These two tests impact not only the Nursing program, but the success of the Academic ESL program in transitioning students into the wider college. Both tests are discussed below as exo-level factors.

The TEAS test serves a similar function for nursing programs that the GRE test serves for U.S. graduate programs. However, the TEAS is at best marginally about nursing, though its ostensible purpose is to predict who will succeed in nursing programs. The test has four sections: reading, math, science, and English and language use, and questions in each of these sections run the gamut. The former assessment coordinator at SWCC shared with me,

> The TEAS test is nearly impossible. The science part of the TEAS test is crazy. . . .I started as a science teacher in K to 12. . . .I have a pretty broad base of science

> knowledge in that I have a degree in science . . . . I was raised by a science professor . . . I struggled with the test. The vocabulary [is challenging for ELs]: Here's four or five, arbitrary vocabulary words that have no connection to any other content or concepts that they've seen so far in English . . . Like how are they, how do you prepare for that?

One of the students I interviewed, Mislande, took the test four times before passing, explaining that in addition to the content requirements of the test, she had to learn the content, "the American way" because the way the questions were framed was unfamiliar. She explained, "You don't, I did not grow up in the culture . . . and it's also timed. So, I had to learn it the American way, so I could catch up on the time." Other parts of the test ask detailed, decontextualized questions regarding obscure punctuation rules or vocabulary. Essentially, the test seems to function as an extended language assessment posing as a nursing entrance exam.

The second test, the nursing board exam, is the culmination of the entire Registered Nurse (RN) program. Students who pass the board exam can go on to be RNs, while those who do not, cannot. Again, this test has a trickle-down impact on Nursing program admissions. Specifically, the program has a vested interest in only admitting students who will eventually pass the boards because the program's ongoing accreditation status depends on a high percentage of graduating students passing the exam. As a result, the Nursing program has to make a determination of students' likelihood to eventually pass the NCLEX exam based on application information, including TEAS scores. Furthermore, the NCLEX exam itself, is, as SWCC's previous assessment coordinator stated, a "super language heavy for an exam."

Ms. McDonald, a Nursing program faculty member, was direct in tying in how students perform on the nursing boards with decisions regarding enrollment into the program.

> I've had a lot [of LM students] in my clinical groups and . . . they struggle with the tests. I would love to do a different format, testing, but it would set them up for failure. . . . I welcome [LM students]. I'll work with you as much as you need . . . but by the same token, we are doing a disservice if they're not going to be able to pass the boards. I can't see someone going through what those students have to go through, and at the end . . . not be able to get a job.

Thus, the national-level TEAS test and nursing board exam play a determining role in who the Nursing program admits, which in turn, impacts whether the Academic ESL program can sufficiently prepare students for success in the wider college.

An important distinction to also make is that these tests impact enrollment into the Registered Nurse (RN) program at SWCC, but students can still pursue work as nurses. Specifically, many ELs and LM students (and one of this study's participants) become Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) which has a much easier certification process. However, the pay, opportunities for advancement, and work options for CNAs are significantly less than RNs. One nursing faculty indicated that many CNAs work up to 60 hours a week at multiple sites but do not receive benefits. Another shared that many rehabilitation centers are "desperate" for CNAs, and yet CNAs are only paid around $12 an hour. These findings suggest that LM students' low performance on these tests can make them more likely to work in low-paying healthcare jobs

COVID-19 Pandemic

Finally, an impact on all of higher education, including the Academic ESL program, is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused college enrollment numbers to decline at SWCC, a trend similar to colleges generally nationwide (Conley & Massa, 2022). At the same time, the format in which college classes took place was also affected. For the first time, Academic ESL courses were offered online. The impact of moving classes online for students was complex. On the one hand, I observed students in the Intermediate level who were able to log into classes while on vacation and without fear of contracting COVID. On the other, internet reliability was low for students in rural areas around the college, and in two instances students let the professor know mid class that their Internet connection was down so that they could not fully participate. The pandemic also laid bare underlying funding discrepancies between the two ESL program. While the Community ESL program provided laptops and internet connections to students who needed them, the Academic ESL program was not in a financial position to do so.

Academic ESL program Outer-Mesosystem

In addition to the exo-level factors discussed above are outer-mesosystem influences, defined here as college-level policies and culture as well as the perspectives of college administrators, faculty, and staff outside the Academic ESL program classroom. The outer-meso-level factors I address include, a) orientations towards language proficiency and LM students, b) a discourse that frames language support for LM students as accommodation, c) substantial faculty workload and multiple

responsibilities, and d) the role of the Writing Center.

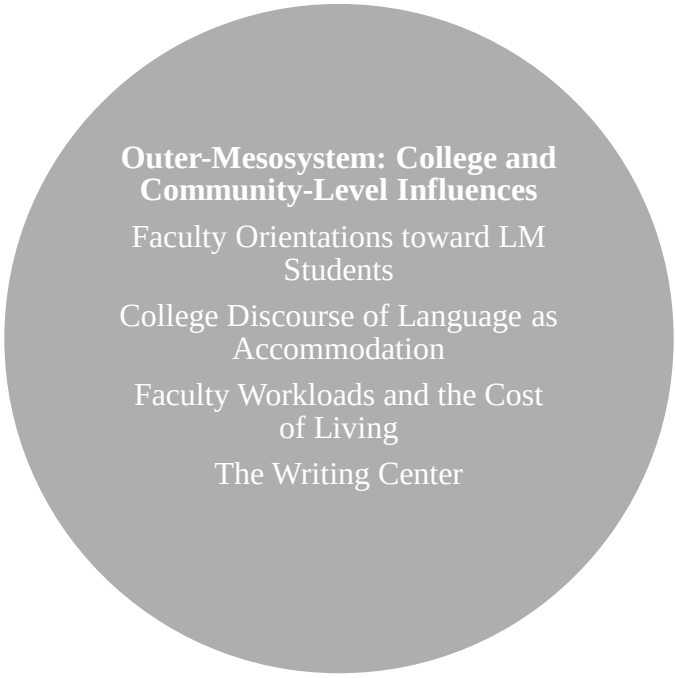

Figure 7. Outer-Mesosystem Factors

Administrator and Faculty Orientations towards Language Proficiency and LM Students

As students leave the Academic ESL program for the wider college, their outcomes and experiences are impacted by the wider college climate towards the language acquisition process and LM students. However, faculty and administrator perceptions were not unitary, but were bifurcated. Some faculty saw LM students as essentially similar in proficiency to native English-speaking students while others saw them as substantially less proficient.

Interestingly, many faculty across the college indicated that LM students often came with similar language proficiencies as many U.S. high school grads. This is more a reflection of how poorly they rated general high school students than that LM students

had language mastery. One English faculty member shared, "[Many high school grads] are really not different from English as a second language students, because they just do not have much experience with English. You know, it's a sad statement on where our . . . education is at right now." A former Math department faculty member similarly stated, "Many of our students who grow up in a family that's, no one's gone to college. No one has a professional job. Nobody reads. They don't have academic language as a part of their . . . toolkit. They don't know how to speak our language." One nursing faculty member was even more direct, "Even English-speaking students . . . some of them are idiots, and they don't read, and they're not good at English and, you know, they don't understand it."

Similarly, the English department chair argued that LM students do not necessarily make more grammar mistakes in writing, just different, more maligned ones than native English-speaking students. The other full-time English faculty member expressed a variation on this theme. He thought that the errors made by LM students were more numerous, but that they often constituted "accented writing" and were minimal and unimportant. The college's expectation for LM students was described well by the Academic Vice-President, "[There's] not a real gap in comprehension, understanding, fluency, at least on the reading and comprehensive side of English."

Three different science faculty brought up the point that regardless of initial language proficiency, in their view, both LM students and native English speaker students in science courses began with roughly similar playing fields. They felt this is in part because, as one adjunct biology faculty member argued, all students are "learning the

new language of medicine . . . and those words are foreign." Because all students lacked discipline-specific vocabulary, they were essentially seen as beginning their science learning at the same point. The minimal difference between the two populations was also shared by a long-time Psychology faculty member, who shared, "It's not ever been a big deal. Because by [the time they're in the college] they're relatively okay, with the English . . . at that point, I think it becomes more of the subtleties of the language." From these perspectives, learning the subtleties of the language, much like acquiring science vocabulary, could seemingly be worked out over time

However, even faculty who expressed admiration for LM students tended in the same breath to highlight the linguistic challenges or "subtleties of the language" they felt these students had not yet mastered. Tellingly, LM students' first language proficiency was almost never noted as a strength or resource, even in clearly applicable fields like nursing. Additionally, the college made a point to recognize that many students were originally from abroad by hanging in the cafeteria the flags that represented the home countries of students at SWCC. Yet, only one faculty member, who was also internationally born, commented on the rich benefit to the college of having students with international perspectives.

Instead, faculty focused their praise on LM students for their maturity and work ethic. The English department chair shared, "They're probably ahead of our high schoolers because they're more grown-up, and, you know, more serious in a lot of ways, too." LM students in the Nursing program were praised for their ability as caring clinicians, but again, the focus was work ethic. One faculty member stated, "I have a

couple students that English is not their first language. They are rock stars. . . .They study hard. They . . . devote massive amount of hours." Another English faculty member praised LM students, "I mean you're setting yourself up for dealing with some really extraordinary people who are far greater academics in their own right than I am . . . I would say have great respect, love. And reverence for these people." Similarly, two biology faculty felt that LM students faced added challenges, but they felt their outcomes were generally comparable to other students because of their work ethic. All in all, most faculty and administrators I interviewed viewed LM students more favorably than the general student population, and the former EL students I interviewed shared in return that they overall felt supported by the school.

Yet this viewpoint of LM students as essentially equivalent in proficiency was not shared by all college faculty. As discussed more in-depth later, many faculty within the nursing track of courses noted that LM students tended to have lower test scores. One reason for this perception among nursing faculty likely came from viewing their students' English proficiency through the lens of its impact on accreditation. Thus, nursing faculty were acutely aware of how LM students performed on high stakes tests (i.e., the TEAS and NCLEX) and what their grades were.

Moreover, a number of former ELs felt that some faculty were biased against them. Nadia, a former Advanced-level Academic ESL program student stated, "I had couple of professors, where it felt like, I don't know, like . . . kind of like, not racist, but it just, you know, biased." A more detailed examination of the bias some faculty members have was discussed by Mr. Hudson, a tutor and Academic ESL program instructor:

> I've heard professors, you know, just resistant to working with ESL students . . . they have the expectation that students are at a certain level when they reach them. And if they feel that somebody isn't . . . the complaints come.

Moreover, as a raciolinguistic perspective would posit, viewpoints about student language proficiency were inextricably connected to perceptions about race. Mr. Hudson continues,

> I've seen racism on the part of professors . . . I don't think it's widespread or chronic, but there are pockets. . . . . it can be so devastating to the student involved. It can be very, very undermining to them. . . I think they can come away feeling like they're beating their head against the wall because there's something about them that makes them unacceptable. No matter how hard they try hard, how hard they work . . . it doesn't even matter because there's just something about them that is not acceptable, and they, they can never change.

One student who experienced and expressed many of the sentiments above was Mislande, a LM student originally from Haiti who is seeking entrance into SWCC's RN Nursing program. Despite testing out of all ESL coursework when she entered the college, Mislande faced ongoing scrutiny regarding whether her language proficiency would ever be good enough. She shared the following experience regarding the application process for the Licensed Practical Nurse program at Sweetwater.

> I went there and I applied, I passed the test [after the third time]. . . . . And so, I was qualified for an interview. . . . I went in and after two or three minutes, the person who was interviewing me said, "I realize that your English score is 89. And I just want you to know that the person before you . . . got a 98."
> And I said, "I didn't know what to say to that." And then she said, "How fluent are you in reading in English? And how many books have you read for the last three months?" . . . . After [my] reply to her question, she basically told me that my English wasn't enough to get into the program even though I passed the score that was required and that other people had higher grades.

One of the challenging aspects of this rejection for Mislande was that she noticed

the person who interviewed right before her was a White American young woman. After this experience, Mislande was left looking for answers. She reasoned,

> Probably because of my accent, or she peeked at something and decided to say that my English wasn't good enough to get into the program. And the way she said it was to me, was condescending. I know, I know, that I was qualified. I know that I understand English.

While it may be true that the reasons the program rejected Mislande related to the program being very competitive and that they believed she was unlikely to succeed, the vignette demonstrates the fact that White, native speakers are still held up as "the standard" to which multilingual students must aspire, and to which they are seen as inherently inferior (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015). Her experience raises further questions regarding how perceptions of race and language impact LM student outcomes.

A telling quote by one nursing faculty member highlights the connection between race and language. She shared, "The nursing faculty is trying to increase diversity by having more nurses that look like the population they are serving, and they see ELs as part of that." Stated this way, the program wanted nurses that first and foremost racially resembled their patients. Yet, like the state's Department of Higher Education emphasis on increasing equity, diversity is primarily framed through a racial lens, and while language could be a part of increasing diversity, it was tangential to this pursuit.

This is not to say that the Nursing program was not committed to working with linguistically diverse students—it provided multiple levels of support and even asked me for feedback on how to better assist LM students. However, as described in Ruiz's orientations framework (1984), at SWCC, especially within the Nursing program, LM

students were seen primarily as problems to fix rather than resources to draw from. Ironically, at the same time, the Nursing program saw multilingualism itself as a valuable skill because the program offered a course designed to help prospective nurses communicate with Spanish-speaking patients.

Language Support Versus Language Accommodation

Even faculty who expressed that they wanted to support LM students did so within a discourse of providing accommodations. Using the Ruiz's orientations in language planning as a heuristic tool (Ruiz, 1984), this study uncovered a campus view that framed discussions of language support as whether or not they constituted a learning accommodation. This orientation also functioned as an outer-meso-level factor in how students exiting the Academic ESL program, and LM students in general were seen.

The genesis of this perspective likely began as a result of a pilot study in the Nursing program. Ms. Jones, a full-time nursing faculty member, discovered that LM students often struggled with completing timed quizzes, and when asked, her students shared that they had to mentally "translate it, answer it, and then translate it back." With the permission of her department chair, she began a pilot study where LM students received extra time on tests. Furthermore, she found that LM students were often tripped up by the wording on tests that did not relate to the content studied. In response to this challenge, the pilot program also gave the faculty member proctoring the test permission to provide a synonym to the entire class for any unfamiliar non-medical term students encountered and asked about. As a result of the pilot test, student retention increased, including among native English speakers, and nursing faculty quietly continued these

practices beyond the pilot test date. However, once the college's wider administration heard of this practice, it was shut down for fear of possible litigation. The reasoning was that giving more time on tests constituted providing an accommodation, and being an LM student was different from having a documented disability.

Many faculty have responded to this decision with quiet disobedience. One biology faculty member shared, "I give them extra time, unofficially. ''m not allowed to do that, but I do give them a little bit of extra time on graded quizzes and exams." Another biology faculty member mentioned that she is in the process of revisiting the idea. "My answer a year and a half ago would be no, I wouldn't give more time on a test because they wouldn't have an accommodation. Right?" Faculty members in the Nursing program banded together to create their own workaround by giving all students extra time on tests, which they passed through the faculty senate despite the objections of the administration. Some have recently gone even further by eliminating all timed tests.

Yet, at the same time, equating the experiences of individuals learning a language with those coping with a disability is erroneous. Nevertheless, within a language as accommodation framework, arguing for this equivalency is a main avenue for providing LM students language support. Ms. Jones, a nursing faculty member, put this into words,

> Just think of all the students we have with anxiety disorder. Well, they have to go, they usually go get accommodations for themselves . . .. But why are they allowed to do that when someone who is a nervous wreck because they can't speak the language?

Other faculty members similarly focused on the providing support through the framework of creating accommodations by allowing students to use a dictionary or have extra time

on assignments.

Some faculty members went still further, and considered future student vocations when grading assignments. Ms. McDonald, a Nursing department faculty member, confessed, "'ve been super lenient with some ESL papers because I just thought, 'Oh gosh, this paper can't fail them. They're really strong clinically.'" Her rationale with grading these papers using relaxed standards was that the kind of nurses these students were currently aspiring to be did not need to do extensive writing. An English faculty member also shared, "One of the big questions I've come to ask myself in this last decade is, is my English 101 course going to stop this person from getting their fire science certificate?" Whether faculty members should provide allowances in grading for LM students because they are seeking degrees and certificates in non-writing heavy fields is an ethical dilemma. However, that faculty must grapple with these questions alone relates to the fact that there is no overarching administrative guidance for working with LM students beyond a list of banned practices.

