

**AN EXAMINATION OF ATTENDANCE AND ATTRITION RATES IN THE
FRIENDLY HOUSE LEVEL 1 ESL PROGRAM**

by

Mary E. Krigbaum

A Master's Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree
Master of Arts

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

January, 2002

LIBRARY - OTTAWA UNIVERSITY
OTTAWA, KANS.

AN EXAMINATION OF ATTENDANCE AND ATTRITION RATES IN THE FRIENDLY HOUSE LEVEL 1 ESL PROGRAM

by

Mary E. Krigbaum

has been approved

August 2001

APPROVED:

ACCEPTED:

Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal and program factors that contribute to low attendance and retention rates in The Friendly House adult ESL program.

A review of the literature revealed that absence and attrition rates are high in most adult ESL educational programs throughout the United States, even though many adult ESL programs are unable to accommodate the number of people who wish to enroll in ESL classes. Most programs experience high absenteeism and attrition rates because of personal and program factors. Personal factors may include a change in work schedule, or lack of transportation or childcare. Program factors may include inappropriate materials or the difficulty level of the class.

This study sought to answer the question: Why do adult ESL learners enrolled in The Friendly House ESL program stop attending classes on a regular basis or dropout altogether? In order to examine this question, the study was divided into two sections: inconsistent attendance and leaving before the completion of the class. A sample population of 96 total students enrolled in three Level 1 ESL classes was selected. Surveys were conducted to obtain student demographic information and the personal and/or program reasons for inconsistent attendance. For dropout information, student enrollment forms were

utilized and phone surveying was done to solicit the reasons for leaving the class before completion.

The majority of students attended class on an irregular basis due to work. The results of the survey noted that transportation problems contributed to missed classes, as was also shown to be true in previous studies. Inappropriate placement was another cause of inconsistent attendance. The demographic information solicited from inconsistent attendees showed that males (78%) and those students between the ages of 21 and 25 (44%) were the most likely to attend class on an irregular basis. Additionally, those students who were single (72%) and had no children (63%) were also inconsistent attendees.

The results of the survey identifying reasons for separation or dropout were less conclusive and could not be definitively supported by previous studies. Because nearly half of the dropout students could not be surveyed for their reasons for separation, the results did not allow the researcher to draw statistically significant conclusions. The results that were obtained showed that 19% of those students who had left the program before completion did so because of the time or location of the class. Nineteen percent left because the program or class didn't satisfy their personal goals; while an additional 19% had moved. The majority of student dropouts, 45%, were between the ages of 21 and 30. Gender did not have a significant role, as the number of males to females, 17 to 14, was close to being even.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - THE PROBLEM	1
Introduction	1
Development of the Problem.....	2
Need for the Study.....	4
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Question	5
Definition of Terms.....	5
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Introduction	6
Adult ESL Education's Purpose and Population	7
Reasons for Participation in Adult ESL Education	9
Reasons for Irregular Attendance	11
Reasons for Leaving the Program Before Completion.....	12
The Friendly House Adult ESL Program	14
Summary.....	16
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY	17
Introduction	17
Research Design	17
Population and Sample.....	18
Assumptions and Limitations	20
Procedure	21
Instrumentation	25
Method of Analysis.....	27
CHAPTER 4 - PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA	28
Demographics of Sample.....	28
Inconsistent Attendees	28
Dropout Students	34
Findings and Results.....	36
Inconsistent Attendees	36
Dropout Students	38
CHAPTER 5.....	40
Summary.....	40
Conclusions	41
Recommendations.....	43
REFERENCE LIST	46
APPENDIX A	48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Gender of Inconsistent Attendees.....	28
Figure 2 Age of Inconsistent Attendees	29
Figure 3 Marital Status of Inconsistent Attendees.....	30
Figure 4 Number of Children Per Inconsistent Attendee.....	30
Figure 5 Employment Status of Inconsistent Attendees.....	31
Figure 6 Work Type of Inconsistent Attendees	32
Figure 7 Years of Education for Inconsistent Attendees	33
Figure 8 Hours Worked Per Week by Inconsistent Attendees	34
Figure 9 Gender of Dropout Students.....	34
Figure 10 Employment Status Upon Enrollment of Dropout Students	35
Figure 11 Age of Dropout Students	36
Figure 12 Personal Reasons for Inconsistent Attendance	37
Figure 13 Program Reasons for Inconsistent Attendance.....	38
Figure 14 Reasons for Separation.....	39

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) educational programs provide a vital service to immigrants or non-native English speakers who are making the transition from their own language and culture to the majority language and culture of the United States. Many adult ESL students attend classes offered through publicly and privately funded organizations. Demand and enrollment are high for most ESL programs, especially those that offer classes at no cost to the students. Nearly as high, however, are the absenteeism and attrition rates of adult ESL learners enrolled in such programs.

The Friendly House in Phoenix, Arizona, is a United Way sponsored organization which provides free ESL services to adults in the Phoenix area through private and public funding. As in other programs operating in metropolitan areas with large immigrant populations, The Friendly House is often unable to accommodate all of the adults interested in ESL classes. With such great demand, one might assume that attendance and retention rates would be high. Unfortunately, students frequently dropout of The Friendly House's ESL classes or only attend sporadically.

Development of the Problem

Adult students enroll in ESL programs for a variety of reasons. Some, such as foreign college students, need English proficiency in order to continue their education at a higher academic level. Others attend ESL classes in order to better function and participate in the daily activities of American life.

Researchers who studied adult ESL learners in Iowa found seven reasons for the learners' participation in adult ESL classes (Valentine, cited in Brod, 1995).

Among these reasons were the desire to improve one's personal effectiveness in U.S. society, to be better able to help one's children with schoolwork, to be better able to speak to their children's teachers, to function better with everyday uses of the language such as shopping and using the telephone, and to be better able to help people in one's native country (Valentine, cited in Brod, 1995).

Publicly or privately sponsored ESL programs throughout the United States provide classes to adult ESL learners, usually free of charge. Enrollment is high in such programs. According to the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (n.d.), the waiting lists for class openings attest to the overwhelming demand adult learners have for ESL instruction. 1,927,210 adults enrolled in publicly funded ESL programs in 1998 (National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, n.d.). A 1994 study of three federally-supported adult education programs (adult basic education, adult secondary education, and adult ESL) throughout the United States found that although the ESL target population is much smaller than the adult secondary education target population, evidence

shows that ESL services have the greatest demand among people seeking adult education (Fitzgerald, 1995).

Why, then, do many adult ESL learners attend classes on an irregular basis or dropout altogether? As noted by Brod (1995), by the end of the second month of classes, a third of all adult ESL learners leave their program. Many adult learners often prematurely leave ESL programs for a variety of reasons. They leave because of personal and/or program factors. Bean, Partanen, Wright, and Aaronson (cited in Brod, 1995) studied attrition rates in urban literacy programs and categorized personal and program factors that contribute to low retention rates.

Personal factors include low self-esteem coupled with lack of demonstrable progress; daily pressures from work and home problems of schedule, childcare, and transportation; lack of support of the native culture and family culture for education; and the age of the learner.

Program factors include lack of appropriate materials for low-level learners; lack of opportunity to achieve success; lack of flexibility in class scheduling; classes so multilevel that those with no literacy skills are mixed with those quite literate (or those with very high oral skills are mixed with those with very low oral skills); lack of peer support and reinforcement; and instructional materials that are not relevant to learners' needs and lives. (n.p.)

Although The Friendly House in Phoenix, Arizona, has made significant program changes in order to increase attendance and retention rates, high numbers of students continue to attend on an irregular basis or stop attending altogether.

Need for the Study

Non-native English speaking adults who wish to gain access to various levels of American society need to be proficient English speakers. By attending classes irregularly or leaving the program prematurely, these students miss the opportunity to improve their English language skills and therefore limit their participation in numerous aspects of the greater U.S. society. This study may benefit the people involved in The Friendly House's ESL program, as well as those who interact with limited English speaking adult members of our society, because of the potential for a better understanding of the reasons for low attendance and early withdraw.

If personal and program factors that affect attendance and attrition rates can be identified, then needed changes can be made to better serve the adult ESL learner. The Friendly House realizes that the adult learners who enroll in ESL classes deserve to receive quality educational experiences that are relevant, necessary, and useful to life situations they may encounter. Through this study, The Friendly House may be better able to offer such experiences to its adult ESL students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal and program factors that contribute to low attendance and retention rates in The Friendly House adult ESL program. By researching and identifying the factors causing low attendance and retention rates, The Friendly House may gain a better

group of students. In turn, with a clearer knowledge of reasons for low attendance and retention rates, changes can be made in order to more effectively serve its adult ESL students and therefore significantly lower absenteeism and attrition.

Research Question

Why do adult ESL learners enrolled in The Friendly House ESL program stop attending classes on a regular basis or dropout altogether?

Definition of Terms

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Instruction in the English language for nonnative speakers (National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education).

