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Negative Attitudes toward English as a Second Language:  
Refusal to Participate in ESL Services in the Somali Community

by

Rebecca C. Kipchumba

A Capstone Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

Fall 2017

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## Dedication

To my family, especially my dad the late Wilson Kiptanui Koech, and my mom Emily Chebichii Koech, who instilled in me the power of handwork, perseverance, and persistence. To my children Denzel, Delphis and Dreena, who watched me go through this and never questioned what I was doing. To all my friends that have stood by me in many ways. Last but not least, to all educators who hold the hands of their students as they cross the big waters of school.

Epigraph

"It takes a village to raise a child"  
(Unknown)

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Thank you to my family and close friends: my sisters who have stayed close to me in every adventure of my life, and my American family, the Ralstons, who have adapted and allowed us to enjoy the American dream in the midst of all the chaos in our own lives.

My friend and colleague Lisa Borg who has taught me what true friendship means, my Tsavo sisters for their positive energy, Monica Ng'etich my sister from another mother, and the teachers whom I have taught alongside and have become a support system.

Thank you to the Kenyan community in Minneapolis, to which I can say I belong and my church St. David Minnetonka where I know I'm not judged and I feel welcome. This journey would not be complete without the touch of love from Albert Korir.

## Acronyms

ESL: English as a Second Language

MDE: Minnesota Department of Education

LEP: Limited English Proficiency

ELL: English Language Learner

EL: English Learner

BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

HLQ: Home Language Questionnaire

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

As I pull out the file cabinet to add a folder of a newly identified student, it is easy to find a slot because they are all in alphabetical order by last name and grade, but one folder at the back labeled “Parental Refusal” seems to always stand out. Each time I wonder, why do some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children? When a parent declines to have their child receive English language (EL) services, even when they qualify, it means the child is in the mainstream class with no extra language support. Even though the folder has held only one file for the last three years, I believe there is a story or a reason behind the “refusal”. That story is what I’m hoping to bring to light. I want to find out if this is an isolated incident or if there are more parents/guardians who refuse ESL services for their child/children? And if so, what is driving that decision.

I am particularly interested in the Somali families; there are nearly 100,000 of them living in the urban area in the Midwest alone (Roble & Rutledge, 2008).

Minnesota saw an influx in Somali refugees in the 1990s, when the civil war in their home country of Somalia, forced them to flee due to the violence and unrest. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Somali is one of the top five common primary home languages of students who registered in Minnesota public schools (MDE) (4/4/2016). In 2015-2016 school year, 21,287 students indicated Somali as their primary home language in their Home Language Questionnaires (HLQ), which makes it the third highest primary home language only to English and Spanish. Even though 21,287 is a high number, I believe it is a low estimate since some Somali-speaking families may

consider English as their primary home language for various reasons, including not wanting to be identified as a Somali or lacking the proper understanding when filling out the home language questionnaire.

According to Farid and McMahan (2004), Somali families choose Minnesota because there is a message out there to migrating families that Minnesota is a good and peaceful place to live a good life, and thus is a banner of hope. This banner of hope may not be fully explored if the families do not get the services they need to bridge the gap left by the language barriers. Lack of academic language support offered in ESL services may shut some of the doors that would otherwise enhance their opportunities to fully experience success in their new country.

Like many immigrant families, Somalis fall into two classifications: voluntary (those who immigrated to go to school or to start businesses) and involuntary (those who immigrated as refugees or seeking asylum due to turmoil and unrest in their home countries). Regardless of their classification, all of them are here for a better life for themselves and their children. Kahin (1997) affirms that education is highly valued by Somali families and is viewed as their only path to hope for the future and hence have high expectations for their children in school. With this affirmation in mind, Kahin (1997) points out that the Somali community in London (an urban city that can be compared to urban cities in the Midwest that also saw an influx of Somali refugees), is deprived and socially disadvantaged due to several factors, with one factor being a high illiteracy rate of over 35 percent and linguistic and cultural barriers due to a lack of English. Similarly, in North America, five out of seven refugees from Somalia who spoke out lamented about their difficulty in learning English and their frustration at being

unable to understand English, which they counted on for their success in their new countries (Hussein, 1997).

Somalis are not the first immigrants to Minnesota. But like all other immigrants, they seem to share the same challenges as they attempt to assimilate into their new countries and the most common one is the language barrier. Schools and the community at large have provided English Learner (EL) services for those whom English is a second language. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols*, as codified in the Equal Education Opportunities Act and other federal laws, requires that each educational agency "take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs" (414 U.S. 563, 1974).

### **Background of Researcher**

I grew up in Kenya and earned a certificate as a primary (elementary) school teacher and taught grades one through eight for two years before coming to the United States to further my studies in 1996. After three years of schooling, I earned my Bachelor of Education to qualify to teach in Minnesota schools. My two sons, then eight and six years old, joined me in 2000. The ESL summer classes offered in the local school district that year gave my sons an opportunity to get their feet wet before entering their new classrooms that fall. My sons loved the summer school program, and I was glad that those services were available for them. I went to teach as an EL teacher and later taught as a Title 1 and I am currently a certified EL teacher in the Midwest.

Halfway through the school year, my oldest son started being reluctant to attend EL classes, not because he didn't like what he was doing during the classes, but he said he got pulled out during the class 'free time'. I got a phone call from school saying the janitor had to help get him out of a locked bathroom because he didn't want to go to ESL services and miss the movie time in his regular class. He apparently had earned this for good behavior and turning in all his homework. On the other hand, it was challenging to wean my younger son out of ESL services because he enjoyed it and to wean him out, he continued to see the EL teacher once a week as a reward if he earned free time in class for 'Friday Fun'. Both my sons stayed in ESL classes until they were exited by their EL teachers when they passed the language test that indicated they were proficient in academic language.