An underlying reason that some college faculty may be using a language as accommodation framework is that it presupposes the assistance of services within the wider college, whereas a language as support viewpoint might argue for more direct instructional help. In other words, this approach allows faculty members to generally maintain their current instructional practices but provide add-on accommodations for student access, such as more time on tests, the use of a dictionary, or assigning support from the wider college (advising, counseling, writing center). In this way, faculty can perceive that they are providing support for LM students without an added burden to an

already large work-load.

Faculty Working Multiple Jobs and in Multiple Roles to Make Ends Meet

In fact, the size of the work-load and the pay that community college faculty receive impacted the ESL program as an outer-meso-level factor. A challenge that all individuals residing in the Sweetwater community face is a high cost of living; even full-time faculty at the college often have to supplement their incomes. For instance, the English department chair, on top of administrative duties and a teaching load of four courses per semester, maintained a side business as a property manager to make ends meet. A full-time faculty member in the English department not only fulfilled his teaching load of five sections of Freshman Composition, but picked up a sixth section to supplement his income. A biology faculty member shared that she taught four classes and seven lab sections, and the Basic ESL instructor also taught full time as a special educator at a local middle school during the day. As the English department chair confided, "At the community college, you don't really make enough money to pay for life. So, you better have another job."

Teaching so many sections of courses as well as managing other life responsibilities created challenges as to what faculty members felt they could reasonably do. Many of the faculty shared that their reasons for working at a community college sprang from a desire to increase equity and work with diverse student populations. However, fulfilling the demands of a full-time teaching load meant faculty had to put limits on the amount and type of support provided. For example, a full-time biology faculty member stated, "I know that this [LM] student needs [support] . . . but there may

be other students that also struggle . . . and I just don't know who they are. So, I struggle with that a little bit and trying to be, to be equitable [in providing support]." The English faculty member who taught six sections of Freshman Composition confided, "And there is a part of me that's just like, 'I'm exhausted.' You know, and at this young sprightly age of 52, which is fairly young, all things considered to feel the kind of exhaustion that I feel." The desire to provide sufficient individual support for students who needed it was everywhere, but these and other faculty members simply expressed exhaustion at their workloads.

Adjunct faculty members, in comparison, often have to fulfill multiple roles within the community college to be able to earn enough money. For instance, the Intermediate ESL instructor also worked nearly 20 hours at the campus Writing Center, an adjunct Psychology faculty member served as a part-time guidance counselor for the college, and another faculty member shared how she previously worked as a math instructor, math tutor, and as a member of the college's assessment team. While full-time positions are coveted, they also mean demanding workloads. One adjunct English faculty member shared,

> One of the things I might say: "Oh God, I wish I was full time!" No, I don't wish I was full time, because I couldn't do the work that I do. I'd be mad by now, if I ever had to do that much work. But I'm able to give each of my students the time that they need, so that at the end of the course they're ready to take another step and become a better college student which is, what the goal is.

The demands of full-time work or the pressures of multiple adjunct roles creates a situation where many faculty members already are overworked and may feel insufficiently compensated. Providing additional support for linguistically diverse

students can then seem like extra burden for an already overworked population. Additionally, many faculty are unfamiliar with strategies in working with LM populations, and receiving the training to effectively support LM students, even if readily available, would constitute another time-consuming endeavor.

For the former EL students I interviewed, one workaround to having college faculty who did not provide enough support was to reach out to their former ESL program faculty. For instance, one former EL continued to send drafts of her work to her Advanced ESL instructor, and she received ongoing feedback. Another former EL student, Luna, instead made sure she continued to take writing courses from the same instructor that taught her ESL course. Despite ESL faculty members having no obligation to continue to assist these students, it appears that many still provide feedback on their papers. This signals in a concrete way that the challenges that the Academic ESL program faced did not primarily stem from uncommitted faculty. Rather, the ESL faculty I met wanted their students to succeed and to foster that success long-term.

The Writing Center

For many, the key institutional resource for LM students was the campus Writing Center, which serves as another outer-meso-level factor. Yet, faculty differed in how they viewed this support service in relation to LM students. For faculty in the English department, and many LM students, the Writing Center, despite its flaws, was a critical resource. The English department chair indicated, “We push them to the Writing Center, and it’s absolutely fine to go and have your paper read and tweaked at the Writing Center.” Mislande similarly expressed, “I have in the past gone to the tutoring center for

writing, and I think it's great there." A former EL student, Nadia, spent hours in the Writing Center with a favorite tutor, Jamie, who helped her with all of her writing assignments. Nevertheless, faculty in the ESL program never identified the campus Writing Center as a resource during my observations despite one of them working there.

At the same time, some faculty viewed having students receive extended help from the Writing Center as borderline unethical. The English department chair mused that visiting the Writing Center, "is cheating for some people." Again, this comment hints at whether support was unfair—a "language support as accommodation" discourse. Conversely, it does appear that some tutors at the Writing Center may give too much "support." The English department chair explained, "I do see students. . . [with] paragraphs that don't sound anything like them, but they're not plagiarized . . . if you're getting it at the Writing Center and somebody's writing your paper for you, you know, it's good." This last comment, "it's good", was spoken with a hint of resignation, and he added, "Because there's somebody else who drove to college in a Mercedes and you know, Mom is writing their paper for them." Another English faculty member stated that, "Before you publish something, it has to be clean. So as long as the content and ideas are yours, if you get help fixing your writing along the way, that's smart writing in my eyes." Thus, the extent of individualized grammar attention of the Writing Center seems to be a point of contention for some faculty. Nevertheless, the Writing Center had strong support from multiple English faculty members.

Interestingly enough, the one foreign born faculty member I interviewed, Dr. Patel, stated that he did not send his biology students to the Writing Center. Part of his

reasoning was that tutors are trained in MLA formatting instead of APA, and they are unfamiliar with science writing vocabulary or discourse patterns. He stated, "The problem is that Writing Center is staffed by people with a background in literature. So . . . they can't help with the vocabulary [of] . . . formal science writing."

He further revealed that he and the handful of other international faculty tended to mentor foreign born students individually rather than send them to other college support services. His rationale was that they better understood the needs of these students.

> In the STEM disciplines, we have a large number of faculty . . . not originally from the US. So, we tend to talk among ourselves, and we can solve our own problems . . .The problem is, they're dealing with it purely as an English language problem. . . . If there's any particular issues with, let's say cultural or religious things, they tend to open up more with somebody from a similar background.

Once again, the added time entailed in these mentoring efforts on top of already heavy workloads demonstrate a commitment to equity. However, there remains the question of whether individual mentoring efforts alone can in the long-term be an effective and sustainable substitute to structured college support. Nevertheless, Dr. Patel's point of seeing student needs as extending beyond simply language proficiency is prescient, and at a school with a predominantly white faculty and administration, these international faculty likely played a key supportive role to linguistically diverse students.

Inner-Mesosystem

In addition to the exosystem and the outer-mesosystems, is the inner-mesosystem, or the structural elements of the Academic ESL program. At this point I also wish to remind the reader that while some factors seem to originate from one of the ecological systems, their influence expands beyond any one system. For instance, the Community

ESL program has been mentioned previously as an exosystem factor, but it also impacts the Academic ESL program at the structural, inner-mesosystem level as well. These and other connections are discussed in Chapter 5. However, the themes that originate specifically in this system include: a) insufficient instructional hours per Academic ESL program level, b) the disconnection of both ESL programs from each other and from the wider college, and c) the Academic ESL program's curriculum. These factors are shown in Figure 8 and are discussed next.

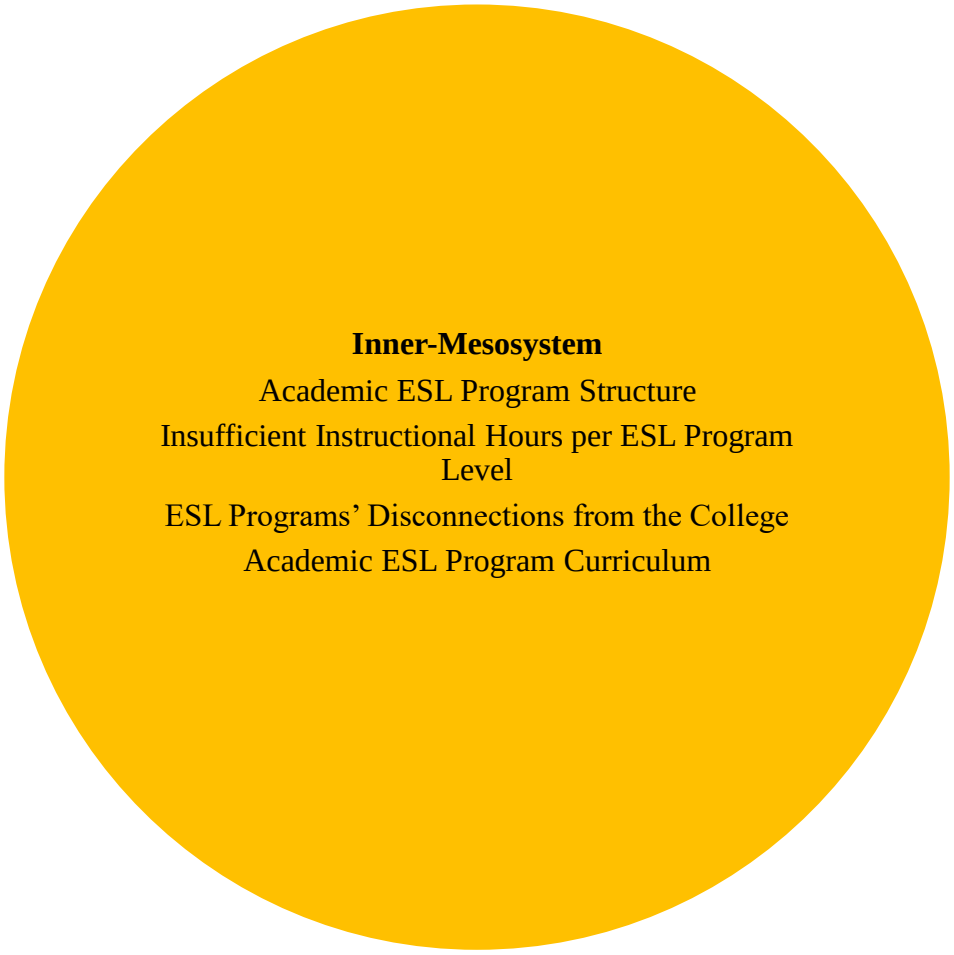

Figure 8. Inner-Mesosystem Factors

Insufficient Instructional Hours per Level of ESL Coursework

One major challenge to the Academic ESL program's success is that the program is structured with three, semester-long levels that meet once a week for three hours at a time, but these levels are designed to serve all EL students and transition them to college-level work. This includes those just starting to learn the language but also students with almost college-level academic English proficiency. Such a structure contrasts sharply with estimates by some researchers that academic language proficiency can take seven to eight years or more to acquire (e.g., Butler & Hakuta, 2004). Substantial English proficiency gaps between levels are likely to occur as a result of this structure. For instance, in the Basic level, I observed students taking tests where they inserted the correct tenses of "like" as well as matched color vocabulary words with colored squares. In comparison, assessments in the level just above included reading quizzes with questions regarding tone, inferencing, and making predictions. The jump between levels was so great that perhaps only a single student in the Basic class was prepared to directly transition to the Intermediate level. In my observation notes I wrote, "I don't think a person can get from a beginning level class to a college-ready level in three semesters if they are starting with this level of proficiency. It is entirely too low" (13 Oct 2021).

This issue was also discussed in detail by Mr. Hudson, the Intermediate-level instructor. He explained,

> Imagine a student coming from the Basic class into the Intermediate class, so he starts very low. Another student comes into the Intermediate class who's practically ready to go to the Advanced class. So, you've got these two students in one class… And do you really expect that lower-level student to master those things in 15 weeks? I don't think that's reasonable to expect.

A key reason for this problem is that students of any English proficiency may enroll in the Basic level, from true beginners to high beginners. Within the same level I observed students who on the ACTFL proficiency guidelines would range from Novice-mid to Intermediate-high levels, from those who could carry on extended, in-depth conversations to those who simply struggled putting short phrases together. This was more fully apparent during my interviews with students from the Basic level, as in-class work often consisted of choral reading such as, "I work. I work inside. We work in an office. They work in a store. He works outside. She works outside. I don't work outside. We don't work in an office. We don't work in a store" (Observation Notes, December 6).

The vast difference in proficiency expectations across levels is codified in the course outcomes (see Table 7). While Intermediate-level students are expected to, "read academic, non-fiction works in English with the aid of a dictionary and clarification by an instructor," Basic-level students only need to "read simple texts in English with the help of a dictionary." These students need to write a "basic paragraph," but Intermediate-level students should be able to compose, "cohesive, coherent narrative and descriptive paragraphs." Finally, Intermediate students should, "express ideas about academic or complex topics in Standard American English," while Basic students, "express ideas about familiar topics in Standard American English." Such a jump in proficiency requirements and expectations after one semester of work seems, as the Intermediate-level instructor stated, "not reasonable to expect."

	Basic Level	Intermediate Level
Reading	Read simple texts in English with the help of a dictionary	Read academic, non-fiction works in English with the aid of a dictionary and clarification by an instructor
Writing	Write a basic paragraph	Compose cohesive, coherent narrative and descriptive paragraphs.
Speaking	Express ideas about familiar topics in Standard American English	Express ideas about academic or complex topics in Standard American English

Table 7. Basic Verses Intermediate-Level ESL Program Outcomes

I was not able to firsthand observe the proficiency difference between students in the Intermediate and Advanced levels because the Advanced-level class did not have sufficient enrollment to carry in the Fall of 2021. However, indications from the course syllabi and interviews with previously enrolled Intermediate and Advanced-level students also suggest a gap between those levels. Expectations for the Advanced level include that students should be able to "read a college textbook and other academic prose with little need of a dictionary or clarification," "write academic English sentences with near native accuracy," and be "developing the ability to read and write essays from college-level English." Intermediate-level students are thus expected to make quite a leap linguistically and rhetorically, especially when the semester-long course only meets once a week for 3 hours at a time.

The gap between the two levels came to a head the semester before the study was conducted when the Intermediate and Advanced levels were combined due to low enrollment. As a result, even students who passed the course were encouraged to retake the class. Camila, an Intermediate-level student who was repeating the course, shared,

"That was a little hard because they compose both Intermediate and Advanced classes. . . .and Mr. Hudson, the professor, recommend to take this class again, just to get . . . better and more ideas."

The jumps in proficiency required from the Basic to Intermediate level and the Intermediate to Advanced level are individually nearly insurmountable. However, expecting a student to go from reading basic texts to college textbooks or from writing a basic paragraph to college essays with "near-native accuracy" in two semesters defies belief. At the very least, the limited number of levels give students a false sense of how long they have until they can complete the ESL track of courses.

When students of widely varying language proficiency are placed into the same level, equitable grading also becomes an issue. Mr. Hudson shared,

> So, here you are in this one course, with all these different levels of ability, all expected to reach the same student learning outcomes, and move on to the next class. And there's no mechanism within the grading system to indicate that this person isn't quite ready for the next class, but I don't want to give them an "F" because they made their progress from where they started. . . .So my feeling is our biggest problem is the lack of adequate levels of instruction.

Yet as long as course outcomes and syllabi are organized as they are, no easy resolution seems in sight.

ESL Programs' Disconnection from the College

Mirroring the separation within the ESL program levels is a physical, organizational, and curricular disconnection between the Community and Academic ESL program pathways and the wider college.

The Community ESL program's location at the Community Center rather than at

the main college campus was commented on by both the Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education and the STEP Program Coordinator. Dean Johnson stated, “It’s about a 10-minute drive, but it seems like it just seems like worlds away.” And the STEP Program Coordinator added, “We’re only five miles away, but it might as well be 50 miles away. They don’t make the connection at all.” Part of the challenge is that the Community Center location for the Community ESL program is more easily accessible by public transportation than the main college campus. The second element is the metaphorical distance between the two programs, in part due to organizational differences.