Student Dropout

Leaving an educational program before objectives are completed; students in The Friendly House Adult ESL program are dropped from the roster if they fail to attend eight or more consecutive classes during a session (Jimenez Uselton, 2001).

Irregular (Inconsistent) Attendance

Attending an educational program sporadically; students in The Friendly House Adult ESL program are considered inconsistent attendees upon missing two consecutive classes during a session (Jimenez Uselton, 2001).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Adult ESL education programs provide an important service to a diverse population of students. Because of this importance, identifying the factors that prevent adult ESL students from regularly attending and/or completing their classes is crucial. The Friendly House is one of many publicly and privately sponsored organizations providing adult ESL services that experience high absenteeism and attrition rates among their students. Studies of adult education programs (adult basic education, adult secondary education, and adult ESL) across the United States show that low retention and inconsistent attendance rates are concerns faced by numerous educational organizations. These studies research and identify essential factors associated with adult education including reasons for participation, reasons for irregular attendance, and reasons for leaving before completion.

This chapter will present information concerning adult ESL education's purpose and population, reasons for participation in adult ESL education, reasons for irregular attendance, reasons for leaving before completion, and The Friendly House Adult ESL program.

Adult ESL Education's Purpose and Population

“The primary purpose of English as a Second Language instruction is to enable adults who are limited English proficient to become competent in communicating in English. Adequate English language skills are essential for adults to become productive and responsible parents, employees, and citizens in the United States” (U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 1991, n.p.). The ESL component of the National Literacy Act, a 1990 amendment to the Adult Education Act, is intended to assist out-of-school adults “...acquire the literacy and the language skills needed to function effectively in society” (Fitzgerald, 1995, n.p.). In addition to articulating national policy, the Adult Education Act provides for federal grants to state education agencies in order to support adult literacy programs (Fitzgerald, 1995, n.p.). The ESL target population includes people age 16 and older who have a high school diploma but lack English language skills and people whose first language is other than English and who “...need to improve English oral/aural skills (listening and speaking), as well as literacy skills (reading and writing proficiency)” (Fitzgerald, 1995, n.p.).

Adult ESL education programs are intended to offer a vital service to a heterogeneous group of people. As with other adult learners, adult ESL students bring diverse educational backgrounds to the classroom. McIntire (cited in Hilles, 1991) noted that adult education programs serve a population of students with varied needs and experiences.

1. Students who did not have an opportunity to attend during the traditional elementary and/or secondary range.

2. Students who dropped out of school.
3. Immigrants who are learning English as a second language, acquiring basic skills in English, or obtaining a high school diploma in English.
4. Students acquiring vocational training skills. (p.403)

Adult ESL learners may also bring a variety of literacy skills to the classroom.

Savage (cited in Hilles, 1991) points out that these literacy skills range from preliterates (those who speak a language for which there is no written form or whose written form is rare) to illiterates, semiliterates, and students whose language uses a non-Roman alphabet. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (1991) groups most immigrant adult ESL learners

...into one of three literacy categories: nonliterates, who cannot read or write in any language; semiliterates, who have the equivalent of a few years of formal education and minimal literacy skills; and non-Roman alphabetic literates, who are fully literate in their own language (such as Lao or Chinese) but who need to learn the Roman alphabet. (n.p.)

In addition to educational backgrounds, participants in adult ESL programs vary in their length of residence in the United States. Adult ESL learners may be recent immigrants, immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for several years, or non-English speakers who were born in the United States. 1990 Census data shows an increase in the number of adults, 18 and older, whose primary language spoken in the home was other than English, from 17.9 million in 1980 to 25.5 million in 1990 (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1998).

A national evaluation, conducted for the U.S. Department of Education in 1994, compiled a profile of ESL clients in adult education.

The current adult ESL learner population is primarily Hispanic (69%) and Asian (19%), with the vast majority (85%) living in major metropolitan areas and residing primarily (72%) in the western region of the United States. Adult education clients in ESL programs are overwhelmingly (98%) foreign born, with most (72%) speaking Spanish in the home... Forty-eight percent of the ESL clients were employed at the time of enrollment in adult education, and 33% were not in the labor force. Eleven percent had been public assistance recipients during the preceding year. (Fitzgerald, 1995, n.p.)

U.S. enrollment data show 1,848,000 adults studied English in 1997 in programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. The number of ESL adult learners in 1997 accounted for 46% of the overall national number of adults enrolled in adult education programs (Western/Pacific Lincs - English as a Second Language).

Reasons for Participation in Adult ESL Education

ESL students are very motivated to participate in adult education (Fitzgerald, 1995). In a national study of ESL Adult Education, Fitzgerald (1995) found that although the number of potential ESL adult learners is much smaller than the number of potential adult secondary education learners, there is considerable evidence that ESL services are in the greatest demand among those learners interested in adult education, especially in states with high immigrant populations, including California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York. Numerous reasons exist to support this desire for adult ESL instruction. An issue brief released by the National Center for Education

Statistics presented results from a survey of adult ESL learners and compiled the reasons for their participation in adult ESL programs.

Of the population of interest who participated in ESL classes, 42% did so as part of a college program. An additional 29% said they took ESL classes to improve communication skills, 14 percent said they took classes for a personal, family, or social reason, and the remaining 15 percent said they took classes for job-related reasons, to improve basic skills, to meet requirements for a diploma or some other certificate or for some other reason. (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1998, n.p.)

Reasons for enrollment were also presented from a forum on adult education and literacy (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Adult education participants were asked their views concerning their experiences as learners in adult education programs. Although some learners attended classes other than ESL, the majority of the reasons for enrollment were similar for all participants. Employment was a motivation for many adult learners. The fear that limited reading skills could cost them their jobs, the frustration at being overlooked for promotions, and the feeling of being trapped in unsatisfying jobs, were some of the reasons given for enrollment. Family issues had an influence on the decision to enroll. Learners wanted to be positive role models for their children, help with schoolwork, read to their children and/or grandchildren, and become more actively involved in their children's education. Many adult ESL learners wanted to become citizens, to learn to communicate in English more effectively, to develop job skills in order to succeed in the U.S., and to become more familiar with the customs and practices of the majority culture.

Adult learners who were surveyed for the forum also expressed the need to feel personally powerful as a motivation for enrollment. Participation allowed the learners to prove to themselves and others that academic success was possible and provided the opportunity to make choices about the future by gaining new skills (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Researchers who studied adult ESL learners enrolled in Iowa programs identified reasons for their participation (Valentine, cited in Brod, 1995). These reasons included the desire to improve one's personal effectiveness in U.S. society, to be better able to help one's children with schoolwork, to be better able to speak to their children's teachers, to function better with everyday uses of the language such as shopping and using the telephone, and to be better able to help people in one's native country (Valentine, cited in Brod, 1995). Court ordered or mandated enrollment in adult ESL programs is another reason for participation, although far less common than the previously noted reasons.

Reasons for Irregular Attendance

The reasons for irregular attendance have not been as widely studied as have the reasons for leaving before program completion. However, many of the reasons given by students who dropout of adult education programs may be similar to those reasons given by students to explain their sporadic attendance. Childcare, transportation, family obligations, finances, and work schedules are some of the concerns faced by adult learners enrolled in ESL classes. Adult education students "... must cope with multiple responsibilities. The burdens and

stresses of adult life make active and regular attendance participation in education difficult" (Longfield, 1985, p. 5).

The program design and expectations may affect the attendance patterns of some adult ESL learners. Personal responsibilities, inappropriate placement, irrelevant instruction and materials, unrealistic goals, inconvenient times and locations, and lack of support services contribute to irregular attendance of adult ESL learners.

Reasons for Leaving the Program Before Completion

"Many adults who participate in the program benefit, but many leave the program before achieving measurable gains" (Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan, 1995, p. 49). In a national evaluation of adult education programs done for the Office of Education, it was found that "...a plurality of clients (45 percent) leave adult education for reasons external to the program. Such nonprogram-related reasons for leaving adult education are particularly characteristic of ESL and ABE clients" (Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan, 1995, p. 20). Adult learners most often give employment-related or family-related reasons for leaving before completion. Specifically, personal illness or health problems, childcare and other family responsibilities, transportation problems, and work changes or responsibilities were noted.

Only 7% of the learners left adult education programs for instructional reasons. These reasons included personal embarrassment or discomfort, lack of progress or dissatisfaction with the program, and that the program took too much

time and energy to attend (Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan, 1995).

In the same study, 2% of the adult ESL learners were unable to give a reason for leaving before completion.

When adult learners were asked why their peers had left adult education programs during a national forum, many of the previously noted reasons were expressed. Six reasons were cited, including family conflicts or loss of child care, unsupportive teachers, work schedule conflicts, loss of income or financial problems, court order expired, and drug and/or alcohol problems (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

In a study of ESL learner attrition rates in urban literacy programs, Bean, Partanen, Wright, and Aaronson (cited in Brod, 1995) found many of the previously mentioned reasons for leaving, in addition to a few reasons not previously noted. The researchers categorized personal and program factors that contribute to low retention rates.