### **Definition of ESL Program**

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), defines an ESL Program as a program for the instruction of pupils of limited English proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking (MDE, n.d.). MDE requires that after an English Language Learner (ELL) is identified and placed in an ELL program, parents are notified of the ESL services available to the students. It also gives the right to refusal of services, giving parents the option of declining ESL services. Purposeful lack of participation by qualifying families seems to be an ongoing problem, and this will be addressed later in this paper. As these services bring many resources to bear, it's worth exploring the reasoning behind the rejection of such services by families of qualifying students.

### **Qualification to receive English Learner (EL) Services**

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), all students are eligible for English Learner (EL) programs and services if: the student has a home language other than English, and based on language tests, teacher recommendations and parent input about language skills, the student shows a need for English Learner instruction to gain skills in listening, speaking, reading, or writing academic English, the language needed for success in school. This includes in kindergarten through high school.

### **The significance of knowing the attitudes of parents toward ESL services**

As stated by the U.S Census Bureau (2010), more than 34% of the nation's population comes from culturally diverse backgrounds. In a more recent study in 2014, one in every four adults, or 17.9 million, speak a language other than English at home. Young adults today, often called the "millennial generation", are more likely to be foreign born and speak a language other than English at home, compared with young adults in 1980. In the same respect, the U.S. Census Bureau's latest statistics from the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) attest that about five percent of school-age children spoke a language other than English at home and lived in a limited English proficient household in 2013.

Proceeding from the statistics that indicate that there is a growing number of EL students, my concern is that, by parents rejecting ESL services, these families are setting their children on a risky academic path. This is because they may not get the necessary academic language support to be successful in school, which is offered through ESL services.

In agreement with Cummins (2001), there are two levels of second language acquisition. One is Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which he defines as “the everyday conversational language or social English”. This is the language used for everyday, face-to-face communication, often accompanied by gestures, and relies on context clues to enhance understanding. This type of English is acquired within two years. The second level of language acquisition is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which Cummins defines as “the academic language of the classroom”. The kind of English language required for academic achievement in situations such as the classroom lectures and readings in textbook assignments, which takes up to five years to develop. Cummins (2001) affirms that lack of second language (L2) support in academic language, or exiting children from minority language backgrounds from L2 support programs before achieving CALP leads to academic failure.

There have been a few documented cases of negative attitudes toward ESL services. Romaine (2000) points out a study in which a German student, who wrote to the New York Times, stated that he came to the United States when he was nine years old and was placed in a regular English class. In his letter to the New York Times, the student was convinced a bilingual classroom would have impeded his integration to American society. In the same respect, a Yiddish-speaking student in a similar situation wrote to the New York Times, also claiming that daily exposure to English throughout the day resulted in more rapid and effective progress than the dilution in a bilingual process (Romaine, 2000). In another case, Richard Rodriguez, author of *Hunger for Memory*, who is also an “English-only” advocate, claims success in a “sink or swim”

classroom, which means full immersion into a regular classroom with no L2 support (Crawford & Krashen, 2007). These examples beg the question if similar views are held by some families that may view the EL support programs as a hindrance rather than a positive resource. The purpose for this study is to find why some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children.

Although many studies focus on how motivation affects second language acquisition, the question of wanting or not wanting to receive ESL services has not been well explored. Bearing this in mind, I will focus on the views of Somali parents toward ESL Programs, and whether the views of Somali parents about the programs may contribute to the attitude toward ESL services. Romaine (1994) addresses the issue of language and education failure and identifies the school as playing a dominant role in exerting control over its students. According to Romaine (1994), students who do not come to school with the kind of cultural and linguistic background supported in the schools are likely to experience unmet needs. Understanding this and the views of parents cannot be undervalued by educators without running the risk of selling the students short.

### **Rationale and Motivation**

While teaching at a charter school in the suburbs of a large metro area in the Upper Midwest, I was surprised at the resistance parents showed for allowing their children to receive ESL services. In some cases, the home language questionnaire (HLQ) (Appendix A) was filled out inaccurately. Some indicated that the only language spoken at home was English. This made it difficult to identify students for EL testing to determine their language needs. It forced the screening process to be initiated by the

classroom teachers, which meant more time was needed to observe and study the students. This consumed the much-valued time of the students. I wasn't sure if this was because parents did not want their students identified as EL students or if this was just an error when completing registration paperwork which included filling in the HLQ.

In a more recent experience, in a suburban school in the same metro area, I had one parent who filled out a HLQ and indicated they spoke more than one language at home. After testing out and qualifying for services, the child started receiving EL support in kindergarten. Halfway through the school year, the parent decided, they did not want their child to receive EL support. In the middle of first grade, the child continued to struggle in class compared to other peers. I talked to the parent, who consented to having the child retested for EL qualification, but even with test scores and classroom teacher recommendations indicating the need for academic language support, the parent held firm to the refusal to have their child receive EL support. In this case, the student was marked as qualifying but with parental refusal in the school system. The student continued to get support in a "push-in" model, naturally by falling into a class that was being co-taught with an EL teacher. In this case, the school found ways to work around student needs even when services were declined. As an advocate for all students, I feel there is a lot to be done to ensure that the EL students are graduating at the same rate as their counterparts. Here in Minnesota for example, even though the graduation rate of ELs has seen an increase of 11 percent between 2011 and 2015, the EL graduation rate is still 63.1 percent compared to the all students which is at 81.9 percent (MDE, 2016).

**Statement of problem.** Observing some parents were reluctant to get ESL services for their children, I became interested in knowing if this is a widespread issue. I wanted to know if other parents held the same view and if so why? What is the disconnect? I wondered if the parents understood the role of EL classes, or if both the parents and students had past experiences that might have led to views about ESL services. My curiosity included the age of the students and duration of time they had been in the United States. I wondered if being a newcomer played a factor in whether they chose to participate in the programs or not. I began to ask myself questions that could only be answered by the parents of students who qualified for ESL services.