The Community ESL program is administered by the Adult Education wing of the college while the Academic ESL program is administered by the English department. The Community ESL program director stated, “We’re pretty autonomous . . . we don’t really openly talk about it, but we consider ourselves a school on our own.” A longtime English faculty member similarly indicated, “There’s kind of a disconnect between the Community ESL program . . . I don’t even know who the coordinator is.” The lack of connection or means of coordination between the two programs creates barriers for students seeking to progress along the college’s intended ESL pathway. In my discussions with faculty and administrators, it seemed that few students ever navigated this transition successfully, let alone continued on to a degree program at the college.

A challenge that students and faculty in the Academic ESL program alike face is their relative isolation from the rest of the college. Part of that isolation comes from the fact that in-person Academic ESL courses only take place at night when most campus

offices are closed. For instance, during two of my observations of the Basic course, the only other people I saw on campus besides those in the classroom were the custodial crew cleaning the hallways. The Basic-level instructor herself talked about how disconnected she felt not only from the college, but from the other ESL program level and instructor. Additionally, every campus service that students might want to access (tutoring, advising, etc.) was closed at that hour. The Intermediate ESL course was isolated in its own way because the course was offered remotely. Inherently, offering ESL-specific coursework creates some disconnection between the students who take these courses and the rest of the college. However, the fact that these courses were held at night or remotely exacerbated the already existing disconnection.

Academic ESL program Curriculum

Along with how the Academic ESL program is structured and the two ESL programs are administered is the Academic ESL program's curriculum. Two elements especially impacted ESL program success. First, very limited information was provided to students regarding the relationship and differences between the two ESL programs and the college. The second was that the literature-focused Intermediate ESL level did not prepare students well for the type of material students would encounter in the wider college.

While an intended purpose of the Academic ESL program was to assist students in transitioning into the wider college, clear information about how to do so or what that meant was hinted at, but not effectively built into the curriculum. Even at the Basic level, one of the course outcomes was to "Demonstrate knowledge and use of college resources

such as the library . . . the Advising and Counseling Center, and the Writing Center." This outcome was repeated throughout all three of the levels, but at no point did I see ESL faculty inform students regarding resources within the wider college, including tutoring or academic advising.

This lack of information served as a barrier for former students. Nadia shared that this factor delayed her from continuing to the wider college for years. "I took . . . ESL in 2011, I believe, and I went back to school in 2018. So, seven years later. But one of the reasons, I did not know what to do, and where to go." She later explained, "I feel like ESL is great, but it has to be a little bit more help . . . for people to, you know, to understand like, where I start from like, where do I go? What, what is the first class? . . . .What do I do next?" Anna, another former Advanced level student, suggested the college offer a class specifically for students who are new to the U.S. college system. "[Students need instruction about] how the system in America works . . . because when you come from another country, it's very different, and most of the teachers here don't understand that it's not the same. . . .Like some of them think that you're lying." She seemingly did not know that there was a College Experience class she could take which would assist her with that very process.

This is not to say that the instructors for the Intermediate or Advanced course withheld information about the college. For instance, during my observations of the Intermediate level, I saw the following interaction,

Mariana shared that she is looking at requirements to go to another college, to transfer to another university because SWCC doesn't have what she wants to study. Mr.

Hudson responded, “You will have to take the TOEFL. There are books. I can show you a book,” and he went on to explain the transfer process” (Observation Notes, 10 November, 2021).

Similarly, students who had previously taken the Advanced-level course praised the instructor (the chair of the English department), for his willingness to share how the U.S. college system works. I saw this firsthand in a freshman English course of his that I observed. He spent the first 10 minutes talking about the registration process, and at the end emphasized, “The whole college thing is super confusing. I’ve been here since 2004. The last time I tried to sign someone up, it can be confusing sometimes. The whole thing is confusing, so don’t be shy about asking for help” (Observation Notes, 15 November, 2021).

Nevertheless, even if such instruction about college knowledge can be timely, haphazard and piecemeal instruction is insufficient if students are to learn how to navigate the labyrinthine system of policies and paperwork of American higher education. Rather, students need the comprehensive, consistent assistance found in working with a college advisor, a college mentor, or through taking the course dedicated to the topic. In both the Basic and Intermediate levels, I did not observe students being informed of the campus services available to them, and these students’ unfamiliarity with American college going, coupled with the Academic ESL program’s disconnection from the college, made it unlikely for students to discover these resources on their own.

Students enrolled in the Community and Academic ESL programs were similarly given insufficient amounts of information regarding the difference between the two

programs. The Community ESL program director shared, "[Community ESL] students think they're going to college when they come here . . . they are proud to be Sweetwater college students." This concept was shared by the STEP Program Coordinator, who stated, "They don't realize they're not getting college credit for these English classes, or some of them don't even know what college credit is or that you need to have college credit to get a degree." Such misunderstandings are natural given that most students are attempting to navigate attending college in a new country and new language. The confusion between the two programs was not limited to students alone, as several faculty members in the wider college I interviewed either did not know that the college had an Academic ESL program or conflated the two.

This point was evident during my last observation of the Basic-level course. As the instructor was preparing students for the last class period, she asked which students were planning to return for the next level. When none of the students replied affirmatively, she went on to talk about getting on the waiting list of the Community ESL program, which she advertised as free and high quality. At no time during the discussion did she mention that students could qualify to participate in the STEP program, which could cover the costs of the next level of ESL coursework and beyond as well as provide a pathway into the college. Thus, when I made my recruiting pitch for participating in my research study, I also provided information regarding the STEP Program and who to contact. After my announcement, the instructor concurred that the program was available for students, and at the end of class, two students came up to me to verify that they had written down the right information. Granted, part of the problem was that the instructor

herself was disconnected from information regarding the wider college and initiatives, and no one from the STEP program reached out to her to visit her class. But more importantly, there were no measurable curricular elements in place to ensure such content was covered, even if it was listed in the course outcomes.

Furthermore, the content of the two Academic ESL levels did not seem to adequately prepare students for courses in the wider college. At the Basic level, this fact was evident in part by the repetitive, fill-in the blank type of activities completed in class. While some basic numeracy and table reading skills could be gleaned from these assignments, little to no critical thinking, critical reading, or problem solving took place. Granted, a limitation the instructor faced was that many students were just beginning to be able to converse in English. However, the unimaginative work that students did in class (highlighted further in the next section), did nothing to prepare them for the rigor of college.

In contrast, the Intermediate-level class was engaging and required strong reading and critical thinking skills. A major element of the class was that the class read the novel *Enrique's Journey*, a book about a young undocumented immigrant traveling across Mexico with the hope of crossing over into the United States to reunite with a family member. The reading resonated well with students, in part, because the students were allowed to choose the book they would read during the semester. Furthermore, the in-depth discussions regarding the meaning and tone of specific passages took up large portions of the class. As I wrote in my observation notes, "Closely resembles what students might actually encounter in a college English class with an analysis of the

material and analyze it for themes. A hands-off approach provides opportunities for students to be able to speak at length and engage with the material" (Observation Notes, 3 November 2021). Students were also given assignments from a college-level style guide and worked on topics such as proper subordination in clauses.

In short, the class was an excellent preparation for college English, but was far removed from the kind of discipline-specific content found in other classes in the college. In contrast to Academic ESL students reading and discussing a fiction text they themselves had selected, students in the Basics of Nursing course were faced with a lecture that included the following slide, "Total body fluid, Interstitial, Electrolytes: Ions. Cations: positive charge. Anions: negative charge. Homeostasis: total cations equal total anions" (Nursing Class Observation notes, Oct 15, 2021). To say that the two sets of content were worlds away would not be overstating the point. At the same time, the Academic ESL program itself is housed within the English department and its instructors, two of whom have taught other English courses at the college, are likely to see the mission of the Academic ESL program as preparing students for Freshman Composition, not necessarily all college coursework. As a result, students who completed the Academic ESL program were unlikely to be prepared for the types of texts, content, and writing they would experience in college courses outside the English department.

Microsystem

Finally, the core level of the Academic ESL program ecology is the microsystem. This system involves the classroom and the experiences of individual students. The themes related to this system include a) wide variability among Academic ESL faculty in

teaching styles and orientations towards language acquisition, b) a focus on community building within the Academic ESL program, and c) the role of the Academic ESL program in individual student trajectories. These factors can be found in Figure 9 and are discussed next.

Figure 9. Microsystem Factors

Wide Variability Between Teaching Styles and Orientations Towards Language Acquisition

While differences in content between ESL courses levels has already been addressed, just as important were differences in how instructors viewed the process by which languages are acquired. For Ms. McCoy, the Basic ESL instructor, language acquisition primarily requires substantial amounts of repetition and mental effort. As she once stated during class when student choral reading was lackluster, “I know that saying

them is boring, but practicing, it's like building muscles or riding a bike. Don't worry. It takes practice. English is so hard" (Observation Notes, 13 October 2021). It is worth noting here that this comment concerning English seems to argue that it is more difficult than other languages (perhaps implying that is therefore more academic). This same point is emphasized by the same instructor in a later observation. After assigning another activity that required lots of repetitive work, she stated, "It's working that muscle [the brain]. It hurts, and I'm sorry, but it will get you where you need to be" (Observation Notes, 13 October 2021). As I observed these many repetitive activities, I commented in my notes, "Monotonous!" (Observation Notes, 6 December 2021).

The students themselves shared during our interviews that they wanted more than the limited listening and speaking opportunities offered. One student shared, "I like to study English . . . but I need conversation more." Conversely, during my last observation, the students doggedly completed each of the activities in last five pages of the textbook. These elements point to the belief that language learning, in Ms. McCoy's mind, is a cognitive, repetitive activity that can at times be unpleasant, but necessary. For her, meaningful language interaction at this level does not seem as important as solidly acquiring language structures. This approach follows more of an audiolingual language learning instructional approach that draws from Behaviorist principles (e.g., Valdés et al., 2014).

In contrast, Mr. Hudson, the Intermediate-level instructor, had a much different philosophy. The class included no choral reading, no repetition, but instead his focus was on students completing assigned activities together, using language, in groups. I wrote in

my observation notes, “[This class] closely resembles what students might actually encounter in a college English class with an analysis of the material and analyze it for themes. A hands-off approach provides opportunities for students to be able to speak at length and engage with the material” (3 November, 2021). Furthermore, I wrote, “He believes that completing the assignments are in essence secondary to the opportunities that students have to interact with one another. Students are allowed to take the quizzes open book, with the help of partners” (10 November, 2021).

Part of the difference between the two instructors also related to the level of control exerted on the class. While students were very rarely interacting in groups or with partners in the Basic level, students in the Intermediate course were put in breakout rooms for long stretches of time. The increased student interaction time was more than could just be explained by the fact that Intermediate-level students were better able to communicate. When I would join the breakout room to observe, what I witnessed was that students were interweaving their use of English and their first language in order to answer the in-depth questions posed in the reading quizzes. Of additional note was that students rarely finished answering even four or five questions of the ten question group quizzes, even after 20 minutes or more. This seemed to be of no concern to the teacher, who was much more interested in creating opportunities for rich language interaction rather than measuring students’ individual comprehension of the material or having students be able to answer all of the questions on a given assignment.

This was further evidenced by an activity in which he had students translate a passage of a reading into their native language and then with a partner who spoke the

same native language, retranslate it back to English. His instructions were simply, “This is difficult, because you have to translate it back to English without looking at the original. Exchange translations with each other” (Observation Notes 3 November 2021). Nothing was graded, and purposeful interaction and practice with the language was the only aim. These practices point towards a sociocultural approach towards language acquisition, one that is learned through participation in the language and mediated by assistance by peers or experts.

The differences in how these two instructors conceptualized the language acquisition process created dissonances between the levels in terms of approach and expectations. Both courses stated in their syllabi that the content of the class is dependent on student needs. The reason for the caveat, I believe, is that it allows instructors to modify the level of instruction based on the language proficiency level of the students enrolled. Nevertheless, instructor perceptions of student needs are in turn influenced by teacher assumptions regarding the language acquisition process. Moreover, when there is no supervisor directly tasked with coordinating the content of these courses, and they are already disconnected from one another by time and format, teacher orientations towards SLA can overshadow course objectives and outcomes.

For instance, while the Intermediate-level course included components that one would expect in a regular English department course such as reading a novel as a class, learning about grammar through a style guide, and interpreting and analyzing literature, the Basic level exhibited what has been described elsewhere as “remedial pedagogies” (Grubb & Gabriner 2013). Student opportunities to communicate were almost completely

limited to choral reading and generic fill- in-the-blank grammar, reading, and listening quizzes. The class content also simply lacked any connection to what students would be expected to do in the wider college.

Academic ESL Program's Community Building Efforts

As discussed previously, a number of structural elements caused the Academic ESL program courses to be isolated from the wider college. Yet that isolation was not necessarily viewed in a negative light. For example, the chair of the English department saw the separation of these courses from the rest of the college positively. He shared, "The . . . bummer of sort of segregating them out in ESL [is] they don't get as much time to like enlighten everybody else. But it's probably better for the students who get, I think it's better for [ELs], you know."

His reasoning for this assessment was,

> I really believe that part of it is it's a…sweet little cohort of people . . .[who] get a touch of American academic culture without freaking out with a bunch of . . . 18-year-olds throwing things around the room and staring at their phones.

For this current department chair and former instructor, a central purpose of the Academic ESL program was community building, and this community building could be accomplished best by having ESL-specific courses, even if these courses took place remotely or in the evenings. Furthermore, the individuals most negatively affected by this isolation were, in fact, students outside the Academic ESL program, not the ELs themselves.

The emphasis on the community building within the Academic ESL program was also manifest in the program's placement procedures. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic,

prospective ESL program students came to an open house night at the college where they would mingle together, provide a writing sample, and more recently, determine for themselves which level they felt best matched their language proficiency. While one faculty member would score the writing samples, the other(s) would lead students in icebreaker activities. The hope was that through building an academic community at the margins of the actual college, students could have a space and time to adjust to American higher education while simultaneously increasing their language proficiency.

However, the community building aspect of the Academic ESL program's coursework manifested itself differently than intended in how students saw themselves in relation to the college. Despite paying college tuition and being matriculated students, the two Basic-level students I interviewed did not see themselves as part of the wider college. One stated, "I'm just an ESL student." The same was true for one of the two Intermediate-level students. A former EL who now is a college freshman shared similar feelings when she initially enrolled in the ESL program. Even when the instructor tried to help students orient students to wider campus resources, she remained stuck in a "just ESL" mentality.

> The first day, the teacher walks with us around the college, showing the main places to go. . . .For me, I didn't feel like part of the college. In my mind I was just taking one class in the college, just to try to learn English.

Conversely, the Academic ESL students who did feel like they were part of the wider college either initially enrolled in the Advanced level or were concurrently enrolled in the STEP program and the College Experience course.

A central tension, then, is that part of the intended purpose of the Academic ESL program is to create a community of students that would transition together into the wider college. The transition from ESL to college is in part symbolized by their earning college credit for taking the two highest-level Academic ESL courses. However, until students gained knowledge about the college and how it functioned through the STEP Program, many ELs only saw themselves as ESL program students, not members of the wider college.

The Role of the Academic ESL program in Student Trajectories

Finally, a central element of my research question is how the Academic ESL program's role functioned in individual student trajectories. As stated in the literature review, time spent in ESL program coursework seems to hinder EL student outcomes, at least for certain populations (e.g., Almon, 2012; Hayward et al., 2022; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005). This section seeks to uncover the role that the program played for the students I interviewed.

Central to understanding the impact of the Academic ESL program is that ELs entered into the program with different goals. Mr. Hudson, the Intermediate ESL instructor, commented,

> I think we have [three] different kinds of goals represented in the student body. . . .Many . . . want a certificate in some field that they would like to pursue, and others . . . have the goal of getting a degree and going on to get a bachelor's degree. Others are . . . generally, just trying to improve their English . . . for their job, getting along in the community.

Thus, the metrics for success for the students enrolled in the Academic ESL may be different from what the college intends. For instance, ELs just trying to improve their

English may see completion of the course they are enrolled in and not continuing further as a successful outcome. In contrast, for ELs seeking to obtain a degree, the same metric would indicate falling far short of their goal.

