

A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN POSTSECONDARY U.S. ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT: Postsecondary English language education is a growing field in the United States. While there has been considerable research on international student mobility in higher education, there is limited research on the population's participation in U.S. English language programs (ELPs). This study examined literature in related fields to create a conceptual framework for international student enrollment in U.S. postsecondary ELPs. By drawing on literature from international student mobility, global English language acquisition, enrollment preferences of students, English language programs, and student success in English language program, the study applies existing theories to better understand postsecondary English language program participation and creates a foundation for future studies. This research could be used in a discussion of the implications for the field of English language instruction to map out directions for future studies. Educators can reflect on the form and function of postsecondary U.S. English language programs.

Keywords: international student mobility, ESL, English language programs, enrollment

Lawyer, educator, and president of Columbia University, Lee Bollinger, made a passionate plea for diversity in all of higher education (Bollinger, 2003). He contended that cultural diversity in higher education gives students the opportunity to understand the views of others and realize how life experiences shape their own identity, which fosters learning and an environment of compassion (Bollinger, 2003). International students add to the cultural diversity of college campuses in the United States. Supporting the international student community expands the U.S. knowledge base, promotes U.S. foreign policy, and contributes to the U.S. economy (NAFSA, 2006). Higher education has been one of the fifth largest service exports for the U.S., with global demand outreaching the supply (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Chow & Bhandari, 2009). In 2014, the number of international students in U.S. institutions of higher education reached a record high (Institute of International Education, 2014). Among the 886,052 international students, 43,456 were enrolled in intensive English programs (IEP) (Institute of International Education, 2014). Postsecondary English language programs (ELPs) help speakers of other languages develop the language and cultural skills needed to succeed in college-level coursework (Hodara, 2015). For limited English proficient (LEP) students, these programs are often a required intermediary prior to full admittance to a U.S. institution of higher education (Dehghanpisheh, 1987). The number of international students in ELPs is “enormous and still growing” (Pennington & Hoekje, 2010, p. 8). However, there is limited literature on international student participation in U.S. ELPs. Given the limitation, this study began by reviewing research in five related fields to create a conceptual framework for understanding international student participation in U.S. postsecondary ELPs.

Globalization has increased the demand for English language instruction. Many U.S. colleges and universities use intensive English programs to attract international students

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(Witter, 2014). IBISWorld projects in the next five years the language instruction industry will see increased competition from in-house college programs (Witter, 2014). As institutes of higher education dedicate more time and resources into English language programs, it becomes increasingly important to understand the nature of international student participation in postsecondary language programs for future studies to examine effective program models, public and private English Language Program (ELP) differences, and the value of ELPs.

Method for Review of the Literature

The literature review process began with an examination of pre-existing literature on the research topic. With little information published about the international student population in the postsecondary English language instructional setting the topic was divided into five main areas of study: (a) international student mobility, (b) global English language acquisition, (c) enrollment preferences of students, (d) English language programs, and (e) student success after language programs. Cumulatively these areas inform concepts that relate to the phenomenon under investigation. Search terms were generated from the thesaurus feature on the ERIC database's ed.gov site. Search terms explored using the Virginia Commonwealth University library search engine, which quarries the library's holdings in excess 2.3 million volumes, 61,000 serials, and 600,000 ebooks (Lawal, Selinger, & Anderson, 2014). Additionally, the search terms were used in Google Scholar and the following databases: *ERIC Proquest, Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts, Library Information Science & Technology Abstracts, Library Literature & Information Science, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Directory of Open Access Journals, Dissertations & Theses Full Text, and IBISWorld*. Institutional websites were reviewed for publications associated with the research topic, to include *the Department of Homeland Security, National Center for Education Statistics, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, U.S. Department of Education, LEP.gov, US State Department, Library of Congress, and the Institute of International Education (IIE)*. An initial screening examined the literature for relevance to the research topic. The collection of relevant sources was evaluated for the timeliness of the information, validity of the author's argument, and credibility of the author. The references of the sources meeting the inclusion criteria were scanned for other possible materials relevant to the research topic and the selection process was repeated.