**Goal.** I am seeking to understand *why do some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children?* With my findings, I'm hoping that this will be an inception in addressing the matter, since this inquiry stemmed from my personal experiences. In being proactive to ensure all students are enrolled in the services they need, so they can maximize all the resources they can get, it became paramount for me to find out why some families may harbor negative attitudes toward ESL services for their children. This may in turn be a beginning to reaching out to parents due to the importance of the support the ESL classes bear in the academic success of their children.

### **Assumptions and Biases**

Like all people, I bring certain assumptions and biases to my research. I assume that all parents want their children to learn academic English and succeed in the mainstream. It is also my assumption that some parents do not understand what role EL classes play in their children's success in the mainstream and may assume that EL classes are a waste of time. I suspect that parents may not know that EL classes have standards

just like the mainstream classes, and lastly that some parents associate EL with special education. I wonder if the resistance from some parents is due to an identity issue and if there is a fear of being stigmatized. These assumptions influenced the interview questions used for the data collection.

### **Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, I have introduced my research, which is focused on finding out why some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children. I have established the purpose and goal of the study, my role as a researcher, assumptions and biases, rationale and motivation, statement of problem and my background in respect to the study. In Chapter Two, I provide a review of the literature relevant to what other scholars have studied on the attitudes toward ESL services by students and their parents. Chapter Three includes a description of the research design and methodology that guides this study. I will cover my methodology and walk through carrying out interviews to find out what parents think about ESL services in an attempt to find out their attitude toward receiving ESL services. Chapter Four will be a detailed analysis of my findings and results of this study. In Chapter Five, I will reflect on the data collected. I will also discuss the limitations of the study, implications for further research and recommendations for school officials, teachers, and parents.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### History of ESL Services and Programs

Academic English can be traced back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when books and printed materials became more widespread (Brinks & Jefferies, 2008). Shirley Brice Heath observed the shift from simple conversational style used during the Colonial period to a growing attention to form. Michael A. K Halliday and James Martin believed that some features of academic English was influenced by the evolution of the language of science used by scientists in writing about their fields (Brinks & Jefferies, 2008).

ESL Programs are not a new phenomenon in schools. They have been provided in schools in various forms. In 1968 for example, congress passed a Bilingual Education Act as Title VII, Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Brinks & Jefferies, 2008). The Act provided grants for local districts and states to develop and offer education programs in L1. This was meant to be a temporary measure to give time to ELs to learn sufficient English to survive in the classrooms. Even though this was passed, not everyone was in favor of such programs. Coalitions such as U.S English (founded in 1983 by S.I Hayakawa) and other defenders of the melting pot ideologies, saw this as a ‘pampering of immigrants’ (Brinks & Jefferies, 2008). Canada had the same programs, but unlike the United States, French immersion programs served predominantly middle-class English-speaking students whose parents wanted them to remain competent in an officially bilingual nation. The American ELs tended to be seen as lower class, and the education system did not value their bilingualism. It was mostly viewed as an instrument to learn English (Hakuta, 2011).

Immigrants are the biggest population needing L2 support in the new countries they are migrating to since most of the time they are coming into a country that primarily has a different L1 as the dominant language of the land. The immigrants must quickly learn the language for survival but that is not their only challenge. Immigrants are not always received well in their new homes. They not only face the culture shock of their new countries but they may also face discrimination and stigma. As Hakuta (2011) points out, in 1952, child psychologist George Thompson claimed that a child raised in a bilingual environment, is handicapped in his language growth. In addition, Sir Francis Walker, president of MIT, also wrote that immigrants were beaten men from beaten races representing the worst of failures in the struggle of existence (Hakuta, 2011).

Linguistic and cultural diversity is the norm in many school systems and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future (Cummins, 1994). Cummins' prediction is echoed in the data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the past few years as seen below. The percentage of ELs in public schools increased between 2002 to 2003 in all but ten states. In 2011-2012, ELs made up an average of 14.2 percent of total public-school enrollment. (NCES). (n.d)

It is therefore paramount that schools try to offer services to meet the needs of their students and hence the need to find out why parents, sometimes may have a negative attitude toward receiving ESL services, even when they need it. This chapter will address the importance of ESL services, the different kinds and models of ESL services, and past research regarding attitudes toward ESL services.

### **Importance of ESL services**

In the past, speaking English came with a higher status than other languages. It was an indication of intelligence. Hakuta (2011), points out that in English-speaking countries, English naturally enjoyed a higher status and standard English enjoyed the most prestige. Many immigrants understand the status of standard English. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), participation in ESL Programs by ELs can improve students' English language proficiency which in turn, has been associated with improved educational outcomes. (NCES) (2015). As Mckeon (2000) notes, education is an important investment to immigrant groups because it is perceived as a key to advancement, particularly for children. However, due to a lack of sufficient command of the language of instruction, students are unable to follow a normal course of education and end up being placed in special language classes. This may be convenient as a short-term solution but in the long run, this may seriously jeopardize their school careers (Cummins, 1994). Cummins (1994) continues to emphasize that while there are individual differences, most EL learners' conversational skills or BICS often approach native-like levels within about two years of exposure to English; in contrast, it takes four to nine years or five to seven years for second language students to achieve as well as their peer native speakers in academic aspects of English, also called CALP (Cummins, 1981). Cummins (1981) affirms that EL support will continue to be beneficial and frequently necessary even after students have attained conversational fluency in English.

Hakuta (2011) states that Language proficiency is not the same as mastering academic language but there is a strong relationship between English proficiency and content area achievement. In 2000, Hakuta using existing evidence from a small school district concluded that it took four to seven years for 80 percent of the students to attain

proficiency in English depending on whether it was oral proficiency or academic criteria (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Hakuta (2011) emphasizes that even with being more focused and direct, English language development still takes time and demands attention. The kind of attention that would be provided in ESL services provided in schools today.