Personal factors include low self-esteem coupled with lack of demonstrable progress; daily pressures from work and home problems of schedule, childcare, and transportation; lack of support of the native culture and family culture for education; and the age of the learner.

Program factors include lack of appropriate materials for low-level learners; lack of opportunity to achieve success; lack of flexibility in class scheduling; classes so multilevel that those with no literacy skills are mixed with those quite literate (or those with very high oral skills are mixed with those with very low oral skills); lack of peer support and reinforcement; and instructional materials that are not relevant to learners' needs and lives. (n.p.)

Greenberg and Perin (1994) studied the reasons for student dropout in an urban worker education program. They surveyed students who had left the

program before completion and noted the reasons for early departure.

Inconvenient class location, inconvenient class schedule, family issues, personal health, lack of interest in classwork, instructional pace too slow, and instructional pace too fast were reasons given by the students for their withdrawal. The authors also pointed out that when most students (enrolled in any adult basic education program) are asked why they leave before completion, they tend to give personal-related reasons more often than program-related reasons.

Learners may have an unwillingness to criticize the programs and teachers, or lack the sophistication or assertiveness to know what they should expect from a program. Because of these factors, student responses on surveys may not always accurately reflect the true reasons for early leaving.

The Friendly House Adult ESL Program

The Friendly House is a non-profit service organization sponsored by The United Way located in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. Numerous services are offered including legal assistance, job training, General Education Development classes, and community-based children's activities. An elementary charter school is also operated by The Friendly House. One of the major components of The Friendly House organization is the ESL program offered to limited-English speaking adults. Although it primarily serves Hispanics, The Friendly House and its services are available to people of any ethnic background (Jimenez Uselton, 2001).

According to Aida Jimenez Uselton (2001), The Friendly House Adult Education Coordinator, ESL classes are offered throughout the fall, winter, and spring, with limited classes in the summer. In order to more conveniently serve students who don't live close to the main downtown site, The Friendly House provides classes throughout Phoenix and the surrounding communities including south Phoenix, north Phoenix, and west Phoenix. Most classes are held in the evening in elementary and secondary schools or public libraries. Day and evening classes are held at the main Phoenix site or other locations with available space, such as the community house at the Habitat For Humanity housing development. Although the overall number of sites and classes changes depending upon enrollment and funding, on average 15 – 20 classes of varying levels are offered each fall, winter, and spring session.

Similar to other adult ESL programs that offer classes at no cost to the students, The Friendly House has a turnout for enrollment each session that exceeds the number of classes available. Because they wish to provide quality services to everyone interested, The Friendly House has made significant program changes since 1998 in order to improve attendance and attrition rates, as well as overall effectiveness. Limiting class size, replacing open entry/open exit enrollment with set class start and completion dates, and offering classes in the outlying areas of Phoenix are examples of the changes implemented. Attendance and retention rates have risen, yet not to the expected or desired levels. By researching and identifying the personal and program factors that affect attendance and attrition rates, additional improvements can be made to

meet the needs of the majority of adult ESL learners who take part in the program.

Summary

Adult ESL programs provide a beneficial service to non-English speaking students. This service includes assisting adult students in the acquisition of the English literacy and language skills needed to be effective, functioning members of American society. The population of adult ESL students is heterogeneous. Adults enroll in ESL programs for a variety of reasons, ranging from better employment opportunities to becoming more involved in their children's education. Although there is a significant demand for adult ESL instruction, adult ESL programs may experience high absenteeism and attrition rates. The reasons for high absenteeism and attrition rates may include personal factors, such as childcare problems; or program factors, such as irrelevant instruction and materials. The Friendly House Adult ESL program in Phoenix, Arizona, experiences high absenteeism and attrition rates. Identification of the factors that contribute to low attendance and retention may allow for program improvements to be made.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal and program factors that contribute to low attendance and retention rates in The Friendly House Adult ESL program. This study addressed the research question: Why do adult ESL learners enrolled in The Friendly House Adult ESL program stop attending classes on a regular basis or dropout altogether?

Research Design

A descriptive research design was utilized for this study. The descriptive research method systematically describes the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon, population, or area of interest (Merriam and Simpson, 1995). The survey was used as a research method to attain information about the low attendance and high dropout rates. Demographic data, including age, gender, and employment status upon entry, was also gathered from student enrollment forms.

Factors were identified that contributed to low attendance and retention rates by gathering information about the adult ESL program participants. The study was divided into two parts: inconsistent attendees and dropouts.

To attain information about the reasons for inconsistent attendance, a sample population of three Level 1 ESL classes was selected. Surveys were administered to the sample population during three class sessions or through phone interviews conducted by the researcher or a member of The Friendly House staff. Students were identified as inconsistent attendees if they missed class twice in succession. From this set of identified students, responses were elicited to determine the reason(s) for absences.

To attain information about the reasons for dropout, the researcher examined student intake data and surveyed students in the same sample population selected for examining reasons for inconsistent attendance: three Level 1 ESL classes. Those students who had prematurely left or dropped the program were contacted by phone. Students were considered dropouts after having missed eight or more consecutive classes.

Population and Sample

The source of the data was adult ESL learners enrolled in three of The Friendly House Level 1 ESL classes. The Level 1 ESL class is designed for beginning ESL students. These students may be non-English speakers or possess limited speaking, reading, or writing abilities in English. Level 1 ESL classes have the highest attrition rate of ESL classes offered by The Friendly House. Statistics for the year 2000 show that twenty-five percent of adult students enrolled in Level 1 ESL dropped out before completing the course (Arizona Annual Performance Report, 2000). Three Level 1 ESL sample classes

were selected for this study. The combined number of students from the three selected classes was 96. The students in the sample population ranged in age from 18 to 58. The students were all of Hispanic descent. There were 59 males and 37 females in the sample population. Of these 96 students, 60 completed surveys for inconsistent attendance patterns.

By the end of April, 2001, 31 of the original 96 students had left the program before completion. Attempts were made to contact these 31 students by phone in order to attain the reasons for dropping out.

The sample classes were chosen based on specific criteria: the majority of the students had been enrolled in the same class between February and April, 2001; the instructor had not changed; the number of students exceeded 15; the class had started no earlier than January, 2001; the class met 2 nights per week, and the class had not advanced to a Level 2 ESL status between February and April, 2001.

The three Level 1 ESL sample classes selected for research were located in the central and south Phoenix areas. Two classes were held at The Friendly House in central Phoenix. The Friendly House is located on First Avenue and Sherman Street, south of Lincoln Street and the main downtown district of Phoenix. The third class selected for this study was held at the Stardust House, a community center for the Habitat for Humanity housing development in southern Phoenix. The Stardust House is located on Thirteenth Street and Apollo Road, between Southern Avenue and Baseline Road.

Because no classes were selected from the northern or western areas of Phoenix, the sample may not be representative of the larger Friendly House adult ESL population of learners. The sample may not represent the greater population of adult ESL students due to the criteria used for the selection of the sample population.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study may be limited because the sample size of three Level 1 ESL classes may not have been large enough to adequately represent the greater ESL student population at The Friendly House. In addition, the selection of the sample population in central and southern Phoenix may not have represented the students who attended classes in other locations in the Phoenix area. This study may also be limited because of errors in translations of English to Spanish or Spanish to English. Students who responded to phone or in-class surveys may not have completely understood the questions or directions given in Spanish by the researcher, who is not a native Spanish speaker. The limited educational backgrounds of the student sample population may have influenced the students' abilities to correctly understand and answer the written questions on the in-class survey. Additionally, the study was limited because not all of the students who had dropped out or had missed classes were able to be contacted for the survey. A final limitation involved one of the sample Level 1 ESL classes. The researcher was unaware at the time the three classes were selected for the sample population that the instructor for Class 602 instituted strict attendance

regulations. The instructor allowed her students to miss no more than one class and required a reason for the absence before the following class meeting. If students missed more than one class or did not provide an explanation for the absence, they were dropped from the class. The Friendly House does not stipulate this attendance policy to their instructors. Because this particular instructor utilized this requirement with her class, the inconsistent attendance rate for her class was extremely low. Only one student had more than one absence, due to the hospitalization of her child.

It was assumed that the students in the sample population would answer truthfully. The honesty of the respondents may have been influenced by the questions on the survey that solicited answers regarding a failure to attend classes on a regular basis or a failure to complete the class. Students may not have given honest responses because they did not want to give the real reasons for inconsistent attendance or leaving the program. They may also have avoided criticizing The Friendly House ESL program by giving incorrect responses to the survey questions.

Procedure

Data collection of the adult ESL students was divided into two parts: inconsistent attendees and dropouts. Two different methods of data collection were utilized for each group of students.