Figure 1. Structure of the literature review

Brief Overview of the Literature

The proprietary nature of the postsecondary language education industry may contribute to the limited literature in this area, or it may be an indication that the field is still evolving in practice, allowing little opportunity for reflection. By drawing on literature in related fields, the study can be situated in past research and further examined through established frameworks. The review of literature spans five areas of research to address international student participation in U.S. English language programs (see Figure 1). This begins with a profile of international student mobility to capture their impetus to come to the U.S. to learn. International student mobility research is extensive and frames the larger population of interest. To understand the desire to learn English, the literature review goes on to describe global English language acquisition. In continuing the journey from country of origin to U.S. postsecondary ELP, next is an examination of the enrollment preferences of students to understand why students select one institution over another. Literature on English language programs describes the purposes of various program models and differences in institutional types, which affect a student's educational experience upon enrollment. The literature review concludes with an examination of student success as it relates to ELP attendance.

International Student Mobility

The phenomenon of international student mobility, defined as the “act of crossing national borders for the purpose of academic study” (Kelo, Teichler, & Wächter, 2006, p. 5), has been examined by numerous researchers (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; McMahan, 1992). McMahan (1992) explored the relationship between international student mobility with global politics, economics, and culture. She presented a conceptual framework that highlights push and pull factors to account for mobility. The push relates to the politics, economy, and culture of the international student's home-country and the pull relates to the same factors in the destination country, which encourage student mobility. McMahan used a multiple regression analysis to examine the flow of international students from eighteen developing countries. The results identified economic, educational, and political factors influenced mobility patterns. She stressed the importance of understanding historical factors for mobility in conceptualizing the mobility trends of today.

Global English Language Acquisition

Kachru (1986), arguably considered one of the foremost scholars in the field of international English education, provided an account of the spread of the English language through a historical context and advocates for the recognition of institutionalized non-native varieties of English. The author conceptualized global English language acquisition, or the spread of the English language globally, using a model of three concentric circles. In the inner circle are countries with English as the primary language (e.g. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the U.S.). In the outer circle are countries that spread English through colonization, and view English as a second language (e.g. India, Singapore, Nigeria, and Papua New Guinea). In the

expanding circle are countries in which English is spreading rapidly and English is viewed as a foreign language (e.g., China and countries of the former Soviet Union). He went on to describe the history and resulting tensions of the *Englishes* within and between each circle. Kachru focused his argument on the outer circle, discussing the theoretical, applied, societal and ideological issues associated with institutionalized non-native varieties of English in multicultural settings. He advocated for the recognition of localized varieties of English and argued against those who would consider grammatical and pragmatic differences in local, non-native varieties of English as errors or deficiencies.

From a different perspective, Appadurai (1996) viewed global English language acquisition through a series of scapes and flows. Scapes are the elements--people, media, technology, ideas, and money that create constructed realities or shared perceptions of the world. Flows are the movement of these elements from one place to another creating an interchange of thought in a cultural economy. The value of the English language is caught up and shaped by these flows and scapes.

Enrollment Preferences of Students

While international student mobility captures the motivation to learn outside of one's country and global English language acquisition address a student's desire to learn English, enrollment preferences of students describes the decision making process associated with selecting a school. Kotler (1976) explained school selection in a seven-stage process from the decision to attend college to registration. Chapman (1981) built on these stages by theorizing factors that influence the student's decisions. Litten (1982) expanded Chapman's work by categorizing factors, then testing the model using data from previous studies. Litten's model suggests that the aspiration to attend college relates to the student's background, personal attributes, high school attributes, and environment. The student's aspiration leads to the decision to start the application process by gathering information. At this stage the student receives information from potential colleges and is influenced by parents, counselors, peers, publications, and other media. The decision to apply to a given college relates to the school's price, size, programs, and ambience. The model concludes with the college's admissions practices and the student's enrollment. Jones (2013) applied principles of enrollment preferences in a dissertation on the influence of marketing factors on selection of U.S. ELP. Jones surveyed 335 students from ten language schools to determine whether various marketing techniques influenced choice by the student's country of origin, age, and gender. The results suggested generational differences-- younger students valued the opinions of education brokers, while word-of-mouth rated higher as the age group of students increased. Most marketing factors were viewed equally between males and females, except mailed brochures and blogs rated slightly higher for females.