Exiting students prematurely from EL or bilingual support programs may jeopardize their academic development particularly if the mainstream classroom does not provide an environment that supports language acquisition. Cummins (1994) states that schools must be prepared to make a long-term commitment to support the academic development of ESL students. Getting students past the initial acquisition stage is not sufficient (Cummins, 1994).

### **EL Models Used in Schools**

MDE identifies eight different models of ESL Programs:

- *'Pull out'* provides for a smaller learning group, by pulling out students from the mainstream classroom for specialized instruction.
- *Content-based ESL* is taught using instructional materials, learning tasks and classroom techniques from academic content areas as a means for developing language, content, cognitive and study skills.
- *Specially Designed Academic Instruction Delivered in English (SDAIE)* is designed to provide ESL students with access to the curriculum.
- *Sheltered English Instruction* has a goal to teach content knowledge and skills rather than language.
- *Structured English Immersion* provides all subject matter instruction in student's L2, but students may use their L1 in class.

- *Developmental Bilingual, Transitional Bilingual, and Dual Bilingual* have instruction delivered in two languages, usually L1 and L2. Most ESL instruction is only for a portion of the day and students are mainstreamed for the rest of the school day.

(MDE, n.d.)

### **Types of Services**

There are two kinds of services identified by MDE. One is ‘Direct service,’ which covers ESL Programs and bilingual programs (MDE, n.d.). In this case, students are receiving direct service specifically designed to meet their language, academic, and social needs. The other kind of service is the ‘Indirect service,’ and this implies services where students are not enrolled in programs specifically designed for ELs but are in the mainstream and occasionally checking in with ESL staff (MDE, n.d.).

### **Parent Attitudes toward ESL Programs**

According to Gibson and Ogbu (1991), in the past, immigrant minority students may have attended segregated or inferior schools, and they still felt privileged because of the kind of opportunity they access in the United States. They regarded the education in the public schools superior compared to what was offered in their homeland. The free textbooks and other supplies they received were more than they had in their home countries. Because they regarded themselves as being in someone else’s land, they appreciated what they attained. With research showing dissatisfaction in the public school by some immigrants, these views have changed to some extent, and parents and students are starting to speak up. Gibson and Ogbu (1994), affirm that the students are

usually successful once they overcome the language and culture barriers, although the extent to which they succeed depends on what the school does to meet their needs and the attitudes of the students.

Guo (2007) highlights the different perspectives the ESL teachers and Chinese parents had about the ESL Program. While the teachers believed that the ESL classes helped socialize students into the Canadian school and social cultures, while helping to develop language and study skills, and appropriate attitudes to help prepare them into the mainstream class, the Chinese parents viewed the ESL Program as having many problems. Some of the concerns the parents voiced included the length of time students stayed in the program, lack of exams, low level content, lack of grammar instruction, and the multi-grade groupings.

In a separate study, Guo (2007) quotes Leung and Franson (2001) in the Calderdale Decision formulated in England in the 1980s, where the Ministry of Education prohibited ESL Programs throughout England resulting in ESL teachers working as support teachers within content classrooms. This was a result of a legal battle where the parents successfully sued a school authority because they felt their children were being “ghettoized” in an ESL Program (Leung & Franson, 2001). Guo affirms that ESL parent voices are not always heard or solicited, yet parents were very concerned about the appropriateness of ESL instruction. Similarly, in California Proposition 227, Unz Initiative (Ballotpedia), which passed with a 67% approval in 1998, eliminated all forms of ESL instruction except immersion. This was due to many Hispanic parents voting against ESL or bilingual education. Parents believed that their children were not learning English fast enough.

Guo (2007) also quotes Salzberg (1998) to bring into light another study of ESL parents and teachers that also revealed very different, negative views of each other. This study revealed that Taiwanese EL families in Vancouver, British Columbia, were anxious to mainstream their children, as they believed that their children's learning of the English language was being delayed by the separate EL classes.

In one interview, Dalhouse & Dalhouse (2009), a teacher coded as Teacher Two indicated that in the past, some students placed in EL classes did not want to be in the class, despite the fact that their language skills indicated the need for placement there.

Dalhouse & Dalhouse also discuss a case where two students interviewed felt they were misplaced in ESL for two years, because they had learned English in Uganda. They felt that the misplacement cost them valuable classroom instruction where their academic language skills could have been enhanced (Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009).

In another study, Dalhouse & Dalhouse (2009) affirmed that three parents interviewed said they trust the teachers' judgments about their children, and that they tended to go with the teachers' recommendations without question. Thus, if the teacher recommends grade placements, advancements, special education or ESL classes, they followed the teacher's' recommendation. These parents considered the teachers' recommendations to be more informed and important than their own. They also trusted that the teachers would act in the best interest of the children (Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). This study demonstrates a different perspective than that of the Chinese parents in the Guo (2007) study.

Lightbown and Spada contend that Gardner's study from 1985, on positive attitude and motivation is related to success in L2 learning (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

They both point out that it is important to keep in mind that an individual's identity is closely related with the way he or she speaks. Depending on the learners' attitudes, learning a second language can be a source of resentment or enrichment. Children, as well as adults, are sensitive to social dynamics and power relationships. Giving EL students and their parents a voice to express their concerns and views will enable them to feel a part of the decision making in schools. As Cummins (1994) points out, academic and linguistic growth of students is significantly increased when parents see themselves as co-educators of their children and felt acknowledged by the school.

### **The Gap**

Gan (2004) in a study on: Attitudes and Strategies as Predictors of Self-Directed Language Learning in an EFL context, Gan (2004), contends that an EFL learner who holds a positive attitude of learner responsibility, and self-sufficiency, is likely to become more responsible and confident in his or her English. To study the effects of the attitude in this case, a factor analysis was used to study attitudinal components. Some of the questions used included: 1) role of the teacher; 2) the role of feedback; 3) learner independence; 4) learner confidence in their ability to study; 5) experience of language learning; and 6) approach to studying Gan (2007).