Inconsistent attendance data was attained through an in-class survey (see appendix A) administered one time by the researcher in each of the three sample

classes or through phone calls made by the researcher or a member of The Friendly House staff. Students who were absent the night of the in-class survey were contacted by phone. The in-class surveys were taken in May, 2001. The phone surveys were also taken in May, 2001. Three attempts were made to contact, by phone, each person who had inconsistent attendance and who was absent during the in-class survey. All of the students selected for the phone survey were contacted.

Upon gaining permission from the adult education coordinator and the teachers of the three Level 1 ESL classes selected for this study, in-class attendance surveys were administered to the three classes. Because all students in the three Level 1 ESL sample classes were native Spanish speakers and limited English speakers, both the survey and the verbal instructions were given in Spanish. With translating assistance from the Spanish speaking teachers when necessary, the researcher verbally explained the purpose of the study and directions for responding to the survey questions. The Spanish speaking teachers also made any clarifications that were needed in order for the students to complete the surveys as accurately as possible.

Each student in attendance the night of the in-class survey was asked to complete a survey. The students were asked to remain anonymous. They were also asked to put a check mark or an "x" next to the appropriate response for each question. The survey questions were read to the students and any questions from the students regarding the survey items were answered. Specific attention and directions were given to question eight on the survey. Question

eight asked students if they had missed two or more consecutive classes since the start of the class. The question solicited a "Yes" or "No" response. Question nine was a follow-up to question eight. Students were instructed to only answer question nine if they had responded "Yes" to question eight. Question nine asked for the reasons for the two or more consecutive absences. The survey was completed by all students within a fifteen minute time period and immediately collected by the researcher.

Those students who had missed two or more consecutive classes and who were absent for the in-class survey were identified through the attendance roster and contacted by phone. A member of The Friendly House staff or the researcher solicited responses to the same questions from the attendance survey that was given in-class. All students who were identified as inconsistent attendees and who were absent for the in-class survey were contacted and completed the survey by phone.

Dropout data was collected through student enrollment forms and phone calls made to students who had left before completion of the class. Dropout students were identified through class attendance rosters for February, March, and April, 2001. Attendance rosters for each of the three Level 1 ESL sample classes were examined in order to identify students who had dropped out during the three month period. The Friendly House considered students inactive or dropouts after having missed eight or more consecutive classes. Students identified as inactive or dropouts were not removed from the class roster until the end of the following month. After identifying dropout students, data from the

enrollment forms for the identified students was collected. Gender, age, and employment status at time of enrollment were gathered for each student. Phone surveys were made to each dropout in order to attain his or her reason(s) for leaving the program before completion. The phone surveys were made by this researcher or a member of The Friendly House staff between March and May, 2001. The surveys to attain the reason(s) for dropout were not the same surveys utilized for inconsistent attendance responses. Because The Friendly House receives funding from the Arizona Department of Education, student dropout data is required and reported annually. The Friendly House uses a form that asks the dropout student for his or her "Reason for Separation." This form lists thirteen possible reasons for a student to leave before class completion. The researcher or a member of The Friendly House staff made three attempts to contact each student in the sample Level 1 ESL classes who had been identified as a dropout. Of the 31 students who were identified as dropouts, 16 were contacted directly or indirectly by phone. Those students contacted directly were asked their reasons for not completing the program and answered accordingly. Students who could not be contacted directly by phone were contacted indirectly by phone through a family member or friend aware of the student's situation and reasons for not completing the program. 15 students were unable to be contacted by phone after three attempts on three different days and at three different times.

To attain the reasons for separation or dropout, the caller first identified herself as a member of The Friendly House staff and explained the purpose of the call. The survey question was asked in Spanish or English, depending on the

language abilities of the respondent. In many cases, a member of the family was able to translate the English into Spanish for the dropout student. The response was then translated from Spanish into English by the family member. The phone survey was complete once the dropout student or person familiar with the dropout student's situation gave a reason for separation from the class.

Instrumentation

To collect inconsistent attendance data, a nine question survey was designed. The first seven questions on the survey requested demographic information. Questions one, two, and three asked for gender, age, and marital status. Student information regarding the number of children and the type of employment was asked in questions four and five. The years of education and number of hours worked weekly were solicited using a closed questionnaire format. For the number of years of education, the students were asked to choose one of four listed responses. The first three response choices were given in five year increments, starting with one and ending with fifteen. The last response choice was greater than fifteen years.

For the number of hours worked weekly, the students were asked to choose one of five listed responses. The first four response choices were given in ten hour increments, starting with zero and ending with forty. The last response choice was greater than forty hours.

Questions eight and nine were also designed in the closed questionnaire format. Question eight asked students if they had missed two or more

consecutive classes since the beginning of the class. Respondents were asked to answer "Yes" or "No" to question eight. Question nine was designed as a follow-up to question eight. If students answered "Yes" to question eight, they were then asked to respond to question nine. Question nine solicited reasons for the students' two or more consecutive absences. The reasons for absence were divided into two sections: personal factors and program factors.

The inconsistent attendance survey was assessed for validity and reliability. Members of The Friendly House staff, including the teachers of the three Level 1 ESL sample classes, and the researcher reviewed the questionnaire for issues of validity and reliability. The issues reviewed included the presence of psychologically threatening questions, item construction and organization, likelihood of students completing the survey to have the information requested, importance and relevance of the statements, ability of students to understand and respond to the questions, and relatedness of the statements to the goals of the research.

To collect dropout data, student enrollment forms and surveying by phone was used. Demographic information regarding age, gender, and employment status at the time of enrollment was gathered from student intake forms. The student intake forms were completed for each student at the time of enrollment by a member of The Friendly House staff. The reason for separation or dropout survey was designed by the Arizona Department of Education and used by the Friendly House to attain separation statistics. The survey solicited from dropout students a reason for leaving before the completion of the class. The survey

contains fourteen response choices for reason for separation. One reason for separation, "Class Ended," was not used because at the time of the surveying the sample classes were still in session. The survey was considered a closed questionnaire format.

Method of Analysis

The collected data for the inconsistent attendees and dropouts was transferred onto separate spreadsheets to be tallied and analyzed. Student characteristics and survey data were then grouped for comparison and presented in graph form for easier analysis. The results and tables are contained in Chapter 4.

For inconsistent attendees, surveys were separated into two groups: "Yes" responses to question eight and "No" responses to question eight. Part of this study addressed the research question, "Why do adult ESL learners enrolled in The Friendly House Adult ESL program stop attending classes on a regular basis?" Because of this, only the data collected on those students who had missed two or more consecutive classes was analyzed. Information was arranged by gender, age, marital status, number of children, type of employment/employment status, years of education, number of hours worked weekly, and reasons for absence.

For student dropouts, intake data and the responses solicited from the phone surveys were arranged by gender, age, status of employment at enrollment, and reasons for leaving before the completion of the program.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The results of the inconsistent attendance and dropout surveys from the Friendly House Adult ESL program, taken in May 2001, as well as information gathered from student enrollment forms, are presented in the following figures.

Demographics of Sample

Inconsistent attendees. Inconsistent attendees were those who missed 2 consecutive classes during a session. Thirty-two respondents fit this category. Figure 1 shows the number of males and females in the inconsistent attendance sample population. There were 25 males and 7 females.

Figure 1

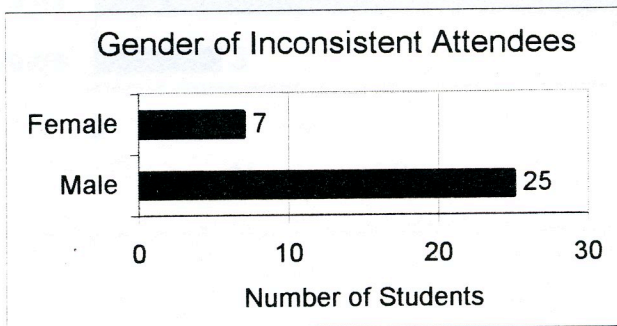


Figure 2 shows the age of the students who were inconsistent attendees in the sample population. Of the 32 students in the sample, 3 students were between the ages of 16 and 20, 14 between the ages of 21 and 25, 4 between the ages of 26 and 30, 3 between the ages of 31 and 35, 3 between the ages of 36 and 40, 2 between the ages of 41 and 45, and 1 student in each of the following age groups: 46 to 50, 51 to 55, and 56 to 60.