The faculty I interviewed commented that ELs enroll in Academic ESL courses for diverse purposes was supported by my interviews with student participants. One Basic-level student (Sofia) was interested solely in receiving additional English instruction. Sofia stated, “I need to learn English because I need to talk to for everybody. My son is study here. I'm living here.” When I returned to the topic, she emphasized that she was there for, “just more English.” Sofia did mention, however, that she was interested in eventually becoming a police officer. The other Basic-level student, Alicia, indicated that she was there both to improve her English skills and to take the next step towards her dream career. “It's for my better English. And I dream to be a paralegal in the future.” It is important to note, however, that SWCC offered neither a degree in criminal justice or a paralegal certificate program. Thus, even if the Academic ESL program successfully prepared these students for college, it could not have transitioned these students to their desired programs because these programs were not offered at SWCC.

For the Intermediate-level students I interviewed, the Academic ESL program was an opportunity to obtain enough English to enter into their desired future programs at SWCC. For Camila, who was participating in the STEP program, her goals included vocational, academic, and linguistic elements: “Right now I want to get a, the certificate for bookkeeping . . . and I want to learn more English.” SWCC did offer a bookkeeping certificate for accounting, and Camila saw the program as a way for her to transition from

solely being a hair stylist at her current job to being able to work at the same job in multiple roles. Even then, she did not see the bookkeeping certificate as her final goal. Rather, she hoped to "probably [get] another job in the future. Yeah. Well . . . we [will] see." Similarly, Mariana also had aspirations tied directly to the college: "To get a better English, and . . . I want to go to the college to do x-ray." Once again, there was a program at SWCC in order to be trained as a radiology tech. In short, both students knew what they wanted to study at SWCC and taking ESL coursework was a step towards a goal they already had in mind.

For the former ELs who had completed the Advanced level of the Academic ESL program, their goals were related to college. Luna, a freshman, had worked for over a decade as a neonatal nurse in Brazil. Her case is unique because she had completed both the Intermediate and Advanced-level ESL courses and was now seeking acceptance into the Nursing program. Nadia, another former EL, was completing her Bookkeeping certificate with the hope to eventually become a CPA. Anna, on the other hand, was nearing completion of her associates in Psychology, and she had initially planned to transfer to a four-year college, but she was having second thoughts. She shared,

> I'll probably just finish up [my associates] and stay with that degree, and apply for . . . a real estate license or for the one that's about estheticians, because [in this community], like, they don't know how to do like the things they do in Europe about like nails, makeup, all of that. So that seems like a business opportunity.

It is important to note that as part of my research design I only conducted one-time interviews, so the amount of data I collected concerning the role of the Academic ESL program in individual student outcomes is limited. However, the former EL students

I interviewed did provide insights into the role they felt the Academic ESL program had played in their academic trajectories.

Luna provided an explanation not only of her reason for taking Academic ESL program courses, but how they impacted her:

> When I look for the ESL, definitely the first idea is I need to learn English. I'm living in the United States . . .. But, I always had this in my mind: I'm an RN. I didn't come to the. . . .United States to be housekeeper or house cleaning . . .I am a RN. So, I need to learn English, so I can become nurse, right?. . . .And my [Advanced] ESL professor, he really encouraged you to keep going at the college. . . .It seems like . . . he kind of opened doors, so doesn't matter if you want to have another specific class to become an engineer an RN, or whatever, but he really, really encourage you to do something else. And I see this like, "Don't stop in your life. You're just take one class now, so you can improve your English. That's my view, and don't stop! Keep going!" So that's the, the feelings that I have when I . . . remember about my ESL with him.

It is clear that her Advanced ESL instructor encouraged her ambitions, and the former ELs I interviewed all felt that the Academic ESL provided needed confidence. Anna, currently a sophomore, similarly shared her gratitude for the Advanced-level ESL course. "Without it probably I, I would not have like the will to take, like the hard English classes." Nadia, also a sophomore, shared, "You have to take ESL class, if you never took any other classes, you know, I think it should be kind of pre-requirement. It just helps you a lot to understand." For Nadia, Luna, and Anna, the Advanced ESL course did more than just offer language instruction. It provided them the encouragement to continue and succeed in the wider college.

However, a comment made by the chair of the English department puts these successes in context. He revealed that the proficiency gap between Advanced ESL and Freshman Composition was minor, stating,

> It's a lot more comfortable for [ELs] to sign up for an ESL class, because that's where they sort of feel like they belong. Even though . . . probably half of them could have survived comp one without much problem.

Furthermore, some students enrolled in the Advanced Academic ESL level may have been placed out of ESL coursework altogether. For instance, Nadia shared that she actually tested into Freshman Composition, but she decided that she wanted to take ESL courses first, and enrolled. Thus, many students who enroll in Advanced ESL may, from an institutional viewpoint, not need any ESL coursework at all.

Moreover, all three former EL students described the Advanced class as mainly a writing class, and the central benefit of the course was how it helped them gain the rhetorical skills they needed. Anna shared about writing, “At the end of [the class], you get like, ‘okay, that's the format.’” Nadia similarly stated, “[Writing became] easy and so logical. I took a psychology class, and we had to write a paper and, I was like, "Oh, now I know how to do this." . . . I knew it because I took ESL.” The last student, Luna, took Freshman Composition from her former ESL instructor just because of how well she felt he taught her to write. This writing focus is also codified in the course’s outcomes and is likely reinforced by the Academic ESL program being housed within the college’s English department.

It should be noted that Nadia and Luna had already earned bachelor’s degrees (in Mathematics and Nursing, respectively) in their home countries. While Anna was not a

college graduate when she first arrived, she had received a rigorous high school education in Bulgaria, and her English level was strong enough that writing samples from her Advanced ESL course were later published in the school's creative writing magazine. The fact that three students all had strong educational backgrounds in their home countries impacted their likelihood of transitioning out of the Academic ESL program and into the wider college. Furthermore, the English department chair commented that most successful students from the Academic ESL program tended to have received degrees from their home countries.

In a way, then, the role the Academic ESL program played for these students was that it assisted them in becoming more adjusted to an American style of writing common in Freshman Composition, and it provided them with positive interactions with a professor who encouraged them to persist to the wider college. At the same time, these students also shared that the Advanced level ESL courses they took did not prepare them to navigate the college going process, and given these students' academic background, the challenges they faced in college could have related just as much with how to navigate college going as with college content itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while Sweetwater's Academic ESL program is designed to be a central feature of the pathway of English learner students into the wider college, the program itself is impacted by factors at the national, state, college, program, and classroom level which undermine that purpose.

At the exo-level, laws and policies at the state and national level impacted the tuition that many ELs paid, limiting ELs' ability to enroll in college coursework. Initiatives at the state Department of Higher Education ignored how the language of higher education and the language acquisition process impact student access and success, thereby shifting college priorities elsewhere. Funding through the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education did provide some English instruction opportunities for ELs through the free Community ESL program, but the coursework was not designed to sufficiently prepare students for higher education. Additionally, funding from the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the form of the STEP program did significantly assist some ELs in accessing college, but the limited size of the program (10 to 15 students per semester) was too small to adequately address student needs. Students seeking to pursue careers in nursing after exiting the Academic ESL program were also impacted by accreditation requirements and tests that made Nursing programs less likely to want to enroll LM students. Finally, the COVID pandemic caused enrollment to decline, but at the same time has revealed socioeconomic challenges that the program was not sufficiently prepared to address.

At the outer-meso level, the Academic ESL program was impacted by college-level perceptions, issues, and policies. For one, faculty had widely varying viewpoints towards ELs' language proficiency, from seeing ELs as essentially similar to native English speakers to seeing ELs as significantly less proficient. These perceptions also impacted the amount of support that ELs were perceived to need. Yet, at the same time, meeting the needs of ELs was widely framed within a discourse of whether or not support

reaches the level of providing a learning accommodation and is therefore not allowed. Faculty who provided too much support might receive administrator backlash, and those who provided too little fail to equitably assist their students. Faculty viewpoints towards ELs were also colored by faculty members' already substantial workload and a cost of living that often required them to supplement their income with outside work. Therefore, providing additional support to ELs is often seen either as a burden or beyond the scope of their practice. Finally, the campus Writing Center can serve as a support to students and a resource to faculty, but again, faculty questioned whether the assistance in the Writing Center rises to the level of an accommodation and whether tutors have the needed training to assist ELs across all their coursework.

Next, within the Academic ESL program itself were inner-mesosystem factors which impact the program's success. First, Academic ESL program levels were too few and the gaps between levels too large to actually provide a three-semester college pathway for beginner EL students given the number of instructional hours. Second, the physical and organizational disconnection among the Academic and Community ESL programs and the wider college hindered the collaboration needed to create a functional college pathway. Third, the Academic ESL program's curriculum did not adequately prepare students for the variety of texts and assignments they will face in college, and the curriculum provided insufficient information regarding how to transition into the wider college.

Fourth, the Academic ESL program is influenced by microsystem, classroom-level factors. For instance, ESL faculty differed starkly in their teaching styles and

orientations towards language acquisition, making transitions between levels difficult. Furthermore, the Academic ESL program's focus on community building led to the creation of a community, but not one with the skills, connections, or knowledge to succeed in college. Finally, while former EL students saw the Academic ESL program playing a positive role in their college transition, at least one of these students already had been placed into the wider college, and arguably, could have succeeded without ESL coursework. Additionally, the Academic ESL program seemed primarily oriented around helping students be prepared to write in the format and style required in Freshman Composition, not to write in all the disciplines.

In short, despite the Academic ESL program's design and intent as a pathway to the wider college, deep change is needed within multiple systems in order for SWCC to provide a functional higher education pathway for ELs. In the two chapters that follow, I first discuss the interactions that take place across levels of the ecological lens of my framework. I then discuss my findings in light of my other two lenses (raciolinguistics and orientations in language planning).

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Introduction

Understanding the factors that impact the Academic ESL program's role requires addressing their interwoven complexity across the systems of my ecological framework. This, in fact, is a strength of this lens. As van Lier (2004) stated, "The value of Bronfenbrenner's models lies not in a nested set of systems, but in the focus on the relationship between them" (p. 210). Because the possible interactions between the four systems I have specified are complex and multifaceted, I have highlighted five issues and discuss how these issues involve the interconnection between systems. The first issue is differing ESL instructor viewpoints concerning the nature of second language acquisition. The second issue is the state Department of Higher Education's focus on social justice. The third issue is the Community ESL program. The fourth is the college's language as accommodation orientation. The fifth issue is the Academic ESL program's structure.

ESL Instructor Viewpoints Concerning the Nature of Second Language Acquisition

One microsystem factor that impacted the success of the Academic ESL program was that the viewpoints of the Basic and Intermediate instructors regarding the nature of second language acquisition were fundamentally different. At its face, this appears to be solely a micro-level issue, one that stems from the education that these two instructors received and their personal beliefs about how languages are learned. The Basic-level instructor followed what could be considered audiolingual practices that belie a Behaviorist-influenced viewpoint towards language acquisition. Her frequent emphasis

on choral reading, fill-in the blank activities, and practice with verb tenses indicated that the acquisition of correct language structures was a central teaching priority (e.g., Valdés et al., 2014). On the other hand, the Intermediate-level instructor was much more interested in providing opportunities for students to communicate in natural and unstructured ways. Students were given tasks, and what was important to the Intermediate-level instructor was not the accomplishing of the task, as it was in the Basic-level class, but the actual use of the language in attempting to accomplish tasks. This speaks to a sociocultural orientation towards language learning (Valdés et al., 2014).

While it is true that these two viewpoints are in many ways personal, how teacher orientations were manifested in the classroom was impacted by structural factors in multiple nested systems. First, low student enrollment at the micro-level of the Academic ESL program meant at the administrative (inner-meso) level that the ESL program coordinator position for the program was no longer justified. Furthermore, both faculty members worked as adjuncts—one teaching online and the other teaching in the evening on campus. This created a situation where the two had no possible unstructured interactions with one another. There was no shared office, no trips to the copy machine, no passing in the hallways where the two of them would naturally meet. Rather, coordination between the two faculty would only occur through direct efforts on the part of either to reach out, and with their already heavy workloads, neither made this a priority. These workloads resulted from instructors' efforts to earn enough money to afford the high cost of living in the community (outer-mesosystem), and from the college's cost-cutting reliance on adjunct faculty (outer-mesosystem).

In fact, the challenge of disconnected pedagogies and orientations towards second language learning at the classroom level also occurred as a result of a confluence of factors from the microsystem level on up. At the student level, individual financial pressures (microsystem), and the existence of the free Community ESL program (inner-mesosystem) inhibited student enrollment in the Academic ESL program. The college's use of adjunct faculty and their multiple responsibilities meant that they were less likely to interact with one another (outer-mesosystem). The Academic ESL program's disconnection from the rest of the college both administratively and physically again created a sense of isolation for the teachers (inner-mesosystem). This isolation was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, which further discouraged in-person collaboration (exosystem). Then finally, without a structured setting in which any coordination could take place, these instructors came to differ extensively in their approach, making it difficult for students to be able to successfully transition from one level to the next (inner-mesosystem). These factors, in turn, may lead to lower student persistence rates (micro-level), which in turn would impact decision making at the inner-meso and outer-meso level regarding the Academic ESL program.

A State-Level Focus on Diversity and Equity without Addressing Language

Conversely, the Department of Higher Education's equity discourse at the exosystem level came to impact EL student outcomes through a variety of interactions between levels. The state's Department of Higher Education's new emphasis on social justice sought to improve the outcomes for diverse student populations across colleges, and this focus in turn increased the pressure on community colleges to achieve these

goals. As a result, SWCC faced increased scrutiny regarding student outcomes, which may have, in part, led the college to become open to participating in this study. However, the Department of Higher Education's focus on racial equity ignores key issues that impact diverse student outcomes.

First, high in-state and out-of-state tuition rates were the most impactful deterrents to EL student success at Sweetwater, yet the state's Department of Higher Education's new emphasis on social justice nowhere directly addresses lowering the cost of education, despite the fact that the department had the authority to do so. There were also no initiatives or outward efforts supporting legislation to allow undocumented immigrants to qualify to pay in-state tuition. Furthermore, while the state Department of Higher Education affirmed that their focus would be on improving racial equity, nowhere in any of the documents is a discussion of the role of linguistic diversity. Rather, the forefront areas of focus are, "race . . . . ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and geography."

While a focus on equity at the state level should be applauded, failing to seriously and openly discuss the roles that English proficiency and cost play on student outcomes creates the illusion that it is simply overt racial discrimination that is holding students back. Worse still, if linguistic differences are not included in discussions, some could argue that the lower educational outcomes these students attain to are because of a lack of work ethic or deficits within minority cultures. This shifts the blame to the residents of these areas rather than to society and the higher education system which creates conditions that make it so much more difficult for these students to succeed (Flores &

Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2016). Furthermore, ignoring the role of the cost of higher education or monoglossic college expectations about English proficiency creates a distorted picture about what is needed to be able to achieve greater equity in higher education.

Moreover, as raciolinguistics illuminates, the linguistic challenges that multilingual students of color face with the language of higher education may have little to do with having insufficient English proficiency (Rosa & Flores, 2017) and have much more to do with viewpoints towards racial minority students. This proposition helped to illuminate a conundrum in my findings in that some faculty asserted that LM students at Sweetwater were similar in their linguistic proficiency to their native English-speaking peers, while other faculty viewed the language proficiency of LM students quite negatively. One reason for the difference in perspectives may well be the extent to which faculty held the point of view of the "White Listening Subject" (Flores & Rosa, 2015) or more concretely, were trying to enforce the acquisition of "Standard American English" that inhibits student access.

Moreover, the Department of Higher Education cannot effectively seek to advance equity without acknowledging and addressing the role that "Standard American English" plays not only at college campuses like Sweetwater's currently, but historically (Rosa, 2016). Ignoring this issue is an abnegation of responsibility because it one of the largest barriers ELs and students of color face in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The fact that there are ESL programs nationwide is evidence of this barrier, so it is strange that state-level administrators cannot name it as a challenge. One can only speculate then about why linguistic elements are left out of the state's social justice focus.

Perhaps addressing the construct of "Standard American English" directly would be a bridge too far for some administrators or for the external organization which funds this initiative.