Gan (2004) points out that researchers have all suggested that there is a relationship between attitudes and learning outcomes. Researchers like Kavitha (2009), reported a study that showed that 120 students surveyed had a negative attitude towards English and learning the English language. This is different from my research question, because I am interested in finding out what is causing the negative attitude toward ESL

services or the thoughts about ESL services by parents of EL students. In another study, Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' attitudes and perceptions, about classroom practices identified as primarily meaning-based and form-focused, suggested a mismatch between learner needs and preferences of the classroom instruction (Savington & Wang, 2003). The question here is to find out if ESL families feel mismatched with the services they are being offered.

While I suspect that my findings will be similar to Guo's in regard to "ghettoization," his study was conducted in Canada with Chinese parents and my study will be done in the United States with Somali parents in a large urban city in the Midwest.

### **Bias and stigma against Somali immigrants**

No one can ignore the constant news headlines and rhetoric about Muslims in the United States. After September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Muslim Americans have been profiled as terrorists because of their religion, which happens to be the same as those who bombed the Twin Towers killing several thousand and injuring many more. Abdi Warsame, who serves in the city council in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest, reported being "accustomed to a regular pattern of calls, emails and social media messages that run the gamut from thinly veiled bigotry to full-blown hate mail" (Golden 2016). Star Tribune. One must then wonder if the stigma affects the Somalis' identity both in the public and in school, leading parents to not want to indicate the language spoken at home as Somali.

## **Research Questions**

The aim of this study is to find out why some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children which are highly recommended for the students' academic success. In the past, teachers and the school as a whole were trusted by parents, and any decisions made or suggestions offered were taken positively and looked at as being in the best interest of the students. Suggestions and decisions made by the teachers and the school were the final say. Today, there appears to be less confidence with teachers and schools. This has led not only to parents questioning the school services, but in some situations, it has led to refusal of services offered by the school. To address this issue, and regain the parents' and students' confidence, it is important to know why these negative attitudes exist. This study is a step toward identifying the opinions of parents toward ESL services and giving the parents a voice. The questions I will include in the questionnaire during the interviews are in Appendix D. My hope is that these questions will help me satisfy my curiosity in answering the following questions:

- Why are some students/parents reluctant to be in ESL services even when they qualify?
- Do the parents understand the role of ESL services?
- Is there past experience that brings about the negative attitude?
- Do the parents feel their children have adequate academic language to be successful in the mainstream class?
- Does the length of stay in the United States affect the attitude toward ESL services?

## **Chapter Overview**

This chapter has reviewed what has been found out in the past about attitudes toward ESL services by parents and students. Also covered were reasons why giving

parents and students a voice in the school is important. This chapter also summarizes what others have already considered and what still needs to be studied and why. To understand the relevance of this study, an explanation of second language acquisition was discussed. The difference between BICS and CALPS and the importance of continued ESL support to students over longer periods of time were addressed.

The chapter also presents an overview of cultural beliefs about ESL services and the attitudes that students and parents have had toward ESL services in the past. It discusses the importance of giving students and parents a voice in the school and the effects of this on the success of the students. The chapter addresses the gaps in the field, particularly what research has been done on attitudes toward receiving services. Some studies have been done in other countries, such as Canada, as there is limited research that has been done on this topic in the United States.

In the next chapter, you will find details of how this study will be done, what methods will be used, and who will be studied.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

This study is designed to find out why some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children. In this study, I want to know whether or not parents understand the role of ESL services. I wonder if past experiences play a role in their attitude toward ESL services and if parents feel their children have adequate academic language to be successful in the mainstream class. Have the parents been educated on the role of ESL services? I'm also curious to know whether the length of stay in the United States affects their attitude toward ESL services. This background information will give an idea of why parents might decline ESL services for their children.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

As stated by Merriam (2009), qualitative research is done with an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness in their natural setting. There is no attempt to predict what will happen in the future, only the seeking of understanding of a setting with intent to communicate findings to others interested in the particular setting. Since the researcher collects and analyses the data, there are shortcomings and biases that might impact the outcomes of the study. These will need to be identified and monitored. According to Merriam (2009), basic qualitative research is the most common form of research used in education. The primary goal of basic qualitative research is to uncover and interpret the meanings constructed from findings on how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. Data is usually collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. An interview is defined as a “process in which a researcher and

participants engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study. Merriam (2009, p. 87).

## **Data Collection**

### **Interviews**

I have chosen interviews as my means to seek an understanding of why parents may resist services that are essential to their success in school. As Merriam (2009) notes, interviews are used when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. The interviews will be semi-structured, with an interview guide, which will include a mix of both more and less structured interview questions (Appendix D). I will base these questions on my assumptions, which are addressed in the Introduction. The questions will include factual inquiries. McKay (2008) defines factual inquiries as questions used to find out more about the characteristics of the individuals. This may include; the age, gender, ethnicity and language background of the interviewees. Attitudinal questions, which are questions that seek information about opinions and beliefs, will be the main type of questions used in this study (McKay, 2008). At this point, I am looking at doing one-on-one interviews, but if the opportunity arises, a focus group interview may be included. The interview guide approach will ensure the same topics are covered with everyone. The disadvantage to using an interview guide approach is that I will not be able to pursue topics that come up from the answers that interviewees give to questions (McKay, 2008).

### **Participants**

The participants will be Somali parents who have refused ESL services for their qualifying children. I am hoping to get at least three interviews with three parents of any age. The participants will be selected from contacts within the Somali community in the metro area. These can be participants in any adult literacy program, who have children who qualified for ESL services but the parents either refused or might have allowed their children to get the services even though they were opposed to them.