Figure 2

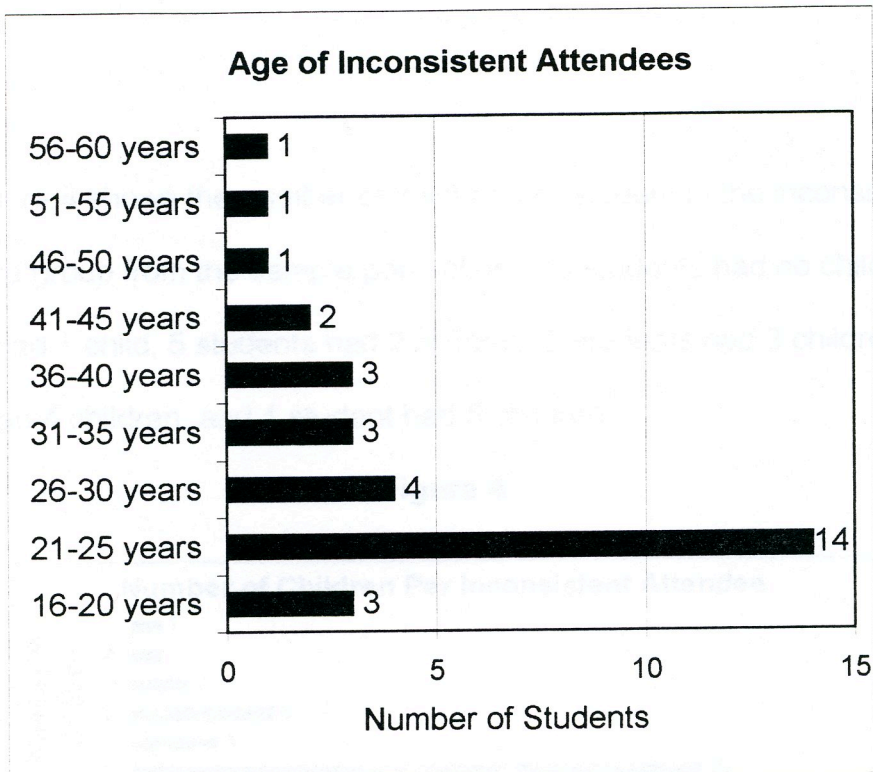


Figure 3 shows the marital status of the inconsistent attendees. 23 students were single; 9 students were married.

Figure 3

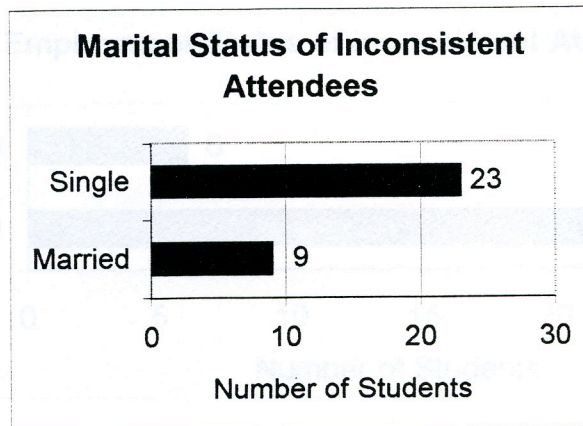


Figure 4 shows the number of children per student in the inconsistent attendance group from the sample population. 20 students had no children. 3 students had 1 child, 5 students had 2 children, 2 students had 3 children, 1 student had 4 children, and 1 student had 5 children.

Figure 4

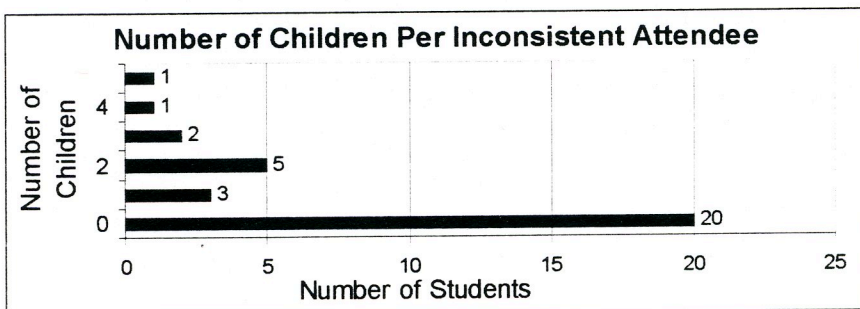


Figure 5 shows the employment status of the inconsistent attendees at the time of the survey. 6 students were unemployed; 26 students were employed.

Figure 5

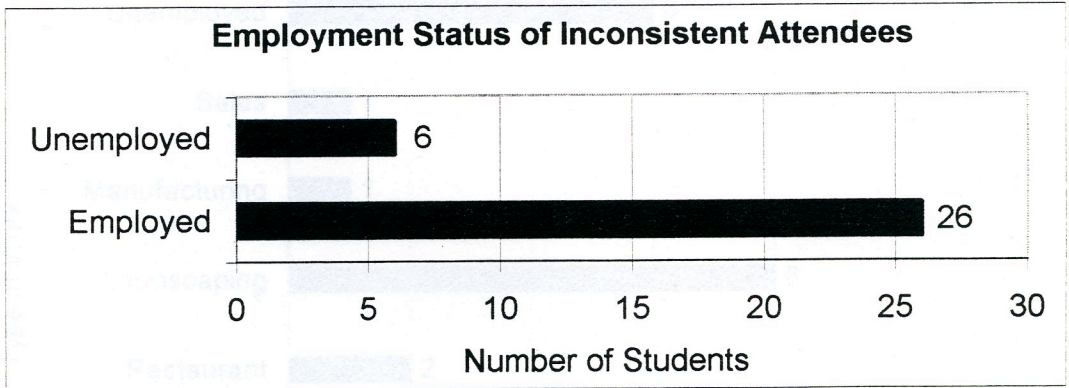


Figure 6 shows the type of employment for the inconsistent attendance group of sample students. 10 students worked in construction/labor. 4 students worked in housekeeping positions, either in hotels, private residences, or office buildings. 2 students worked in restaurant service, one student was a bus boy and one a dishwasher. 8 students held landscaping or yard maintenance jobs. 1 student worked in assembly, and 1 in sales. 6 students were unemployed.

Figure 6

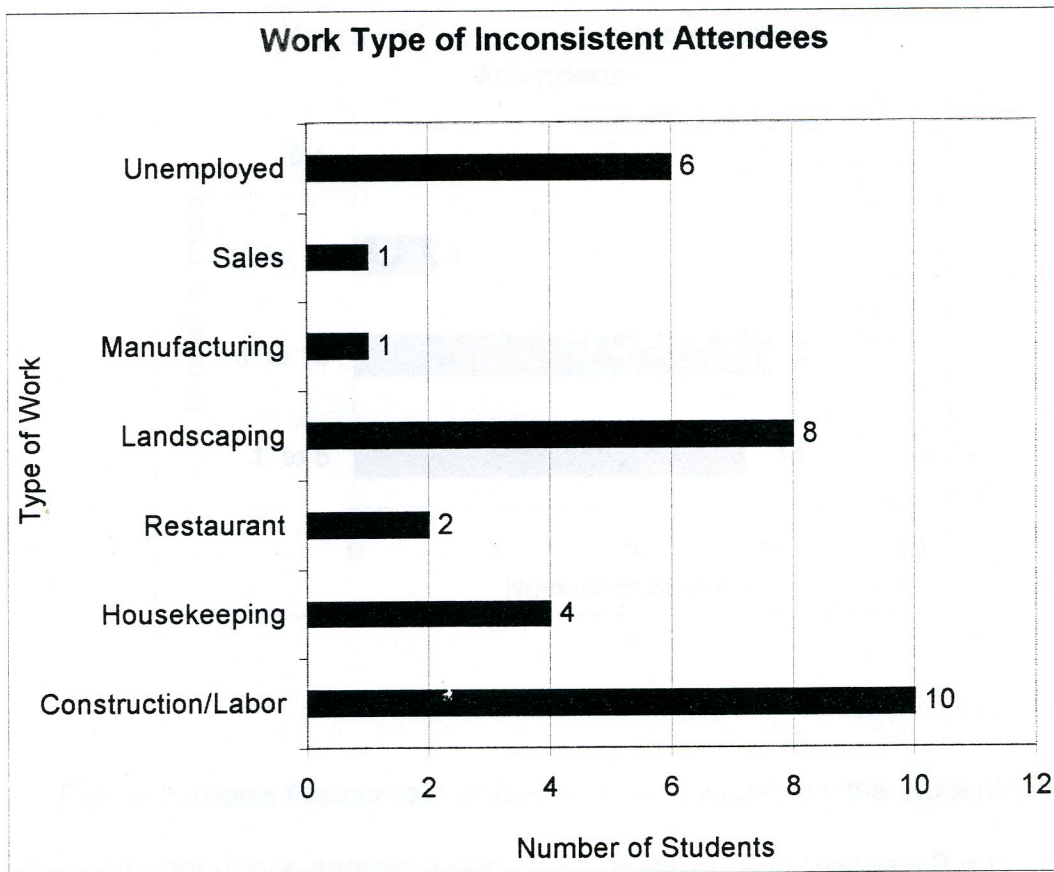


Figure 7 shows the number of years of education for each student in the inconsistent attendance sample group. 14 students had between 1 and 5 years of education, 15 had between 6 and 10 years of education, and 3 had between 11 and 15 years of education. No students had more than 15 years of education.