English Language Programs

The composition of ELPs in which a student may enroll varies by purpose and institution type. Pennington and Hoekje (2010) discussed leadership in the *ecology* of a language

program-- *ecology* representing the environment or context of the program. They contended that language programs have a complex and delicate system of connected components, which are constantly evolving. The authors presented their ecological model with leadership theory to aide in program development. Pennington and Hoekje's model consists of *people* (students, faculty and staff), *things* (materials, equipment, records, and physical spaces), and *processes* (learning, hiring, training, record-keeping, budgeting, marketing and recruitment) -- in addition to the typical program components of curriculum and instruction. Program administrators must understand and skillfully work within this ecology (Pennington & Hoekje, 2010). In the ecology of language programs, there are arguably two main program purposes and three institutional types.

ELP Student Success.

Student success as it relates to ELPs is a fairly unexamined topic. Bers (1994) researched the GPA, credit completion, and persistence of LEP students in community college. The results of a multivariate statistical analysis indicated no statistically significant difference between LEP students and the total student population. Hodara (2015) compared students in ELPs with students in developmental writing programs through a longitudinal examination of student transcripts. Through a difference-in-difference approach, results indicated the longer sequenced ELP, as compared to the developmental writing programs, inhibits LEP student progression to credit-bearing college-level courses.

Summary and Synthesis of Literature Review

The literature on international student mobility describes the *push* and *pull* factors surrounding international student mobility from developing countries to developed and the implications of mobility. Global English language acquisition examines the role of globalizations, colonization, and English dominance in motivating students to learn English. Research on the enrollment preferences of students details the influences that predispose students to selecting one location or institute of higher education over another - these include personal attributes, background, media, public policy, college characteristics, and admission practices. Information on ELPs by purpose and institution type describes the various instructional models available to students (English for general and specific purposes) and the differences in program implementation at university, community college and for-profit institutions.

Individually, these fields do not address international student participation in U.S. English language programs. Research on international student mobility gathers information on enrollment to U.S. institutes of higher education, but not to ELP. Global English language acquisition accounts for the drive to learn English, but does not address the resulting ELPs. While there is an abundance of literature on college enrollment preferences, there is little information on regarding choice in ELP. There is a need for more current research on university and community college program models and great need for information on for-profit programs. While research in the effectiveness of English for general and specific purpose is garnering increased attention, additional research is needed to examine the effectiveness of ELPs by institution. Overall, the field

has failed to address the value of postsecondary ELPs in student achievement. However, together these areas of research provide a means of conceptualizing international student participation in U.S. English language programs.

Conceptual Framework

Litten’s (1982) model of the college selection process offers a framework to conceptualize international student enrollment practices in U.S. ELPs, when incorporating Appadurai’s (1996) scapes, McMahon’s (1992) push-pull model, and Kachru’s (1986) concentric circles of English. The adjusted model depicts international student enrollment from the desire to learn English to program admissions, in a six-stage process (see Figure 2). The initial desire to learn English is theorized to be associated with the student’s background and outside influences, which predisposes the student to learn either English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL). The influences, (colonization, media, people, technology, ideology, and money) are reflective of Appadurai’s scapes. Appadurai (1996) argued that the global cultural economy impresses on identity formation, the interpretation of one’s world, and the roles in social institutions, both within and between nations. This global cultural economy is comprised of dynamic environments: ethnoscapes, immigration of people; mediascapes, images promulgated by the media; technoscapes, interactions through technology; finanscapes--exchange of money; and ideoscapes--transference of ideologies (Appadurai, 1996).