### **Setting**

The study will be done in the homes of the individuals, or in public places like the library, or coffee shops in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest that has seen an increase in the need for ESL services in schools. I chose this setting because according to a Minnesota legislative report issued by MDE On March 29<sup>th</sup> 2013, there was an 8.6 percent increase of students with limited English proficiency enrolled in Minnesota schools. The state in general, has seen a steady increase in the number of EL students enrolled in the schools.

### **Materials**

A tape recorder with speed control will be used to allow time to check and make any corrections. The interviews will also be recorded using Android voice recording on smart phone in case there is a fault in the initial tape recorder.

To ensure internal validity and credibility, I will record the interviews, take notes and transcribe the interviews soon after the interviews are completed when everything is still fresh in my mind. According to McKay (2006), internal validity in qualitative research is obtained by recording and analyzing all data and presenting it in an unbiased manner.

After transcribing each interview, I will listen to each interview more than twice while

following along with the transcriptions to ensure no errors are made. It has come to my attention that the Somali language was only put in print in the last few decades and that most of the adults in the Somali community may not be able to read in Somali. For this reason, I will be counting on an interpreter to translate my questions from English into Somali. I plan on using certified translators from around the Twin Cities metro area. I am also aware that I might need a different translator for each interview.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I'm hoping the findings of this study will be a first step towards understanding the perspectives of parents of ELs toward services available in schools that are intended to support the student's academic achievement. The study lacks generalizability due to the limited number of interviewees. Three parents are not an adequate representation considering the total number of Somali families in the Midwest metro area. Future research will need to improve the generalizability by considering a more direct survey which will cover a bigger population and a more detailed questionnaire that will have more specific questions based on the findings of this study. Availability of individuals to interview may initiate a limitation, because this is solely dependent on the available participants, and access to adult literacy programs. I might need a translator when interviewing parents, hence transcribing may not be accurate. Since this research will only include interviewees from one cultural background, it may not be a good representation of the population in the schools in the Midwest.

### **Data analysis**

The aim of analyzing my data is to provide a means to draw conclusions or inferences of my interviews (Merriam 2009). Unlike quantitative research, research

where large quantities of data is displayed in terms of some numerical representation, qualitative research does not permit this type of simple reduction making qualitative analysis more problematic. Regardless, in qualitative research, the objective is for the data to be reduced and displayed in a manageable way that is accepted by the research community, policymakers, and public as valid. (Merriam 2009).

Analyzing this data will allow me to draw out the main messages and themes to give a comprehensive summary of the data. I will identify the themes after the interviews are completed because I cannot decide in advance what the themes will be. I will use an emergent or intuitive strategy which Merriam identifies as a strategy where the researcher has the capacity to discern the important themes (Merriam 2009). Because I have not discussed my research questions in advance with the interviewees, I have no idea what responses to expect from them. Only after the interviews are done that, I will look for commonalities with the responses.

### **Ethics**

Three participants will take part in the interviews that will take between ten and twenty minutes each. The latent risk is relatively low owing to the aspect that the participants will be adults over eighteen years of age. All the participants will be given an option to have an interpreter. The participants will each sign a letter of informed consent that will be dated and read to them. The consent will notify the participants that their contributions are voluntary and there would be no repercussions if they decided not to be a part of the research. The participants will also be notified that, at any time they had a right to withdraw and stop their consent to participate with no retaliation. The only cost to the participants will be the time it takes for them to complete the interview

The participants will be assured that the recordings will be destroyed according to the Federal law and will be used only for the purpose of completing this research and the findings might be shared with other colleagues in school or at professional conferences. They will also be given a choice to receive a copy of the final findings.

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter describes the methodologies that will be used in this study. First, the rationale and description of the research design is presented along with the description of the qualitative paradigm. Second, the data collection protocols are presented, and finally the method of data analysis and ethics are discussed. The next chapter will show the results of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

#### Chapter Overview

The previous chapter highlighted the methodology of this study and the data collection techniques that were used. This chapter is a presentation of the data collected, the data collection process, and the connection of the results to my research question.

The goal of this chapter is to give an unbiased, systematic, and readable summary of my findings. The interviews were conducted to find out *why do some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children?* Seven guiding questions were used in three interviews of three adult Somali parents in a suburban city in the Midwest, a leading city with a big Somali population. The individuals interviewed were chosen randomly from connections in the community and from a visit to a large community center complex that is known as ‘Little Mogadishu’, the Somali capital of America.

In addition to the interview questions, five demographic questions that solicited; the age, sex, number of years in America, level of education and whether the children of the interviewees participated in ESL services or not. The demographics were tactfully chosen to be used in analyzing the final responses to determine if there was any correlation with the demographics collected and the open ended semi-structured questions. The table below shows the summary of the demographics collected.

#### Participants

Fatima, is between the age of 30 and 40 years old. She is a mother of five and her oldest who benefited from ESL services and is currently in college and has four other children still in school. Two of Fatima's youngest children did not participate in ESL

services. Fatima never completed high school and has lived in the United States for over ten years. Abdullahi is also between 40 and 50 years and is married with three children. Abdullahi has a bachelors' degree and has lived in the United States for over ten years. His children did not participate in ESL services. Omar who is between 30 and 40 years old, has lived in the United States also for more than ten years. Omar's children did not participate in ESL services either but Omar came to America when he was 8 years old and attended EL classes when he was in elementary school.

## **Results**

### **Not all Somali parents have adequate information about what ESL services entail**

It was obvious from the participant responses that some parents were not sure if their children really needed ESL services. All three participants noted that some parents wonder why their children need ESL services which in their view, is for 'English beginners' and yet, according to the parents, their children were born here in America and it does not make sense that they need ESL. Fatima, one of the interviewees, reported that parents wondered about ESL services, saying, "Not all parents but some of the parents I speak with, they say, this kid is born here in America, he is a citizen, is born here in Minnesota, why would he go to ESL class?" Abdullahi echoed what Fatima brought up, saying, "the children were born here and they speak very good English and they don't need the extra help because they can speak really well."