Figure 7

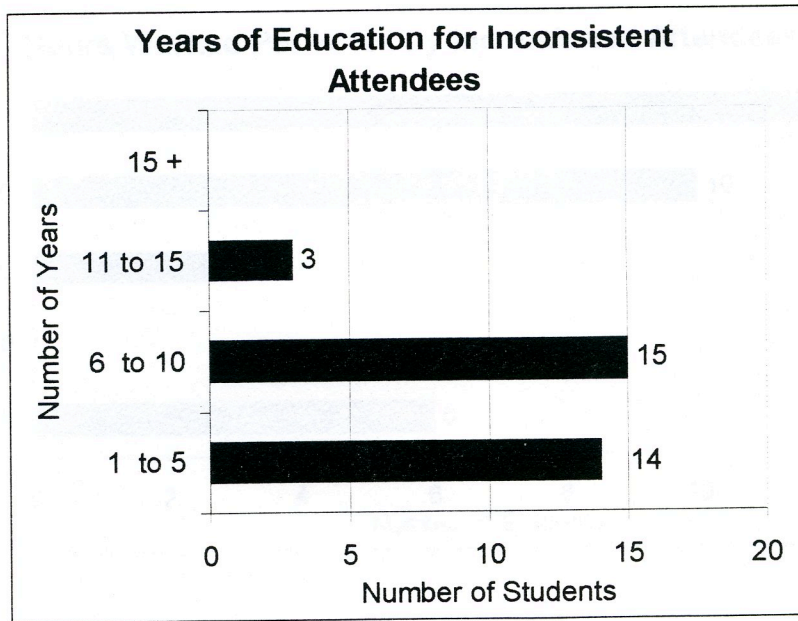
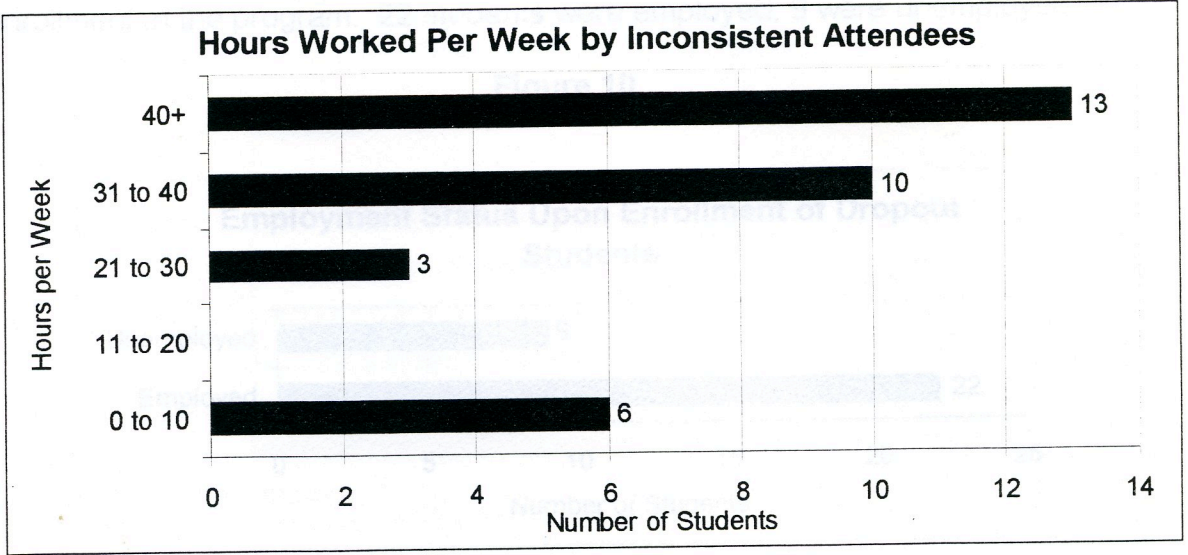


Figure 8 shows the number of hours worked weekly by the students in the inconsistent attendance sample group. 6 students worked between 0 and 10 hours per week, no students worked between 11 and 20 hours per week, and 3 students worked between 21 and 30 hours per week. 10 students worked between 31 and 40 hours per week, while the majority of students, 13, worked more than 40 hours per week.

Figure 8



Dropout students. Dropout students were those who missed eight or more consecutive classes during a session. Thirty-one respondents fit this category, compared to thirty-two students who were considered inconsistent attendees. Figure 9 shows the gender of the dropout students in the sample population. 14 students were female; 17 students were male.

Figure 9

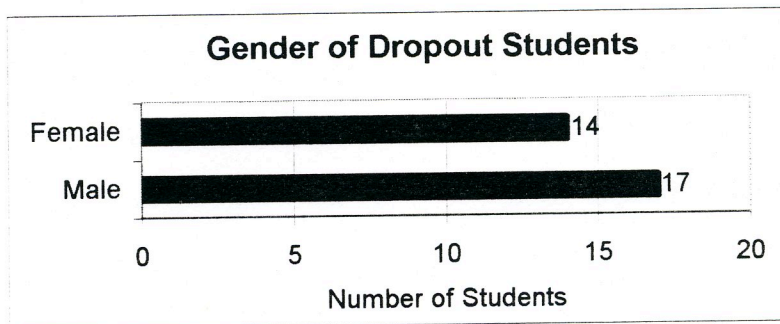


Figure 10 shows the employment status of the dropout students upon enrollment in the program. 22 students were employed; 9 were unemployed.

Figure 10

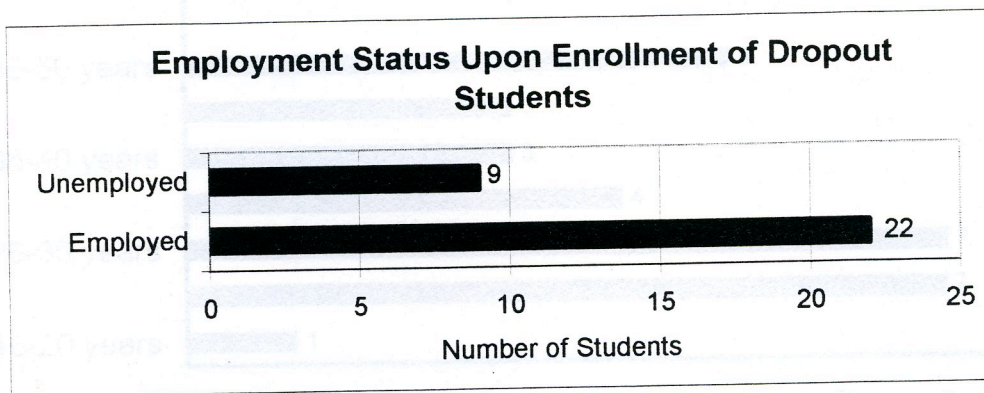
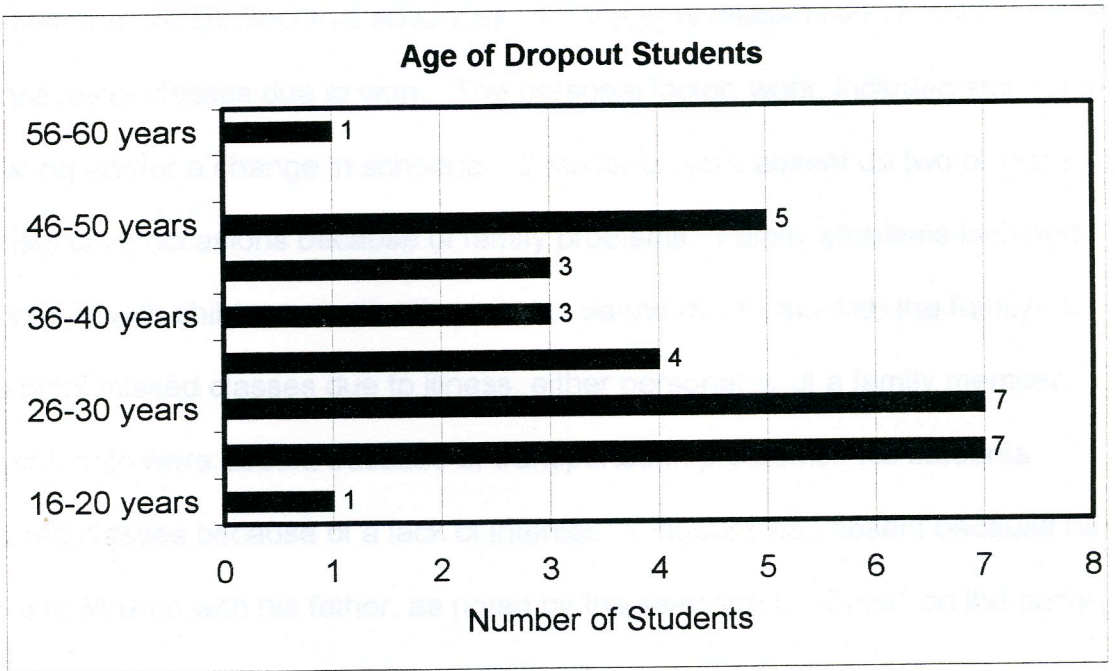


Figure 11 shows the ages of the students in the dropout group of the sample population. Of the 31 dropout students, 1 was between the ages of 16 and 20. 7 students were in the 21 to 25 age range and 7 students were in the 26 to 30 age range. 4 students were between the ages of 31 and 35, 3 were between the ages of 36 and 40, 3 were between the ages of 41 and 45, and 5 were between the ages of 46 and 50. 1 student was between the ages of 56 and 60.