To summarize, the state Department of Higher Education's focus on improving racial equity but ignoring linguistic diversity or the actual cost of education reverberated throughout the systems. At the college-level (outer-mesosystem), administrators became more accountable for measuring, reporting, and improving diverse student outcomes. However, tuition costs and policies regarding acquiring in-state residency remained the same (exosystem). These policies hinder Academic ESL program enrollment (inner-mesosystem). Furthermore, the Department of Higher Education failed to directly address the negative impact that privileging "Standard American English" had on college access. This creates a maintenance of the linguistic status quo, which impacts the language expectations at the classroom level (microsystem), course curricula and departmental outcomes (inner-mesosystem), and college initiatives and mission (outer-mesosystem).

Community ESL Program

Third, the college's Community ESL program impacted the Academic ESL program in complex ways that functioned simultaneously across system levels. While the grant money funding the Community ESL program is ostensibly an exosystem factor because it comes from the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the U.S. Department of Education, the program also impacted the Academic ESL program at the outer-meso and inner-meso levels. These influences both helped and hindered the success of the Academic ESL program.

In examining the exosystem impact of the Community ESL program, it is important to consider the fact that the funding for this program came from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, not from the Department of Higher Education. Therefore, the purview of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the U.S. Department of Education impacts the scale of the programs offered. In essence, the funding is designed for adult basic education, not for postsecondary preparation, and the curriculum of the program is mandated using Common Core Standards, a common practice for K–12 education (Common Core Standards, 2022), but not for higher education. Were the funding for the program through the Department of Higher Education, the curriculum and purposes of the program would likely be significantly different. Furthermore, an unspoken exosystem factor is that these two departments are separate entities with separate missions rather than as a single connected system.

At the outer-mesosystem are college-wide issues and college administration, and at this level the Community ESL program fits within an already established Community Center campus, and courses are offered alongside high school equivalency programs. The fact that the program is not connected to any one department in the college but is separately overseen by the Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education is also important. Like the Academic ESL instructors previously mentioned, the physical separation between this program and the rest of the college likely inhibits coordination. Community ESL faculty do not attend campus meetings with their Academic ESL counterparts, so any structured or unstructured communication between these groups is

rare indeed.

Creating further distance from the college and perhaps antipathy is the fact that the program is a net drain on the college, so money spent on the Community ESL program cannot be spent elsewhere. While the state grant funding for the Community ESL program covers student tuition, books, and teacher pay, it does not cover the cost of building use, and the program uses the campus payroll system, creating further costs for the college. However, the fact that the college provides continuing support for the Community ESL program reveals a real commitment to serve the EL populations in the community.

At the inner-mesosystem, the Community ESL program provides contrasts which impact the identity, focus, and enrollment for the Academic ESL program. For example, the Community ESL program operates largely autonomously from the rest of the college and is not connected to any one department. In contrast, the Academic ESL program is rooted within the English department, and the literature-focused Intermediate and Advanced levels speak to that connection. Next, the proficiency level cap of Community ESL courses (7^{th} grade reading) hypothetically provides a counterpoint to the Academic ESL program. SWCC intended for the Academic ESL program to work specifically with higher-proficiency students preparing for college. In fact, Academic ESL program faculty historically made recruiting pitches to students in the highest-level Community ESL course in part because administrators envisioned a natural transition from one program to another. However, low enrollment in the Academic ESL program overall has precluded it from embracing that role; students in the Basic level in the Fall of 2021 outnumbered

students in the Intermediate level two to one.

Most significantly, the Community ESL program impacts the Academic ESL program's enrollment. The differences in cost, hours of instruction per week, disclosing documentation status, and location likely cause prospective EL students to already be more likely to enroll in Community ESL courses than to pay to enroll in Academic ESL coursework. This is despite the two- to three-year waiting period. Conversely, students who urgently desire to receive ESL instruction are unable to find a spot in the Community ESL program because of the waiting list, and thus may be more likely to enroll in Academic ESL coursework than they might otherwise be. Rather than equal programs leading to separate outcomes, the Community ESL program acts in some ways like the preferred twin of the Academic ESL program.

A key reason for this preferred role relates to the fact that ELs are not provided enough knowledge regarding college policies and the differences between the two programs. Without understanding what accruing college credits means, ELs are unable to make fully informed judgements regarding in which programs they should enroll. After learning more about both programs, many ELs may still ultimately prefer to enroll in the Community ESL program, but they will do so recognizing the inherent tradeoffs between programs. Until ELs are provided this information in an accessible way, decisions regarding enrolling in the Community ESL program or the Academic ESL program primarily relate to cost, location, revealing documentation status (for undocumented students), and time on the waiting list. For three of these four metrics, the Community ESL program is the preferable choice.

Language Support as Accommodation, K–12 and College Access

Fourth, campus orientations towards language and language learning impacted ELs and LM students in multifaceted ways. Using Ruiz's orientations in language planning (1984) as a heuristic tool, this study found that while LM student needs were generally framed from a language as problem perspective, the most common discourse regarding supporting LM students in the wider college was whether the language support that teachers extended rose to the level of providing accommodation. The discourse related to this concept was especially prevalent among nursing and biology faculty (outer-mesosystem), so it more directly impacted LM students and former ELs leaving the Academic ESL program than it did ELs within the program (inner-mesosystem). Instructors within the Academic ESL program did not appear to share this orientation (inner-mesosystem), and according to English faculty members, neither did tutors, who seemed unconcerned about whether the amount of assistance they provided bordered on plagiarism (outer-mesosystem). Faculty across the campus (English, biology, and nursing) modified either their assessment practices or used relaxed standards in grading LM student work and struggled with the ethical dimensions of these decisions (outer-meso).

The question of whether providing certain types of language support for LM students is allowed or appropriate is likely a question rooted in expectations at the college level. For instance, elementary and secondary students in the U.S. are guaranteed by law (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015) that they will receive the instructional support necessary to be able to effectively access school material

(e.g., Nuñez, et al., 2016). In contrast, at SWCC, teachers were essentially directed that they were only allowed to provide certain types of assistance to students if these students had first visited the disabilities services office on campus and were cleared to receive accommodations. Many faculty simply ignored this policy and provided the assistance they felt that ELs needed anyways. The most common support that faculty provided LM students was likely the simplest: more time on tests.

However, much like diverse ESL faculty perceptions regarding the nature of second language acquisition, viewpoints regarding what support to provide ELs were impacted by a convergence of factors within different systems. For instance, it is likely that nursing and biology faculty were most attuned to this orientation not only because the conflict with the administration occurred within the Nursing program, but because these faculty are attuned to exosystem demands regarding Nursing program accreditation. The Nursing program was seeking to become more diverse (outer-mesosystem), but at the same time accreditation policies for Nursing programs specified that students must maintain grades above a certain threshold in all classes and graduating students must pass the final NCLEX exam before receiving licensure (exosystem). If these levels of achievement were not met, the program could lose its accreditation.

In a way, then, Nursing and Biology program faculty were pressured into exploring classroom instructional options for assisting LM students without having been trained in LM pedagogy. It is not surprising, then, that they first sought to address the needs of LM students in much the same way they assisted students with disabilities: more time on tests. However, this type of discourse also places teachers in a no-win scenario.

Teachers who provide no instructional support for ELs are not successfully meeting their students' needs, yet teachers who provide too much support are seen as providing these students unfair advantages.

Furthermore, the language support as accommodation discourse creates an environment in which faculty only need to change their teaching practices in certain areas. For instance, rather than changing the lecture format for classes, teachers might instead give ELs additional time on assessments and send students to campus "experts" for help as is the case with student accommodations. Neither practice necessitates an additional commitment of time or training on the part of faculty, or a new approach. This approach would be particularly appealing for faculty who already work more than full-time in order to make ends meet due to the high cost of living in the area (exosystem) and modest faculty salaries they receive (outer meso-system). Generally, this orientation otherwise allows faculty to keep the instructional status quo. This is not to say that faculty were unsupportive of LM students. English, biology, and nursing faculty described providing some extra assistance for ELs, and further support was provided by the Writing Center or supplemental instruction in the case of the Nursing program. Furthermore, when these campus services are appropriately utilized, this faculty mindset does assist students in accessing college-wide support.

However, when overused, this perspective creates an abnegation of responsibility for faculty—helping ELs is someone else's responsibility. Furthermore, rather than seeking to help ELs directly, faculty may assume that they do not have sufficient training to work with ELs and not recognize that obtaining such training ought to be their own

responsibility. In summary, faculty might not change their instructional practices in light of changing student demographics, and instead, farm out assistance so that students can meet college expectations. Such an orientation becomes increasingly untenable as LM student enrollment increases and language instruction increasingly becomes the responsibility of not just ESL instructors, but of the college as a whole (Garrison-Fletcher, 2020).

Academic ESL Program Structure

Fifth, the way in which the Academic ESL program is structured is central to understanding its intended and actual roles. However, rather than solely being an outer-meso or inner-meso factor, the program's structure results from a convergence of multiple systems of influence, from the exosystem to the microsystem. For example, while the awarding of college credit for ESL coursework is a decision ostensibly made at the outer-meso, college-wide level, this decision is impacted by larger discourses at the state and national level. One ongoing conversation relates to whether ESL coursework constitutes remedial or developmental coursework. State-level legislation in Texas (TX HB 2223, 2017) and California (Assembly Bill 705, 2017), though similar in their goal of helping EL students transition to coursework in the wider college earlier, offer two sides of the same coin. The California law specifically states that ESL coursework is not developmental or remedial, while the Texas law concerns developmental education generally and labels ESL coursework as belonging to that category. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, national organizations such as TESOL (2012), and the College Conference on Composition and Communication (2001) have weighed in on providing

college credit for ESL coursework.

However, in this case where there was no specific guidance at the state (exo) level concerning credit policies and ESL coursework, colleges are left to decide for themselves. In this case, at the outer-meso (college administrators) and inner-meso (English department chair) layers, decision makers chose to award college credit for the higher two levels of coursework in the Academic ESL program, but not the lowest level. No clear rationale as to why the Basic level course was not offered for college credit. Perhaps the higher two levels seemed more "academic" while the lowest level seemed more "basic," yet students were charged full tuition for all three.

Moreover, ambiguity at the exosystem level concerning where Academic ESL programs belong organizationally within community colleges has led to different practices at the college (outer-meso) level. The literature has identified that ESL programs have been housed within English departments, foreign language departments, ESL departments, Adult Basic Education programs, other departments, or multiple programs within the same college (e.g., Bergey et al., 2018; Crandall & Shepperd, 2004; Raufman et al., 2019). Additionally, in program structure, content, and approach, ESL programs are likely influenced at the inner-meso and micro levels by where they are housed within the college. For instance, at SWCC, while the overall structure and design of the ESL courses appeared similar to other foreign language classes (outer-meso), the literature and writing focus, including drawing instructors primarily from the English department (inner-meso), impacted not only the outcomes of the courses offered, but instructional priorities and perspectives.

Furthermore, decisions concerning the structure of the Academic ESL program, including the number of levels offered and course outcomes are made at the departmental (inner-meso) level, and must be later approved at the college (outer-meso) level. This, in turn, clearly impacts what occurs in the classroom (microsystem). However, ideally, the instructors of these courses are able to provide feedback and propose course revisions back up through the nested system to the departmental (inner-meso) level on to the college (outer-meso) so that the courses are responsive to student needs. However, given the low enrollment of the Academic ESL program, the fact that the courses were held at night or online, and that there was not set coordinator for the ESL program meant that this feedback may not be fully heard or implemented. For instance, the Intermediate-level instructor indicated that the program did not have sufficient levels of instruction to meet student needs, and yet due to low enrollment, additional courses were unlikely to be added. Finally, without clear oversight and coordination, including classroom visits (microsystem), administrators at the departmental (inner-meso) and college (outer-meso) level were unable to assess whether the instructors taught to and students attained the outcomes specified for each course.

Conclusion

In summary, viewing the five issues presented from an ecological framework highlights that factors which appear to originate from one nested system are connected with other nested systems. This perspective underscores not only the interconnectedness of the systems, but also that actions within any one system can impact the role of the Academic ESL program and extent to which it fulfills that role. In Chapter 6 I further

discuss the findings of the study as well as provide recommendations and areas for further study.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Role of the Academic ESL Program

As stated earlier, the focus of this research study was to examine the intended role of an academic ESL program as compared to the actual role the program played within the college and in individual student outcomes. Based on institutional documents and interviews with administrators and faculty, it is clear that the intended role of SWCC's Academic ESL program was to prepare EL students to transition to and succeed in the wider college.

However, the actual roles that the program played within the wider college and in student outcomes differed widely. First, low student enrollment in the full-tuition Academic ESL program versus the bursting-at-the-seams size of the free Community ESL program suggests that even the cost of enrolling in Academic ESL coursework presented a barrier that many ELs were not able to surmount. Consequently, the small size of the program mirrors the minor role the program plays in the college to the point that many faculty either did not know it existed or conflated it with the Community ESL program. Yet the three levels of administrators who oversaw the program, the chair of the English department, the Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Adult Education, and the Academic Vice-President of the college continued to view the program as important to the wider college and part of the access mission of the college. These administrators also felt that the program did not function as intended, and they hoped that this study might assist them in revising the program so that it would become more successful. Thus, to administrators, the program's role is as a promising college pathway

that remained unfulfilled.

For most faculty, the Academic ESL program played no significant role in their everyday work. While some faculty across the campus knew of the program, only English department faculty tended to interact with ESL faculty with any regularity. In fact, faculty often confused or conflated the popular Community ESL program with the Academic ESL program. The role that the program played for ESL faculty themselves, though, was impacted in large measure by what they saw as the nature of second language acquisition.

For students enrolled in the Academic ESL courses, the program played different roles depending on their goals and reasons for taking coursework. For the two Basic-level students, the Academic ESL program was simply a way to improve their English and not necessarily to progress towards an academic program in the college. Unfortunately, these students felt they did not receive enough opportunities to communicate in the language, and near the end of the semester, none of the Basic-level students indicated that they planned to continue to the next level. For Intermediate-level students, the Academic ESL program offered a step towards the college program in which they wanted to enroll. For students formerly enrolled in the Advanced level of the Academic ESL program students, the program provided assistance in how to write in an American style and the confidence to take courses in the wider college. Former ESL program students also shared, however, that the program did not sufficiently prepare them to navigate tasks related to the college going process such as choosing a major, obtaining financial aid, etc.

While students enrolled in the Academic ESL program generally had positive

opinions regarding the program, from a structural level, any judgements regarding the success of the program should take into account that only 15 students total were enrolled in the Fall of 2021, and that just two of the three levels of Academic ESL coursework carried. Put another way, of the 4,000 credit students the college enrolled, over 99.5% were either first language English students or had English language proficiencies the college deemed sufficiently for college enrollment. Conversely, more than 750 EL students were willing to wait two to three years just to get a spot in the college's noncredit ESL program. Were the college to admit into credit programs all students currently enrolled or waiting for a spot in the Community ESL program, ELs would constitute a fifth of all SWCC students.

The fact that Academic ESL program enrollment has dropped the past five years also is noteworthy because the population of the nearby community that speaks a language other than English has increased during that same time. Regional trends speak to a similar phenomenon: linguistically diverse populations are increasing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), but Academic ESL program enrollment appears to be dropping (Bednar & Paz, 2 December, 2021). Thus, the drop in Academic ESL program enrollment appears to be independent of the number of prospective ELs in a population. Furthermore, the reasons for the enrollment trends seen at SWCC may be common across the region, and may relate to similar pressures relating to cost, fears regarding immigration enforcement, or competing, less expensive ESL programs.

Furthermore, the Academic ESL program faces barriers to its success besides low enrollment. These barriers are detailed below in Figure 10. First, high tuition costs, EL

student fears of revealing documentation status, and a competing ESL program all impact enrollment. Second, insufficient instructional hours per ESL program level, a curriculum that insufficiently prepares ELs for coursework in the wider college, and wide variability in instructor approaches to language acquisition impact EL student outcomes. Similarly, a limited focus on linguistic diversity by the state's Department of Higher Education, limited coordination between ESL program levels, and the ESL program not instructing ELs on navigating college also act as roadblocks to the success of the program.