Fatima acknowledged that she knew that ESL services were provided in her school district and that her children could enroll for ESL services and that she was aware that participation in the program was optional and had the entitlement of pulling her children out of the program at any time. Fatima acknowledges that her children

benefited from the program. She pointed out that not all her children received ESL services but those who did benefited from it and eventually exited out of the program when they became proficient according to their teachers. Fatima added that ESL services were for 'English beginners'.

Abdullahi said he did not know about any specific ESL Program but his brother's children went to ESL classes where they went to separate 'speech' classes and got help with writing and reading. Omar on the other hand reported not knowing 'too much' about ESL services but knew it was part of a process where students that needed development in the English language, whether it was in reading, or writing abilities went through for extra help. Omar added that the program is setup to assist students before they get into the mainstream English class in the schools.

In summary, all participants knew that ESL services were offered in schools and the services helped students in writing and reading particularly those who were 'English beginners'. One participant said that the classes helped with speech. This can be misunderstood for special education services offered by speech pathologist for students diagnosed with delayed speech. It also appears that the participants have the opinion that ESL services are offered before students can qualify to be in a mainstream classroom.

Fatima is aware that one must qualify for the services and that one does eventually exit after they get to a certain level in their language based on test given by the teachers.

**According to these Somali parents, disadvantages of ESL services outweigh the advantages.**

All participants listed some advantages of ESL services for those who need them but they also had several disadvantages. Fatima stated that learning English grammar

was one benefit of receiving ESL services. Fatima reported that even though her children were born here and spoke English well, her children's English was still different from that of native speakers and ESL services supported that need. Fatima pointed out that her kids benefited from the small group instruction, which she witnessed with her now 20-year-old son who received ESL support and has done a 'fantastic job'.

Abdullahi reported that his brother confirmed that his children benefited from the extra help or attention as a result of small group instruction offered through EL classes and ESL background that teacher brought to the table. Omar added that some of the most helpful things about the ESL Program were that teachers tried to work with students at their pace. Omar said that ESL classes are a benefit to students coming from different countries where English is their second language, and struggle with reading and writing in English. Omar stated that because different cultures have different ways to communicate, especially the Somali who originate from East Africa and are primarily an oral community, students from these cultures have difficulty in writing and reading.

Omar continued to add that EL teachers take their time to understand the culture of their students. He also specifies that the mainstream teachers may not always be able to help ELs sufficiently because the expectation of the mainstream teachers is that the students in their classrooms are at grade level language proficiency before coming into their class and this might not always be the case with all EL scholars.

The disadvantages of ESL services that came up were concerning. Both Fatima and Omar lamented that even though the program was good, it seemed to take too long for some children be proficient enough to exit the program. Fatima was not sure if this was because of the program, the teacher or the student. Fatima said in some cases the

students were in the program for what seemed to be an extended period for example some kids stayed in the program from second grade to fifth grade and sometimes into middle school and high school. Fatima wishes the ESL Program had a goal and set a goal for each child with a limit or time frame for exiting the program.

Fatima restrained from using the word discrimination because she was not sure if that was the right word to represent what parents feared. She said the word does not necessarily fit but sometimes they feel that their children are treated differently and eventually feel left behind by other children in the same grade level and that's what parents are most afraid about. Another concern was that their children were sometimes being pulled out of class and not being a part of the class and subsequently, the students were falling behind because they were missing out in what was being taught to the rest of the class. Abdullahi on the other hand, said his wife did not approve of ESL classes. As he stated, "She says she does not see any reason to isolate them from their classroom affecting child's self-esteem."

Omar brought up the notion that not all EL teachers were conversant with the needs of ELs. Omar said that some EL teachers were not aware of the supports needed at home for ELs whose parents do not speak English either and consequently cannot provide any academic support to their children at home. As reported by Omar, these parents do not necessarily know the benefits of enrolling their children in afterschool programs and academic enrichment programs, and when teachers have these students in their class and are not aware of these needs, it may result in students not advancing in their English language level. Omar also stated that, there were higher expectations in mainstream classes which are more challenging than what was offered in EL classes.

**Some Somali Parents have low expectations for the ESL Program**

All the expectations that were brought up by the participants are things already being implemented in the programs but the parents may not be aware of. For example; Fatima emphasized that she expects that the services continue being offered in schools, but the teachers should provide more information to parents like her on how their children benefit from the program and the process in which the students exit the program or when they should expect their children to be proficient English learners. Abdullahi was not sure what to expect from an ESL Program but in his opinion, the program should help someone in improving reading and writing in English. Abdullahi added that since his children did not attend any ESL Program, he did not know what to expect.

One of Omar' expectations was that every child get tested before being placed in an ESL Program and that the child's language proficiency level be used to determine their needs to qualify to be in a mainstream program, or in a mainstream English class.

Omar believes that currently, there is no timeline for the progress of the students. Omar alleged that often, you find students that have been in an ESL Program starting for example from third grade, or fourth grade and the child is still in the same program in middle school and high school. Omar asserted that, the prolonged stay of the students in an ESL Program brought into question the effectiveness of the program especially when the academic progress of the child is not noticeable.

**Past experiences did not impact participation in ESL services**

Past experiences did not seem to be a factor in allowing their qualifying children to participate in an ESL Program. Fatima recounted having a positive experience with

the ESL Program at her children's school. She said academic success was noticeable due to the progress her children made in school. Abdullahi on the other hand did not have any experiences with an ESL Program because his children never participated in any. Omar revealed his experience with working with families who had children in ESL Programs, in many instances dealing with parents, students and teachers. Omar stated that his experiences included having an overview of what was being done in EL classrooms, having a feel of what the ESL Program, and what was being taught in the classroom.