Figure 11

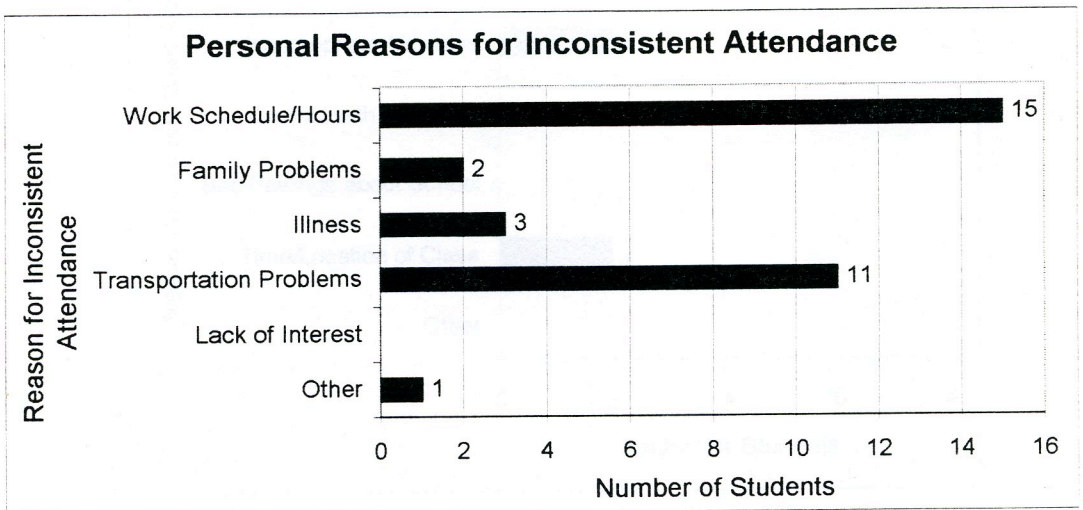


Findings and Results

Inconsistent attendees. Question 8 on the inconsistent attendance survey asked respondents if they had missed two or more consecutive classes since the start of the class. Of the 60 students who completed the survey, 32 students answered “Yes” to having missed two or more consecutive classes. 28 students indicated that they had not missed two or more consecutive classes since the start of the class. Question 9 was a follow-up to question 8 and was answered by those students who had chosen “Yes” for question 8. Question 9 asked respondents for the reasons for two or more consecutive absences since the beginning of the class. The reasons were divided into two parts: personal factors and program factors. Students were asked to select all factors that

contributed to their absences. Figure 12 shows the personal factors or reasons for two or more consecutive absences. 15 students missed two or more consecutive classes due to work. The personal factor, work, included starting a new job and/or a change in schedule. 2 students were absent on two or more consecutive occasions because of family problems. Family problems included problems with childcare and/or the need to spend more time with the family. 3 students missed classes due to illness, either personal or of a family member. 11 students were absent because of transportation problems. No students missed classes because of a lack of interest. 1 student was absent because he went to Mexico with his father, as noted by the selection of "Other" on the survey.

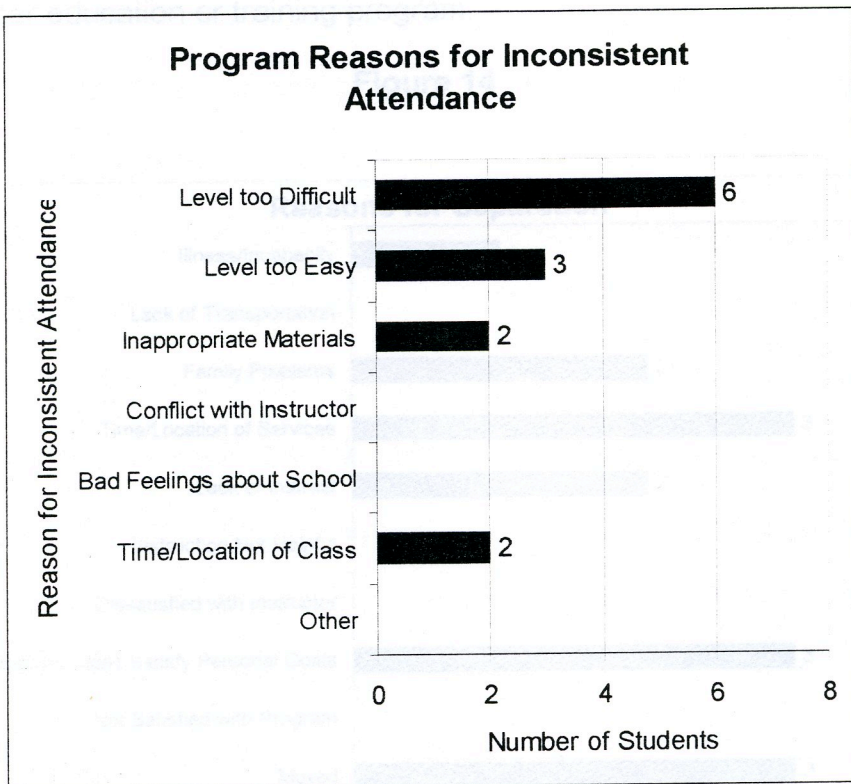
Figure 12



The second part of question 9 asked students about the program reasons for two or more consecutive absences. Figure 13 shows the program reasons for inconsistent attendance. 6 students missed classes because they believed the

level was too difficult. 3 students missed classes due to their belief that the level was too easy. 2 students reported the reason for missing classes was inappropriate materials used in the class. No students missed classes because of personal problems with the instructor or bad sentiments about school or education in general. 2 students were absent on 2 or more occasions because of the time or location of the class. "Other" was not selected by any students.

Figure 13

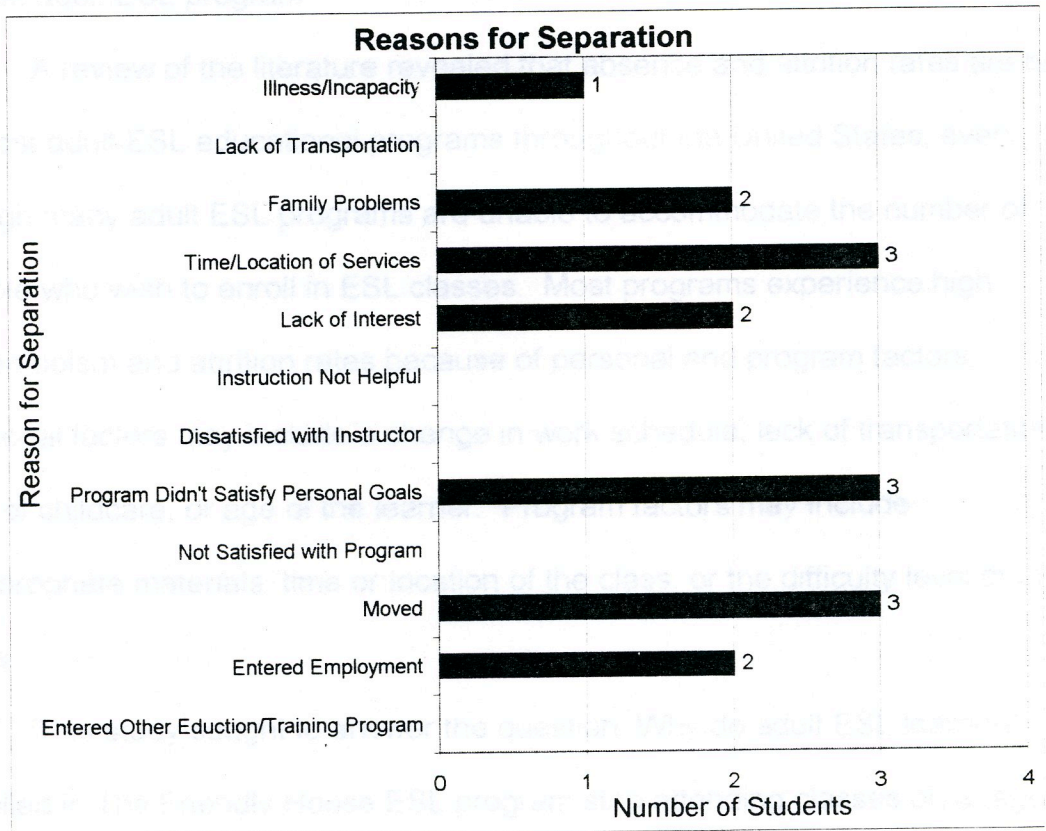


Dropout students. Figure 14 shows the reason for separation or dropout.

The dropout students contacted and surveyed by phone were given a selection of responses to indicate their reason for leaving the class before completion.