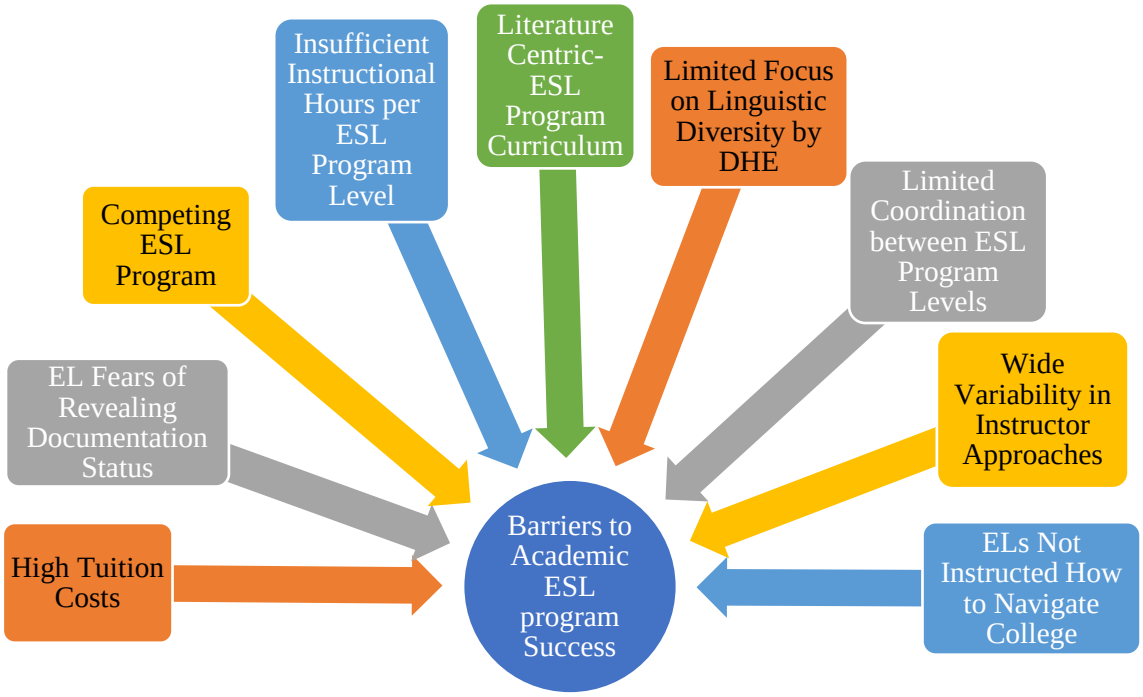

Figure 10. Barriers to Academic ESL Program Success

Can Academic ESL Programs at Community Colleges be Successful?

Seeing the many barriers that the Academic ESL program in this study faced, it might be reasonably argued that community college academic ESL programs should be

discontinued. The proposition is not out of the question as state-level legislation in Texas and California has generally led to the shortening of ESL programs (AB705, 2017l; TX HB 2223, 2017), and administrative actions in Connecticut (Key, 2020) and Georgia (Harklau & Baston, 2019) have either reduced or eliminated community college ESL programs altogether. Furthermore, recent research by Hayward et al. (2022) using large data sets from California found that U.S.-educated ELs are better off not taking the ESL pathway of courses in college. These conclusions also align with earlier findings by Harklau (2000), and Hodara (2015). Multiple studies also recommend shortening ESL program sequences (Almon, 2012; Hodara, 2015; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005; Raufman et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2019). In summary, community college academic ESL programs appear to function as barriers to EL student success, not as viable pathways to higher education.

However, before eliminating academic ESL coursework altogether, two important factors should be taken into consideration. The first relates to the mission and prevalence of community colleges, and the second regards the diverse nature of EL student populations.

First, community colleges are both widespread and focused on providing college access. In the United States there are over 1,000 community colleges, and they enroll over 40% of all undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). ELs and LM students are more likely to attend community colleges than universities due to a number of factors (location, lower cost, open access) (AACN, 2021; Kanno & Cromley, 2016; Nuñez et al., 2016). At the same time, the demographics of the United

States is rapidly changing, and linguistically diverse populations, including EL and LM students, are becoming the norm in what has been termed *the New Mainstream* (e.g., Bunch et al., 2020; Enright, 2011). Community colleges are the institutions best positioned to provide any sort of large-scale pathway to postsecondary education or training for *New Mainstream* students, at least within this generation. Eliminating any sort of higher education pathway for EL populations is not only antithetical to the very nature of community colleges (Dougherty, 1994), but arguably, unethical (Harklau & Baston, 2019).

Second, as stated previously, ELs are not a monolithic group (e.g., Raufman et al., 2019), and understanding the impact of academic ESL programs means not only recognizing the factors that influence these programs, but also navigating the constraints inherent in working with different populations of ELs. In other words, academic ESL programs which negatively impact some groups of ELs might benefit others.

For instance, Hodara (2015) found that ESL program enrollment impacted students differently depending on whether EL students were first-generation immigrants, generation 1.5 students, or second-generation immigrants. Additionally, the negative impact of ESL program enrollment found by Harklau (2000) and Heyward et al. (2022) was specific to U.S.-educated EL populations, which is different from the population served in this study. Furthermore, one reason U.S.-educated ELs are negatively impacted by ESL program enrollment is that many feel stigmatized by being placed in college-level ESL coursework (Raufman et al., 2019), particularly if they tested out of ESL coursework in high school, only to "rebecome" ELs in college (Marshall, 2009). For

U.S.-educated ELs in particular, it seems that a traditional academic ESL program approach is ineffective, and community colleges may better serve these students by supporting their language development through existing campus services (e.g., writing centers), or through innovative course offerings such as learning communities and corequisite coursework (Bunch & Kibler, 2015).

In contrast, none of the ELs in this study indicated that they felt stigmatized by being placed in the Academic ESL program, and one of the students, Nadia, chose to enroll in the Academic ESL program even when she qualified for placement in Freshman Composition. Yet, there is an important difference between not feeling stigmatized by placement and benefitting from ESL placement. This next section considers three distinct EL subpopulations, and after evaluating both student and programmatic influences, addresses whether they can best be served through academic ESL programs. These groups include low English proficiency ELs, undocumented ELs, and ELs with substantial academic training in their home countries.

Low Proficiency ELs, Raciolinguistics, and Stigma-Free Remediation

A common theme across the community college ESL program literature is the need to shorten ESL course sequences in order for students to be able to enter college coursework more quickly (e.g., Bunch et al., 2011; Raufman et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2019). At the same time, central to the mission of community colleges is the goal to provide postsecondary training and access to all (Dougherty, 1994). Given these two competing forces, many community colleges might choose to create short sequences of ESL coursework (David & Kanno, 2021), while at the same time allowing students of all

proficiency levels to enroll. The resulting program, as demonstrated in SWCC's example, is a short program sequence with large gaps in proficiency between program levels.

However, such programs do not adequately address the fact that the acquisition of academic "Standard American English" is a time-consuming endeavor (e.g., Butler & Hakuta, 2004). Put another way, the construct of "Standard American English" as assessed by the White listening subject is designed so as to make college access for students of color more difficult, regardless of the level of mastery of the forms that constitute this language (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that college is an almost exclusively English-monoglot environment (Rosa, 2016), and multilingual students are unable to draw from their full linguistic repertoires in nearly all college coursework (García & Lin, 2016). Even if ELs are enrolled full-time in an intensive English program, expecting students to go from a beginning level of English proficiency to becoming college ready within three semesters is simply unrealistic. Students who attempt to make the leap by enrolling in an academic ESL program where they are taking classes once a week for three hours at a time are on a quixotic quest, doomed to failure.

In fact, tacitly implying to beginning students that they can be college ready in three semesters is the linguistic equivalent of what Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2002) have termed "stigma-free remediation." In this situation, unrealistic student ambitions are encouraged or at the very least left unchecked so that students are not aware of the gap between what they hope to do and what is likely that they will be able to do. Students' awareness of this gap often only occurs after they have already spent substantial money

and time pursuing this goal. Just as importantly, stigma-free remediation can prevent students from being able to consider alternative, more likely pathways to success (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum). In this study, while only one of the two Basic-level students I interviewed had ambitions that necessitated attending college (i.e., becoming a paralegal), the fact that neither of these students nor any students in the Basic level planned to continue on to the next level of the program speaks to this theme.

Ironically, one contributing barrier to low-proficiency EL student success is that programs may be adopting a recommendation found widely in the literature. Statements from TESOL International (2012), The College Conference on Composition and Communication (2001), and my own research (David & Kanno, 2021) have recommended the awarding of college credit for ESL coursework. The rationale for such recommendations is that language learning is not a remedial endeavor, and that if well organized, ESL coursework can be just a rigorous as any foreign language coursework the same college offers. Students completing this coursework deserve to earn college credit for their time, and those credits can benefit them later on in their college trajectories. Providing college credit for ESL coursework also elevates the programs themselves.

However, providing college credit for all ESL coursework may negatively impact some low-level EL students because of the length of the language acquisition process and the fact that awarding college credit entails students paying substantial college tuition costs. Again, the impact of this policy depends on the type of EL student population. International students who attend community colleges full time on F-1 visas generally do

not earn college credit for ESL coursework (e.g., Fulton-Montgomery Community College, 2022; Salt Lake Community College, 2022), so this policy change would allow them to accrue more college credits, and these students already are likely paying full tuition, if not higher.

Conversely, the ELs in this study and at many community colleges had available to them discounted or free grant-funded noncredit ESL programs in which they could enroll (e.g., Miele, 2003). While these courses generally are oriented towards lower proficiency ELs, this is not always the case (Raufman et al., 2019; Roxbury Community College, 2022), and some serve multiple purposes, including college preparation. Taking into account traditionally low ESL program persistence and completion rates for many ELs (e.g., Jenkins & Weiss, 2011; Patthey-Chavez et al, 2005), as well as the lower socioeconomic status of immigrant ELs (Jenkins & Weiss, 2011), the awarding of credit for low level ESL program coursework can be the equivalent of paying students in a currency that they will never use. While there are also persistence challenges for students enrolling noncredit ESL programs (Spurling et al., 2008), students in these programs likely incur fewer costs for more hours of instruction than what the traditional college credit hour structure would allow. Exacting full college tuition costs when these ELs are unlikely to ever progress to courses in the wider college and use those credits towards graduation is not an equitable practice. Even more inequitable is what occurred in the Basic level—students paid full college tuition for ESL coursework but were not awarded college credit.

In short, community colleges cannot streamline college access by only offering a

minimal number of ESL program levels while at the same time attempting to serve all proficiency levels of EL students.

Undocumented ELs and Academic ESL Programs

One group that may be particularly ill-served by academic ESL programs is undocumented ELs. This is certainly not to say that undocumented ELs lack academic promise or a college-going disposition. Rather, these students face multiple structural barriers and a convergence of policies that inhibit their likelihood of college success. To begin, their documentation status creates difficulties in finding well-paying, stable work (Terriquez, 2015). Undocumented ELs also are less likely than other immigrants to speak English very well (Passell & Cohn, 2019), further limiting their work prospects and increasing their need for English instruction.

Moreover, policies at the national and state level act to deter undocumented ELs from enrolling in higher education. At the national level, undocumented students are unable to qualify for federal financial aid, including loans (Federal Student Aid, 2021), and in the state where this study took place and in many states across the United States, undocumented students cannot qualify for in-state tuition rates regardless of how long they have lived in the area (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). As a result, undocumented ELs may need to pay twice as much or more for any credit-bearing ESL or other college coursework in which they enroll. In this study, the chair of the English department indicated that perhaps half of all Academic ESL program students were undocumented. For these students and others, the barrier of cost in essence seals off multi-semester higher education opportunities unless students are independently well-off

or are offered other grants or scholarships to assist in covering the cost of college tuition.

Highly Educated ELs and Academic ESL Programs

In contrast to the previous two populations, adult immigrant ELs who were highly educated in their native countries might benefit most from academic ESL programs. Despite popular perceptions framing immigrant populations as uneducated, immigrant populations as a whole are more likely to have received a bachelor's degree than the general U.S. population (Batalova et al., 2020). Two of the three former Academic ESL program students I interviewed fell within this category, and the third, Anna, received a strong K–12 education in Bulgaria. The chair of the English department also noted that ELs who were highly educated in their native countries tended to do better in the Academic ESL program and afterward in the wider college than their peers.

Two of the students (Nadia and Anna), had taken English coursework in their home countries. The third, Luna, learned English both through working as a CNA at a local care center and by completing the Intermediate and Advanced levels of the Academic ESL program. However, it is striking to note that for them the main benefit of the Academic ESL program was not language acquisition per se but in learning to write in an American style and format (specifically, the type of writing expected in Freshman Composition courses). As a result, these students felt prepared to take courses within the wider college and structure essays effectively in this coursework.

What was missing for these ELs that the Academic ESL program could have provided was a more thorough understanding of the college going process. Multiple times these individuals commented that education in the U.S. was different from education in

their native countries and that knowing how to navigate those differences would have been incredibly helpful. Thus, for these three students, and likely many other highly educated immigrant-EL populations, the role of the Academic ESL program was a safe space in which to understand rhetorical and format differences in American writing, and the main barrier to success in the wider college was not academic rigor, but being unaware of policies and expectations.

Thus, traditional academic ESL programs at community colleges are likely to be most effective for immigrant EL populations who already have a fairly-high level of English proficiency and who tend to have strong academic backgrounds from their home countries. Jiang and Kuehn (2001) similarly found that students who already had ten or more years of education in their home countries showed the greatest language gains from being enrolled in community college ESL coursework.

Academic ESL Programs and the New Mainstream

Yet if community colleges are to stay true to their core, open access mission, they must do more than effectively serve a limited subgroup of ELs. Rather, community colleges must learn to adapt to the opportunities and challenges presented by new demographic realities, including a *New Mainstream* of students (Enright, 2011). Central to serving this burgeoning population is recognizing why traditional academic ESL programs at community colleges have failed to effectively serve many EL populations. This, in turn, ties into larger issues regarding diversity and equity.

The core mission of community colleges is to provide postsecondary access for the local community. Yet despite the U.S. population changing vastly even within the

past 30 years, including a doubling of the number of individuals who speak a language other than English at home, (Raufman et al., 2019; Ryan, 2013), many community colleges still view language acquisition as the responsibility of ESL programs and tangential to the concerns of the wider college and its faculty (e.g., Garrison-Fletcher, 2020). Consequently, many colleges offer academic ESL programs as a stop gap measure to attempt to solve the English language acquisition "problem" (e.g., Ruiz, 1984). However, such efforts cannot be the work of ESL programs alone, in part because the language acquisition process is lengthy and ongoing (Butler & Hakuta, 2004), meaning that "Students who begin college in an ESL program . . .are not finished with the process of acquiring English once they exit these courses" (Garrison-Fletcher, 2020, p. 392).

While many factors impact academic ESL programs, ultimately, the reason why SWCC's Academic ESL program and many other academic ESL programs fail to provide a pathway to higher education for ELs is that colleges and their affiliated higher education departments are unwilling to address the needs of linguistic diverse populations or provide language support in a comprehensive way. The current Academic ESL pathway at SWCC is essentially a band aid solution, consisting of a series of three semester-long courses that meet once a week for three hours. For students who complete these courses, the only LM-specific ongoing support is a single tutor in the campus Writing Center. While some faculty in the wider college are willing to provide additional feedback on papers, the most common type of support mentioned is providing LM students extra time on tests, even though this practice is against the rules and has gotten faculty in trouble. Ironically, the program (nursing) in which LM students could receive

the most extended amount of support is the same program which was incentivized by accreditation standards to not enroll LM students.

This is not to say that instructors or administrators at SWCC were uncaring or that no EL students succeeded (some seemed to). However, language acquisition and its related issues (expectations regarding language use, the amount of time language acquisition takes, what language support actually means, etc.) are so central to college going and college success for EL students, that when these issues are ignored from the state's Department of Higher Education on down, no academic ESL program alone will be able to otherwise compensate.

I next address possible approaches to providing EL support. However, as discussed earlier, such approaches cannot be successful if they are considered to be the purview of ESL programs alone.