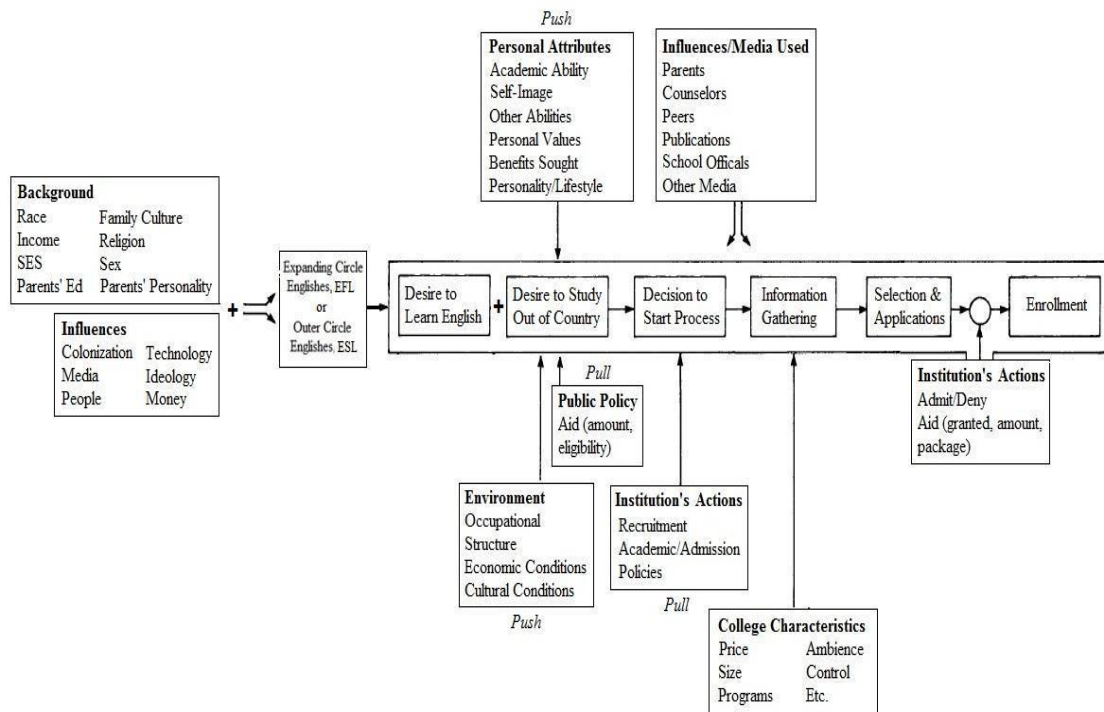


Figure 2. International student ELP selection model

The framework goes on to theorize that background and external influences position the student in Kachru's (1986) *concentric circles of English*. In the *inner* circle are countries in which English is the primary language; the *outer* circle includes countries in which English is important historically, used in institutions, and considered a desirable second language; and the *expanding* circle incorporates countries in which English has little historical or institutional importance, but spreads as a foreign language or used as a lingua franca (Kachru, 1986). The inner circle sets English language norms, and the outer circle assimilates the norms, while the expanding circle is dependent on and accommodates norms set by the inner circle (Kachru, 1986). The framework of international student enrollment practices proposes that international students from the outer circle are likely to seek English language instruction from the inner circle, and students from the expanding circle would look to either the inner or outer circle.

With the disposition to learn English, the international student needs also to have a desire to leave one's country to study abroad. The desire to study outside of one's country relates to personal attributes, public policy and environmental factors. The framework of this trend is best represented by McMahon's (1992) *push* and *pull* model. The *push* suggests politics, economy, lack of educational opportunities and culture in international student's home country drives the student to leave his/her country (McMahon, 1992). The *pull* relates to corresponding factors in the destination country, which entices the students to attend college in that country (McMahon, 1992). This includes, the size of the destination country's economy as it relate to the home country, foreign or political relations between the countries, cultural conditions, and destination country's support of international students (McMahon, 1992). The decision to start the college or program selection process is mediated by the student's sphere of influence, and prospective institutions, which have *push* and *pull* elements.

The information gathering process exposes the student to the various institutional and programmatic characteristics and options within the industry. The selection of schools and program is thought to be influenced by any combination of the previous factors. The model ends with the student submitting an application for enrollment. The arrows in the framework signify the direct connection between elements, but can lead one to believe ELP enrollment practices are a linear process. However, it is argued that enrollment practices are a fluid process, shifting back and forth between stages. The factors listed in the framework are numerous and complex with multiple sub-constructs, precluding the predictability of student choice.

To use this model in an investigation of international student participation in postsecondary ELPs, the researcher recommends exploring the factors in manageable parts instead of attempting to represent all concepts in one study. In representing a number of concepts in one study a researcher risks of producing unfocused research that does not address the concept in meaningful depth. With little research in this area the accessibility of information impacts what can be studied. Many of the other factors in the model are difficult to codify or have not been measured by any source over time.

Future Study

The next study in this line of research will use the framework in an exploratory design using quantitative methods to analyze a secondary dataset. With little research on international students in ELPs an exploratory study is necessary to better formulate the phenomenon of international student participation into a more precise investigation and develop working hypothesis from an operational perspective. Quantitative methods complement the exploration of relationships between the anchor variables discussed in the conceptual framework. By using secondary data, the study can view participation on a national scale, increasing generalizability and giving researchers the ability to apply what is learned to investigate their unique international student populations. The next study will be a first step to understanding the topography of international student participation in ELPs.

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