16 dropout students were surveyed; 15 dropout students were unable to be contacted. 1 student left before completion due to illness or incapacity, 2 due to family problems, 3 due to the time or location of services, and 2 due to a lack of interest in the class. 3 students left because the program did not satisfy their personal goals, 3 students moved, and 2 students entered employment. No students gave the following reasons for dropout: lack of transportation, instruction not helpful, dissatisfied with instructor, not satisfied with program, or entered other education or training program.

Figure 14



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal and program factors that contribute to low attendance and retention rates in The Friendly House adult ESL program.

A review of the literature revealed that absence and attrition rates are high in most adult ESL educational programs throughout the United States, even though many adult ESL programs are unable to accommodate the number of people who wish to enroll in ESL classes. Most programs experience high absenteeism and attrition rates because of personal and program factors. Personal factors may include a change in work schedule, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, or age of the learner. Program factors may include inappropriate materials, time or location of the class, or the difficulty level of the class.

This study sought to answer the question: Why do adult ESL learners enrolled in The Friendly House ESL program stop attending classes on a regular basis or dropout altogether? In order to examine this question, the study was divided into two sections: inconsistent attendance and leaving before the

completion of the class. A sample population of 96 total students enrolled in three Level 1 ESL classes was selected. Surveys were conducted to obtain student demographic information and the personal and/or program reasons for inconsistent attendance. For dropout information, student enrollment forms were utilized and phone surveying was done to solicit the reasons for leaving the class before completion.

Survey results for the inconsistent attendees showed that 47% of the learners missed 2 or more consecutive classes due to work. A new job, a change in schedule, or increased hours contributed to absences. Thirty-four percent of those surveyed for inconsistent attendance reported problems with transportation as the reason for absences. Eighteen percent of the students missed classes because they felt the class level was too difficult, while 9% felt the class level was too easy.

Of the 31 learners identified as dropout students, 16 were able to be contacted and surveyed for their reason for separation from the program. Nineteen percent of the dropout students contacted reported that the time or location of the class was the reason for dropout. Another 19% had left the program before completion because they moved, while an additional 19% left because they didn't feel the program satisfied their personal goals.

Conclusions

The part of the research question regarding inconsistent attendance was answered by the results of the survey that asked students why they had missed

two or more classes. As reported by previous studies, the majority of students attended class on an irregular basis due to work. The results of the survey noted that transportation problems contributed to missed classes, as was also shown to be true in previous studies. Inappropriate placement was another cause of inconsistent attendance. The demographic information solicited from inconsistent attendees showed that males (78%) and those students between the ages of 21 and 25 (44%) were the most likely to attend class on an irregular basis. Additionally, those students who were single (72%) and had no children (63%) were also inconsistent attendees. The majority of the employed students who missed two or more classes worked in construction/labor (38%) or landscaping/yard work (31%).

The results for the reasons for separation or dropout were less conclusive and could not be definitively supported by previous studies. Because nearly half of the dropout students could not be surveyed for their reasons for separation, the results did not allow the researcher to draw statistically significant conclusions. The results that were obtained showed that 19% of those students who had left the program before completion did so because of the time or location of the class. Nineteen percent left because the program or class didn't satisfy their personal goals; while an additional 19% had moved. Although the small sample size did not allow for an accurate assessment of the reasons for separation, some students left because of the same factors noted in previous studies, including the time or location of the class, unfulfilled personal goals, and family problems. Demographic information obtained from the student enrollment

forms showed that the majority of student dropouts, 45%, were between the ages of 21 and 30. Gender did not have a significant role, as the number of males to females, 17 to 14, was close to being even. Seventy-one percent of the sample dropout population were employed upon enrollment.

Recommendations

Because the average adult ESL student must cope with multiple responsibilities in his or her daily life, different approaches to The Friendly House adult ESL instruction need to be explored.

The results of the study showed that work and transportation issues were the most common reasons for inconsistent attendance. Students also missed class because of inappropriate placement. For those students who stopped attending altogether, the time and location of the class and not having their personal goals satisfied caused them to dropout.

The demographic information also indicates that the average Friendly House Level 1 ESL student who has inconsistent attendance is male, younger than 30, single, and has no children. Program changes need to be implemented in order to better serve and retain this type of learner.

Although The Friendly House has a modified version of set class start and completion times, instructors don't always adhere to the amount of time allowed for each class during a session. For example, a Level 1 class may take 12 weeks for completion, while a Level 2 class may take 20 weeks. The intended amount of time is 10 weeks per session. By not maintaining a schedule, some

students may feel their personal goals are not being met or that the class is too easy. The extended class sessions also may prevent some students from seeing progress, a valuable necessity in any educational program. By limiting the sessions to between 10 and 12 weeks, adult learners might be inclined to attend and complete a class.

In addition to having definite start and end dates, The Friendly House may need to encourage instructors to emphasize consistent attendance from their students. Students may not feel attendance is mandatory because the instructors don't place enough emphasis on the need to attend. Students may also not attend regularly because the classes are offered free of charge and therefore have no financial incentive to attend. If instructors were to stress consistent attendance and perhaps contact students after their second consecutive absence, learners might take their role as a student more seriously.

The time and location of classes is often a reason for students to attend on an irregular basis or stop attending altogether. The Friendly House may need to explore alternative class times and days for those students whose personal obligations limit them from consistently attending ESL classes. Transportation problems also limit students from being regular participants in ESL education. By having a carpooling system in place for students who live in the same area, The Friendly House might encourage more students to regularly attend.

To avoid students leaving permanently or attending sporadically because of inappropriate placement, The Friendly House may need to develop a system that allows students to test out of a class that is too easy. Students who find their

current class too difficult and become discouraged may also need a support system in place, such as providing students who feel overwhelmed with the opportunity to speak with one of the program coordinators. The program coordinator could then assess the students' situation and decide if a class change is necessary.

REFERENCE LIST

- Arizona annual performance report. (2000). Phoenix, AZ: Arizona Department of Education Division of Adult Education.
- Brod, S. (1995). Outreach and retention in adult ESL literacy programs. ERIC Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.
- Fitzgerald, N.B. (1995). ESL instruction in adult education: Findings from a national evaluation. ERIC Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.
- Greenberg, D. & Perin, D. (1994). Understanding dropout in an urban worker education program. Urban Education, 29(2), 169-188.
- Hilles, S. (1991). Adult education. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (pp. 402-411). Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Jimenez Uselton, Aida. (2001). Adult Education Coordinator, The Friendly House. Interview, April 16. Phoenix, AZ.
- Longfield, D. (1985). Adult literacy: Focus on limited-English-proficient learners. Rosslyn, VA: InterAmerica Research Associates, Inc.
- Merriam, S.B. & Simpson, E.L. (1995). A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults, 2nd Ed. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.
- National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education. (n.d.). Frequently asked questions in adult literacy. Available www.cal.org/nclce
- U.S. Department of Education. (1997). National forum on adult education and literacy: Views from adult learners. Washington D.C.: Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Division of Adult Education and Literacy.
- U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (1998). Issue brief: Adult participation in English-as-a-second language (ESL) classes. Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

- U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (1991). Teaching adults with limited English skills: Progress and challenges. Washington D.C.: Author.
- Western/Pacific Lincs. (n.d.). English as a second language. Available www.literacynet.org/esl/
- Young, M.B., Fleischman, H., Fitzgerald, N., & Morgan, M.A. (1995). National evaluation of adult education programs. Arlington, VA: Development Associates, Inc.

APPENDIX A

ATTENDANCE SURVEY

El Cuestionario de la Asistencia

1. ___ Hombre ___ Mujer

2. ___ Edad

3. ___ Soltero ___ Casado

4. ¿Cuántos niños tiene?

5. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo tiene?

6. ¿Cuántos años de educación tiene?

___ 1-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 11-15 ___ 15+

7. ¿Cuántas horas trabaja semanalmente?

___ 0-10 ___ 11-20 ___ 21-30 ___ 31-40 ___ 40+

8. ¿Ha faltado mas de dos clases consecutivas desde el principio de la clase?

___ Si ___ No

9. Si usted contestó si, favor de marcar uno o mas de las siguientes razones por su ausencia.

Factores Personales

- ___ Trabajo (trabajo nuevo, un cambio en horario)
 ___ Familia (un problema con el cuidado de los niños, necesita pasar mas tiempo con la familia)
 ___ Enfermedad (Usted mismo u otro miembro de la familia)
 ___ Transportación
 ___ Falta de interés
 ___ Otro _____

Factores del Programa

- ___ Nivel es demasiado dificil
 ___ Nivel es demasiado facil
 ___ Las materiales son inapropiados
 ___ Un conflicto personal con el maestro
 ___ Se siente intimidado por la escuela
 ___ La hora o la ubicación de la clase
 ___ Otro _____

Gracias para su tiempo y la ayuda.

Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, written in a cursive style. The text is oriented vertically and appears to read "H. G. H. H." or similar characters.