Transforming Language Expectations and Translanguaging

One option in creating a comprehensive language approach is a transformation of language expectations at the community college level. A key place to begin is ESL programs. For instance, the outcomes for SWCC's Academic ESL program call for the acquisition of, "Standard American English" unquestioningly. Such an approach likely encourages the use of certain language structures as "appropriate," or from my observations of the Basic level, as really the only correct way of communicating. While the Intermediate-level instructor did much better in encouraging students to use their native language and multilingual skills during group time, the construct of what is considered standard English was never questioned. Faculty instead can frame this

construct within its proper historical and colonial context (Rosa & Flores, 2017) rather than suggesting it needs to be learned for the sake of "appropriateness" in order to fit in to academic contexts (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Additionally, rather than privileging "academic English" or "Standard American English" as monoliths to which students must aspire, faculty can instead seek to assist ELs and LM students in applying their first language(s) and the developing English they already know to the task at hand (Flores, 2020). This approach follows supports Bunch and Martin's (2021) recommendations that non-academic English can in fact be effectively used to accomplish discipline-specific tasks. Rather than commenting on whether what a student is writing is "academic" or not, instructors can focus on the inherent requirements of the genre and task and how well students fulfilled that task. This allows ELs quicker access to authentic texts and tasks as well as a swifter entry into the wider college. In conjunction with this approach, instructors in the wider college should at the very least receive training in how to scaffold the language learning of LM students (e.g., Garrison-Fletcher, 2020).

Furthermore, community colleges could even adopt a translanguaging approach to not only ESL instruction (Hills, 2020), but to all college coursework (Mazak & Carroll, 2016). This change could help faculty across to college to truly see students' first language as a rich resource to preserve and draw from (Ruiz, 1984) as students are encouraged to access and use their full linguistic repertoires (García & Lin, 2016). In such community colleges, LM students are in a stronger position to succeed, and the entire campus would benefit from this more equity-minded approach.

However, effecting such a sea change in approaches at any one community college requires the sustained, coordinated efforts of faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders at multiple levels. In contrast to the level of discussions needed for these changes to begin to take place, the state's Department of Higher Education that serves SWCC failed to even note that language expectations at the college level played a role in student access and outcomes. As discussed in the recommendation section, community colleges seeking to fully address and serve linguistically diverse populations should create and implement thorough, equity-minded language plans.

Innovative Academic ESL Program Structures

Academic ESL programs at community colleges also need not wait for sea changes in approaches in the wider college before improving the programs themselves. As mentioned earlier, academic ESL programs that employ corequisite models of instruction, in which students take a content course in the wider college and a supplementary ESL course, have shown promise (e.g., Bunch & Kibler, 2015; Song, 2006). Programs structured this way not only lead students to credit-bearing courses earlier, but can assist in providing genre- and disciplinary-specific writing instruction (Bunch et al., 2020). Such programs also fulfill what ESL program administrators at SWCC hoped to do, build community within the ESL program, while at the same do what traditional ESL programs cannot, transition students into the wider college.

College-for-All Mentality and Vocational Training

However, a focus only on preparing EL students for the academic coursework offered at community colleges ignores the possibilities offered by the "comprehensive"

community college, which offers both academic and vocational postsecondary pathways (Dougherty, 1994). Academic ESL programs may in essence be part of the singular, American focus of college-for-all that fails to recognize that many structural disadvantages that LM students and other minorities face in American K–12 education. These disadvantages lead to insufficient preparation for college-level coursework (Deil-Amen & De Luca, 2010). Specifically, many ELs, through being placed in ESL coursework in high school, graduate neither ready for college-level academic coursework nor trained for a specific vocational field (Kanno, 2021). Community colleges should look beyond only providing ELs a pathway to associate's or bachelor's degree tracks, which entail the lengthy process of having students acquire college-level English proficiency. Instead, community colleges should also create pathways for ELs of varied proficiency levels to better access already existing vocational training programs.

Of course, care must be taken so that ELs are not given the message that "academic courses are for native English speakers and vocational courses are for ELs." However, at the same time, ELs are poorly served by academic ESL programs that promise a pathway to college, but in practice, rarely provide that outcome. Consequently, these ELs are left with having expended time and money, but have received no postsecondary or vocational training. Moreover, focusing on vocational training first does not preclude pursuing an academic degree later. In fact, students who receive the kind of vocational training that allows them to obtain a higher paying work are placed in a better financial situation to afford college coursework. For example, Camila, an Intermediate-level Academic ESL program student, was interested in obtaining a bookkeeping

certificate at SWCC in order to work in multiple roles in her current job at a hair salon. This change would allow her to not be on her feet all day, and the additional training she received would likely lead to her receiving a raise. This did not mean Camila wanted a career as a bookkeeper at a hair salon. She intimated as much herself. However, she saw the certificate as providing her a step towards a more lucrative job which would in turn allow her opportunities to pursue additional training or work elsewhere.

Furthermore, pursuing vocational training and certifications may especially benefit undocumented ELs and low socioeconomic status ELs because many vocational training programs are housed not in the credit-bearing side of the college, but in noncredit programs. As a result, the cost of receiving training is the same for documented and undocumented students alike, and certification sequences can often be shorter and less expensive than obtaining Associates degrees. For instance, enrolling in two semesters of Academic ESL coursework entailed the same length of time and (in-state) tuition cost as completing certificates in medical billing and coding or phlebotomy at any number of community colleges in the same region. These certificate costs also include internships and help with job placement. For undocumented ELs, two levels of Academic ESL alone would be twice the cost of either certificate.

At the same time, the level of English proficiency required for success in certificate programs is in many instances lower than what is required in freshman-level composition. Some innovative community colleges have even combined ESL program sequences with vocational training and certification in fields like automotive repair, health care, and early childhood education (David & Kanno, 2021). Such efforts deserve

further investigation and may provide a model for working with many immigrant EL populations. Even ESL programs not connected to noncredit vocational training programs at the same college can still provide previews for EL students into what these programs entail.

Noncredit ESL Programs

Lastly, the noncredit, free Community ESL program at SWCC is a testament to the demand for ESL instruction by members of the community. The main problems the Community ESL program seemed to face were that it simply could not accommodate all of the students that wished to attend and that this specific program could not provide a direct pathway to college coursework or vocational training. It should also be noted that noncredit ESL programs are not bound by the same credit hour/tuition demands that courses on the credit side do. Therefore, courses could be offered for more than three hours once a week and still be low-cost to students. ELs who enroll in noncredit programs with more instructional hours per week may ultimately see quicker English proficiency gains than peers who enroll in academic ESL programs with fewer instructional hours.

However, this is also not to say that noncredit college ESL programs are superior to academic ESL programs, or that free ESL programs are a panacea. Rather, noncredit college ESL programs simply provide easier access to English instruction as long as these programs are sufficiently large. Nevertheless, these programs must also be structured, rigorous, avoid remedial pedagogies (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013), and provide ELs clearly articulated and defined pathways to postsecondary training if they are to truly benefit the

population they serve.

Recommendations

Studying SWCC in depth illustrates that a wide variety of factors may impact Academic ESL program success. Furthermore, policies and practices aiming to assist certain populations of ELs in one educational milieu may not necessarily benefit different populations of EL within other contexts. Thus, in my recommendations I have focused on four areas of action that I believe hold true across a wide variety of contexts. They include creating campus-wide language plans, ending policies that deny undocumented students a financial pathway to higher education, structuring information about college and career pathways within academic ESL programs, and creating flexible ESL programs focused on specific EL student populations.

The Need for a Campus-Wide Language Plan

As highlighted in the discussion regarding the language support as accommodation orientation, ELs and LM students are poorly served when faculty members are confused about what support they are allowed to provide and the extent of that support. This is especially true when college administrators and faculty are working crossways. An alternative to this confusion and contention is for community colleges to develop campus-wide language plans for addressing LM and EL student needs (e.g., Eggington & Evans, 2003; Siiner et al., 2018).

The benefits of creating and implementing an equity-minded campus language plan are manifold. First, a language plan created with the full participation of faculty and administrators allows for coordinated efforts in serving linguistically diverse populations.

This is in sharp contrast to the SWCC context where faculty felt policed by administrators in terms of what support and how much support to provide. Moreover, campus language plans directly address underlying questions regarding the nature of the language the college expects students to acquire, which ties in not only with genre-specific language (Bunch et al., 2020), but also provides an opportunity to reflect on the raciolinguistic history associated with "Standard American English" (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Furthermore, creating a campus-wide language plan clearly indicates that language acquisition is not solely the responsibility of ESL programs, but is the responsibility of the whole college. Thus, a key aspect of a successful language plan would include not simply working with ESL faculty or the English department, but also across the campus, especially in SWCC's case, the nursing program. College's seeking guidance on where to begin can utilize the books *Language policy and language acquisition planning* (Siiner et al., 2018), or *Language planning: From theory to practice* (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

The resulting plan could create the framework of coordinated effort that allows college accommodations officers to be full participants in the planning and administration of such plans rather than serving primarily as enforcers. Questions regarding the role that faculty should play in supporting LM students could be determined together. Furthermore, the expertise of multicultural and international faculty could be better utilized across campus, and the Writing Center could have a more clearly delineated role regarding the type of support to provide. Organized within a coherent language plan,

faculty need no longer wonder, “Is this type or amount of support allowed?” and can instead ask, “Are my LM students receiving the support that they need, and that the college can offer?”

End Policies that Deny Undocumented Students a Financial Pathway to Higher Education

In order for community college academic ESL programs to serve any role as pathways to higher education, they must be financially within the reach of the ELs in the community they serve. However, current tuition policies in many states as well as legislation at the national level keep college financially inaccessible for many, especially undocumented ELs (Federal Student Aid, 2021; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). A great many undocumented students have no process in which to establish in-state residency regardless of how long they have lived there, meaning that many will forever have to pay the nonresident rate. In addition, federal law makes federal financial aid, including grants and loans, inaccessible to undocumented students. Such laws further hinder undocumented students from accessing or persisting in higher education and make it therefore more likely that they will work low-wage jobs. Providing a pathway to residency status for undocumented ELs, as there already is in a number of states (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021) is an important first step to providing a financial pathway to college. Furthermore, statewide initiatives like the STEP program can help provide college access as well, and should be expanded.

Structure College Information About College-Going within Academic ESL program Curricula

One aspect not sufficiently addressed in the literature is that for most students enrolling in academic ESL programs, these programs constitute the first point of contact between the student and the higher education system (e.g., Harklau, 2008). While the transition for immigrants who have college degrees from abroad might be less than for those who have not attended college previously, sufficient information regarding how to be a college student and which processes to engage in are vital to student success. As a result, if academic ESL program pathways are to work, students within those pathways need to be fully aware of the process. However, as more and more courses are taught by adjuncts who lack connection with the wider college, these faculty are less likely to have the information students need to know in order to navigate their transition into the wider college.

To ensure that EL receive sufficient information about the college going process and college resources, this information should be structured within actual academic ESL program curricula. Incorporating assignments that increase college knowledge can allow students to learn more about the college while participating in an academically rigorous and English language rich activities. For instance, academic listening practice could include interviewing financial aid staff or guidance counselors concerning their job responsibilities. Writing assignments could involve selecting a major of interest and writing about the prerequisites and graduation requirements of that major. Furthermore, any opportunities that students might have to connect to the wider college (observing

classes, interviewing former ESL program students in the wider college, etc.) can assist in helping those students develop their own college-going identity.

To sum up, English language acquisition is a necessary but insufficient condition for academic ESL program success. If students only leave their academic ESL program courses with a better understanding of how to do college assignments, but not how to become college students, then the program has not met its intended purpose.

Create Flexible ESL Programs Focused on Specific EL Populations

As discussed earlier, community colleges must navigate the principle of college access for all with the reality that the longer that ELs spend in ESL coursework, the less likely they are to ever progress to coursework outside the ESL program. In other words, ideally, ESL programs must both be long to ensure college access, and also shortened in order to provide for college success. One solution to this problem that has been adopted by some community colleges is to offer multiple tracks of ESL courses, including everyday English, academic English, English for citizenship, and vocational ESL coursework which serve students of different proficiency levels and needs (e.g., Raufman et al., 2019). This model of multiple ESL programs has the benefit that each program can focus more on disciplinary-specific vocabulary and discourse within a given domain (e.g., automotive repair, healthcare, sociology) (Bunch et al., 2020). It also provides students additional opportunities to align student learning goals and interests with specific ESL programs.

Central to the success of such programs is ensuring that information about the variety of ESL programs is readily available and understandable to EL students.

Furthermore, ESL courses oriented towards certain vocational or academic pathways should, wherever possible, be offered concurrently with relevant coursework and certificate programs within the college.

At the same time, for some states, the cost of college tuition is already low and undocumented ELs are considered resident for the purpose of determining tuition rates (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). In these situations, the recommendation by TESOL (2012) and CCCCs (2001) regarding the awarding of college credit for some ESL coursework should be followed because these accrued college credit may be ultimately beneficial to academically-oriented EL populations. This is especially true if ESL course credit counts towards fulfilling general education graduation requirements. However, even in states where tuition costs are low, colleges should also look to recruit ELs and LM students to vocational training certification programs. ELs should not be denied access into these sequences until they have completed the entire sequence of ESL coursework. Rather, ELs should have access as soon as is reasonable given the linguistic demands of the work involved. This practice could assist U.S.-educated EL populations in becoming more career ready (Kanno, 2021). Thus, students who may not otherwise place into courses within the wider college could have access to postsecondary training in many instances without having to take ESL coursework first. Such programs especially benefit ELs who face economic barriers to accessing postsecondary training.

Finally, innovative community college ESL program in Washington and other states have begun offering ESL course sequences which teach specific vocational content

and can lead to certification (e.g., David & Kanno, 2021). Other colleges have even provided some vocational-oriented instruction in common languages other than English (Artiaga, 2013), which would again assist ELs in not only finding better work opportunities but put them in a financial position where they could better afford the cost of college in the future, if they so desire.

Future Research

Additional research is needed regarding many aspects of community college academic ESL programs (Raufman et al., 2019). However, four areas of research are particularly relevant to this study. First, more research is needed on the decision-making process which ELs undertake at community colleges. Information regarding whether they consider themselves ELs (di Gennaro, 2008), how they react to being identified as ELs (e.g., Marshall, 2009), how they make enrollment choices when a variety of ESL programs are offered, and in which courses and programs they choose to enroll in the wider college (Li, 2012). While cost has been identified as a significant factor in this study, more research is needed to affirm this finding and how it impacts EL decision making for coursework.

Second, although important connections are being made in the literature between ELs' experiences and the training they receive for healthcare careers (Bunch et al., 2020; Li, 2021), more studies are needed to examine programmatic collaboration between ESL programs and vocational career pathways (e.g., Artiaga, 2013). An area of special interest relates to assisting EL and LM students access discipline-specific discourse practices (e.g., Bunch & Martin, 2021) common to vocational fields through noncredit vocational

training programs.

Third, more research is needed on how ELs develop a college-going identity and how ESL programs impact the development of that identity. This area of research is particularly needed as it has also been identified by Raufman et al. (2019) as one of their four key areas for future research.

Finally, because many community colleges are shortening (Rodriguez et al., 2019) or even eliminating ESL programs (Harklau & Baston, 2019), research is needed concerning community colleges which do not have academic ESL programs and how these colleges respond to linguistically diverse populations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the Academic ESL program at Sweetwater was intended as a pathway for EL students to access the wider college, it did not actually fulfill that role. A central cause of this gap between Academic ESL program intentions and actual roles was that the role of language in higher education and the needs of linguistically diverse students were insufficiently addressed at the state and college level. As a result, ELs faced barriers in accessing the Academic ESL program, persisting within the program, transferring to the wider college, and succeeding in the wider college.

Individual factors which impacted the success of the Academic ESL program occurred at each level of my ecological framework (exo, outer-meso, inner-meso, and micro). National and state-level laws policies regarding documentation status, financial aid, tuition rates, and the establishing of residency made the program unaffordable for many. A state-level Department of Higher Education focus on increasing diverse student

enrollment and college success failed to address the role that language and linguistic diversity played in the higher education landscape. As a result, efforts towards increasing equity did not focus on improving ESL program access or success.

A number of factors at state and national level impacted students. For instance, LM students interested in pursuing a career in nursing were impacted by placement and certification tests that were overly difficult and language dense, making nursing programs more hesitant to enroll them. Programs funded by state-level grants from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education either assisted ELs' transition to higher education (STEP program) or both helped and hindered it in complex ways (Community ESL program).

College and community-specific factors also influenced the Academic ESL program. For one, the cost of living in the Sweetwater community caused many faculty to work more than full time in order to make ends meet. This economic reality in turn impacted the amount of time faculty were able to spend assisting students generally and LM students specifically. Faculty efforts regarding the amount of support LM student should receive were colored by a language as accommodation orientation which constantly foregrounded the question of whether the amount of assistance provided to ELs rose to the level of a learning accommodation. In turn, college faculty differed widely in their perceptions of the language proficiency of ELs in the college, and these perceptions influenced the amount of support offered in specific departments and whether faculty thought that assisting ELs was within their level of expertise.

At the level of the Academic ESL program were factors which also impacted how

the program functioned. The structure of the Academic ESL program, including the number of levels and proficiency level expectations for each level, made transitioning from one level of ESL coursework to the next difficult, if not out of reach for many students. Furthermore, the physical isolation of the Academic ESL program from both the Community ESL program and the wider college hindered student access to support services within the wider college. This was exacerbated by the limited curricular information that students received in Academic ESL coursework, leaving students ill-prepared to make the transition from the Academic ESL program to the wider college.

At the classroom level, EL students faced widely different pedagogies and orientations towards the language acquisition process depending on whether they took the Basic or the Intermediate-level course. Moreover, the Academic ELs program's focus on building community both helped and hindered students. At the lower levels, the focus on community building seemed to isolate students from resources and connections in the wider college. At the Advanced level, community building efforts helped to create a viable cohort of students by providing them the necessary information regarding American rhetorical forms and writing expectations common in freshman-level writing courses. However, ELs enrolled in the highest levels of the Academic ESL program did not receive sufficient information concerning how to navigate the policies and processes of college-going, which impacted their ability to effectively transition into the wider college.

Furthermore, the challenges that ELs face in higher education often have just as much to do with societal forces and economic constraints as they do with challenges

inherent in preparing ELs for higher education. Community college administrators seeking to improve college access for ELs must recognize the confluence of factors which impact their own programs and students, and adapt their efforts to their specific milieu. In general, though, colleges must first recognize the financial challenges that many ELs face which impact their educational trajectories. Efforts like the STEP program can assist colleges in ensuring that students with college ambitions can continue through ESL programs and into the wider college.

Financial pathways to college should also be complemented by informational pathways (Harklau, 2008), since for the vast majority of ELs, the ESL program is the student's first point of contact to American higher education. Efforts to help students learn how to navigate college should also be paired with college-level initiatives to ensure coordinated support for the ongoing English language development of EL students and to avoid a language support as accommodation framework which creates uncertainty regarding the type and extent of support that should be provided. Finally, rather than focusing solely on providing ELs pathways to degree programs, community colleges should also develop pathways to noncredit certificate and vocational training which would be more affordable and more within reach for many students.

In conclusion, community colleges are uniquely positioned to provide U.S.-educated ELs and adult immigrant ELs entry points to postsecondary training (e.g., Kanno & Cromley, 2016). However, unless community colleges and the governing structures which oversee them address the role that language plays in higher education and seek comprehensive, college-wide ways to support linguistically diverse populations,

efforts towards providing postsecondary pathways to EL students will be insufficient. Furthermore, administrators and decision makers need to recognize that successful ESL programs take into account the makeup and goals of the diverse EL populations community colleges serve, as well as understand and address the intersecting administrative and classroom factors which impact the success of these programs. The significance of this study, then is not only that it is the first case study of an academic ESL program that collected data from administrator, faculty, and student perspectives, but that it is also the first to examine in depth what confluence of factors might impact the success of academic ESL programs.

APPENDIX A: OBSERVATION REFLECTION GUIDING QUESTIONS

Assumptions About SLA/Nature of Language

- What error correction practices does the instructor use?
- Did the instructor talk about strategy use at all?
- What kinds of texts (authentic, simplified, genre-specific) were used?
- Was grammar taught? How?
- How much teacher talk time was there? How much group work? Pair work?
- Did students use translanguaging or their first language at all?
- Were language skills taught separately or through an integrated manner? Was content integrated with language instruction?
- How explicitly were classroom tasks connected with "real world" tasks?

Raciolinguistics

- How was translanguaging or first language use responded to?
- Was there any linguistic variety in the texts used? (different varieties of English, different languages)
- Did the teacher use error correction, and if so, how?
- Where there any explicit discussions about power, language, social justice, etc.?

APPENDIX B: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Did you go to school in the United States before college?
2. If yes, for how many years?
3. How long have you been enrolled in ESL classes?
4. What is your goal after the ESL program?
5. Why did you decide to enroll in ESL courses?
6. What do you see as the purpose or job of the ESL program?
7. Why did you decide to attend SWCC? Are you attending part-time or full-time? Why?
8. Tell me about the placement process you went through here at SWCC.
    a. Did you expect to be placed in the ESL program? Why or why not?
    b. What test or tests did you take? How long was it? What kinds of questions were you asked?
    c. How well did you understand what was going on in the placement process? Did anyone talk to you about the process? Did you feel like you were placed correctly?
    d. How did you feel being placed into the ESL program?
9. Tell me about your ESL classes at SWCC. Are your ESL classes what you expected them to be or are they different? Why?
10. What do you expect to learn in the ESL program?
11. What sorts of things do you think you need to be able to do in English to be ready for mainstream classes?
12. What do you think is the best way to learn a language? How well do you think the classes at SWCC help you learn English?
13. Do you feel like you are a part of the whole college or just the ESL program? Why or why not?
14. If you compare your ESL classes and college classes, what are the main differences? Do you find content classes challenging? Why, why not?
15. What are your goals after the ESL program?
    a. Do you feel like the ESL program has helped you to reach your goals? Why or why not?
    b. Have your goals changed because of your time in the ESL program?
16. If there is anything you could change about the ESL program, what would it be?
17. So, because of COVID-19, ESL classes are now just held online. How has that affected you?
18. Anything else you want to share about the ESL program?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ESL FACULTY

1. Tell me a little about your educational background.
    a. Where did you go to college? What did you study?
2. Why did you decide to teach at SWCC?
    a. How long have you taught here?
    b. What classes have you taught?
    c. Do you teach here full time or part time?
    d. Do you only teach here, or do you also teach at another college or school?
    e. What courses do you normally teach here at SWCC?
3. Tell me about the ESL students who attend here.
    a. What are their backgrounds? What are their goals?
    b. Do you see ESL student backgrounds impacting their success in the program?
4. What do you see as the purpose of the academic ESL program?
    a. How do you see that reflected or not reflected in the curriculum?
    b. How successful do you think the ESL program is at meeting its purpose?
5. What do you think students expect to learn from the ESL program?
6. What should ESL students be able to do upon exiting the ESL program?
7. Tell me what you know about the ESL placement test and process.
    a. Do you feel that it accurately places students in each level?
    b. Are ESL faculty able to contest placement if they feel students are misplaced?
    c. In what ways do you feel the ESL placement process is successful and accurate?
    d. In what ways do you feel the ESL placement process needs to improve, if at all?
8. Tell me what you think about the current structure of the ESL program.
    a. Do you feel that the ESL program has the correct structure and number of levels? Why or why not?
    b. If you could change anything about the structure of the ESL program, what would you change and why?
    c. What do you think ESL program students need to learn and do to be successful in the mainstream college?
    d. How successful do you feel the ESL program is at preparing students for college?
    e. In what ways to you feel the ESL program succeeds at educating students? In what ways to you think the ESL program falls short?
    f. What do you think the college does well at in working with ELs? How could the college improve?

9. Tell me about your interaction with the wider college as an ESL faculty member.
    a. Do you have any responsibilities outside the ESL program?
    b. What role do you see the ESL program playing within the wider college?
    c. In your opinion, is the ESL Program respected by other parts of the college? Does it enjoy the same status as other academic branches of the college?
    d. What role do you think you play in the community college?
    e. What role do you feel other faculty think you play in the wider college?
10. Anything else you'd like to share with me?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR OTHER COLLEGE FACULTY

1. Tell me a little about your educational background.
    a. Where did you go to college? What did you study?
2. Why did you decide to teach at SWCC?
    a. How long have you taught here?
    b. What classes have you taught?
    c. Do you teach here full time or part time?
    d. Do you only teach here, or do you also teach at another college or school?
    e. What courses do you normally teach here at SWCC?
3. How regularly do you teach students whose native language is not English in your classes?
    a. Do you change your teaching or assignments at all when working with ESL students? Explain.
    b. Do you use any ESL instructional strategies?
    c. Do you see scaffolding ESL students' access to academic content as part of your responsibility as faculty?
    d. If a student in your class is struggling in English, what would you do?
4. What do you see as the purpose of the ESL program? How well do you feel it meets its goal?
    a. What challenges, if any, do ESL students continue to have at the college level?
    b. What changes, if any, might you recommend for preparing ESL student for success in your class at the college level?
5. What role do you feel the ESL program plays in the wider college?
6. At SWCC, what do you see as the ESL program's responsibility versus your responsibility with ELs? What do you think ESL program students need to learn and do to be successful in college?
7. How often do you interact with ESL faculty or administrators? In what capacities do you interact with them?
8. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic effect on multiple education sectors, including community colleges. How have you seen the pandemic affecting your teaching? Do you feel it has impacted the purpose or role of the ESL program? Why or why not?
9. Anything else you'd like to share?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ESL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

1. Tell me about the students in your ESL programs.
    a. What are their educational backgrounds?
    b. What are their goals?
    c. Who do you feel your program caters to?
    d. How do you feel different groups of ELs do in your program? Why?
2. Tell me about the current structure of the Academic ESL program.
    a. What do you see as the goal of the Academic ESL program?
    b. What do you think the Academic ESL program is good at? What could improve?
    c. What factors do you think impact English language acquisition for your students?
    d. What do you think impacts ESL student persistence in your ESL program?
    e. If money weren't an issue, what would you change in your current program? Why?
3. Tell me about how you see the ESL program functioning in relation to the wider college.
    a. What role does the Academic ESL program have within the wider college, if any?
    b. Do you feel that ESL program students see themselves as college students?
    c. Do you feel ESL program faculty sees themselves as full faculty? Why or why not?
    d. Tell me about your experience interacting with the wider college.
4. Tell me about the ESL placement process.
    a. Do you feel your current placement process is accurate?
    b. Do you believe that there are those who should be taking ESL coursework that avoid ESL placement or vice versa? Explain.
    c. How do students react when they find out they are placed in ESL coursework?
    d. If money were not an issue, would you change the placement procedure?
5. Tell me about the curriculum of the ESL program.
    a. How are the programs organized in terms of their curriculum?
    b. Is there any overlap between the two programs?
6. To you, what does it mean for an ESL student to be ready to enter the mainstream college? What should ESL students know and what should ESL students be able to do?
7. Tell me about the transition of ESL students to the college
    a. How well do you feel former ESL students do at the college compared to native speaker students?

    b. Do you think ESL students transition too early or too late? Why?
    c. How do you feel the ESL program prepares students for college coursework?
8. Some recent research suggests that ESL sequences are so long that they can hinder ELs persistence. Do you think the ESL program can function as a barrier rather than an enabler for ELs?
9. There were recently some policy changes regarding the awarding of credit for ESL courses. Can you tell me about that process?
10. COVID has dramatically changed education in the US. How has the pandemic impacted the ESL program? What has stayed the same? What has changed?
11. Anything else you wanted to share?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR OTHER COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS

1. Tell me about the work you do on campus
    a. What are your job responsibilities?
    b. Who do you regularly meet with?
    c. In what ways do you feel you impact the college as a whole?
2. What relationship do you have with the college's Academic ESL program?
    a. Tell me about how you interact with the faculty and administrators of the ESL program.
    b. What do you feel is the purpose of the Academic ESL program in the college?
        i. Should the Academic ESL program be the sole provider for ESL instruction, or should mainstream college courses also play a part?
    c. What role do you feel the Academic ESL program plays in the wider college?
    d. What role do you see the ESL faculty and administrators playing within the wider college? How is that similar or different from the English department?
3. How successful do you feel is the current ESL program? Explain.
    a. What do you feel the ESL program is successful at? Where do you feel it can improve?
4. For you, what does it mean for ESL students to be ready to leave the ESL program and be ready for mainstream college classes? What sorts of things should students be able to know and do?
5. If money was not an issue, what changes would you like to see in the ESL program?
6. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly impacted higher education. How have you seen it impact the college? In what ways have you seen it impact the ESL program?

APPENDIX G: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL GUIDING QUESTIONS

Type of Texts

- Who generated this text? Who had to sign off on it? What audience was it produced for?

Type of Language

- Is this document only available in English, or is it available in languages other than English?
- How accessible would this document be to ELs?

Orientation Towards Language Instruction/Language Diversity

- Is the ESL program or linguistically diverse students mentioned in this text? If not, are other programs or groups mentioned, making the omission of the ESL program or linguistically diverse groups glaring?
- How is the ESL program framed in terms of its role within the college?
- What policies regarding ESL coursework are similar to or different from other college coursework?
- How do policies for students in the ESL program relate to policies in other college programs?

ESL Program Organization/Curriculum

- What is the overall structure of the ESL program? (Levels, cutoffs, etc.)
- How is the acquisition of English operationalized within the ESL program's structure (separate skills instruction, integrated skills, content-based instruction)?

ESL Program Purpose/Responsibility

- What is the Academic ESL program's purpose (explicitly or implicitly stated)?
- How is this purpose/role similar/different from the purposes of the college as a whole?
- Does the purpose of the ESL program relate to language acquisition solely, or transitioning to the college, preparation for college or vocational coursework, etc.?
- What role do ESL faculty have within this responsibility?
- Are faculty outside the ESL program framed as sharing in the responsibility for language instruction?

Other

- What else about this document speaks to the purpose or role of the ESL program that I might have overlooked?

APPENDIX H: PROPOSITIONS FROM MY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework:

- Areas in higher nested systems impact lower nested systems
- Interaction and interconnectedness between the systems is common and key to understanding the ecological environment you are studying
- What exo-level factors are impacting the Academic ESL program?
- What outer-meso level factors are impacting the Academic ESL program?
- What inner-meso level factors are impacting the Academic ESL program?
- What micro-level factors are impacting the Academic ESL program?

Raciolinguistics:

- Views about race and views about language proficiency are interconnected
- For some, ELs' language proficiency will never be enough regardless of how "appropriate" it is
- Language standardization marginalizes specific demographic groups.
- High school educated Latinx students are often seen as "languageless"
- Remediation is needed for Latinx students to succeed in "academic language"
- One approach to language in education is to see "standard English" as "appropriate"
- Proficiency in languages other than English or in non-dominant varieties of English are seen from a deficit viewpoint
- Colonialism and colonial power structures are often at the center of viewpoints about language and the role of other languages.
- The white listening subject (teachers, admins, etc.) determine language ability. There are no objective measures.
- Non-white speakers speak in ways that deviate from the standard.
- Access and success in college depends on the extent to which students can conform to the standards of the white listening subject.
- Race impacts language and language impacts race.
- White supremacy acts to bar students from access and success in college through the means of language standards.

Orientations in Language Planning:

- What are the complex of dispositions towards language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society?
- Orientations are largely unconscious and pre-rational.
- Orientations delimit the way we talk about language and language issues.

- The language as problem orientation is dominant in American education
    - Language planning has been generally seen as the fixing of a problem
    - Other languages as problems to fix in order to increase students' socioeconomic status
    - Other languages are seen as causes of problems observed in the group
    - Focus on transitioning out of first languages
    - "The Ultimate goals of bilingual education programs are to learn English and keep up with English speaking peers in subject matter. While bilingualism per se is a laudable and worthwhile outcome, we judge benefit in terms of English acquisition and subject matter learning" (Birman & Ginsburg, 1981, p. 5).
    - Wisconsin statute located in the chapter on handicapped children. Language other than English as handicap.
    - Monolingualism is unifying
- The language as right orientation
    - First language is a right
    - Students have an inalienable right to speak their own language
    - Students have a right to be instructed in their native language
    - Discrimination based on language is against the constitution
    - Language as right leads to confrontation
- The language as resource orientation
    - Mastery in language is a resource to manage, develop, and conserve
    - Bilinguals have linguistic resources that we should value

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