### **Not all Somali parents would recommend ESL services to friends and relatives**

Two of the three participants were not positive they would recommend ESL services to friends and family members. Fatima's only response was "absolutely!". When asked why, Fatima stated that it's because she witnessed the benefits of the services. When asked if he would recommend ESL services to family and friends, Abdullahi responded, "I don't recommend things that I don't believe in. For families who come from another country, like most families from East Africa are not literate in their own language, which means they cannot help with their kid's homework or school work, in that situation, I believe the kids will benefit from ESL programs. ESL is for the not privileged group. But for me I read to my kids and buy books." Although Abdullahi expressed his disbelief in the program, he said the services were beneficial to families from another country, like most families from East Africa who are not literate in their own language, and therefore cannot help with their children's homework or school work. Abdullahi believes those students will benefit from ESL services. Abdullahi

continued on to say that ESL is for the ‘not privileged’ group. But for him, he reads to his children and buys books for them.

Omar was not sure if he would recommend the program to all his friends and family who needed ESL services. Omar said it depended on the program. Per Omar, some of the programs are more effective than others. Omar stated that for families who needed minimal support, he would not recommend ESL services instead he would recommend a mainstream classroom. Omar would prefer that those students needing minimal support be placed in the mainstream classroom while still getting EL support.

Omar maintains that, as for students who are ‘new to country’ and do not speak English as a first language, ESL services have proven to be effective if they have the right things in place.

### **Suggestions for improvement of ESL services by Somali Parents**

Fatima suggested that teachers needed to provide more information about the program to the parents. Abdullahi reported that even though he did not know what to suggest, in his opinion, the programs should help someone improve reading and writing in English. He also suggested that the school should try to convince the families and reach out to them and tell them about the ESL Program

Omar’s crucial suggestion involved providing parents with more information. Omar argued that parents enrolled their children in ESL Programs but most of the time; they didn’t necessarily know the outcomes of the program. Omar suggested that teachers should sit down with parents and have an in-depth explanation of what the services entail for their children and what the parents should expect in terms of yearly

accomplishments anticipated. Omar, also suggested that parents needed to have a good understanding of what is expected of their child to know how they can do at home to help.

### **Conclusion/ Chapter Overview**

This chapter broke down the guiding questions used for the framework of the research. Each interview question was addressed and results potted to give a clear picture of the findings from each participant. The ethical piece was discussed, and the credibility of the study was accentuated. The process of data analysis was discussed in detail and the breakdown of themes presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

#### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I have reviewed the results of my interviews. I have analyzed my quantitative data responses by analyzing each question and how they were resolved. I have also addressed the implications, the limitations of the study, suggestions for a potential future research.

#### Research Question

The goal of this study was to find out: *why do some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children?* My hope was to start the conversation on what I or we can do as EL teachers to reduce the instances of parents declining ESL services for their children which can potentially set the students for an academic path to fail. I interviewed three parents in the community using semi structured questionnaire to try and get an insight of what the Somali community know and think about ESL services. Even though I only interviewed three parents from the Somali community and there were only two documented refusal of services in a school of an average of approximately seventy-five qualifying students, I feel that the information collected is valuable and a generous input on answering my questions on what might be causing some Somali families to decline ESL services for their children who qualify. While this study focused on Somali families, it is my assumption that the information accumulated can be used to improve the ESL Program considering some of my findings may apply to the other language

communities represented in our district as our program parameters are the same across all the EL families represented in the district.

We do not have a unique program for one group of people and hence whatever shortcomings were brought up, will be shared and used to improve what we are already doing to enhance parent satisfaction with the program and in return possibly improve how we provide services for all families. This will feasibly decrease any instances of refusal of services or any questioning of the program effectiveness in student achievement. This information will be shared with colleagues and possibly at a professional conference focusing on ELs and families.

The first question was seeking to understand what the parents understood about ESL services. All the participants acknowledged that even though their children were born here, their English was different and still needed ESL support which they got from the ESL services provided in schools by the school districts. All three parents interviewed presumed that those who were ‘English beginners’ needed ESL services before joining a mainstream class.

The second question was seeking to discover what the parents felt were the benefits of ESL services. Two of the parents felt that ESL services gave students better attention due to the use of small group sizes for instruction. The parents also believed that the ESL services offered helped with grammar and the EL teachers worked with the EL students at their pace. Help in writing and reading was cataloged as one of the benefits of ESL services by the participants.

On the other hand, question three addressed the least helpful things that the parents were aware of in the ESL services provided. There was a unanimous view that the children born and raised in the United States already spoke English and did not require any support and the parents did not understand why those students were placed in the programs. There was also an undisputed sense that the students in an EL pull-out model, faced discrimination, and isolation from their peers and eventually causing them to lose their self-esteem. This isolation is echoed by Guofang (2012). According to Guofang, newcomer students placed in separate ESL classes from regular education classes at the middle school level results in many English-speaking students rejecting, putting down and squeezing newcomer students out of social involvement in turn isolating them. This kind of marginalization together with other factors often causes low academic achievement amongst ELs. The benefits of the pull-out program were in question also because the parents seemed to have a sense that while the students were away in a separate room, what was being taught in their classroom was overlooked.

Another issue brought up by the participants was the length of time students remained in the program after admission. The responses indicate a feel that the length of time was too long with no time line to exit the program. Some parents indicated examples of students kept in the program for several grade levels as much as five years. There was also a concern that some teachers did not understand the needs of the students and in return were unable to assist the students adequately. Another limitation of ESL services brought up by participants was that the program did not have identified individual goals for the students in the program. The participants also pointed out that ELs lagged their peers in class, falling behind academically.

There was an indication that some parents were not sure of what to expect of an ESL Program but my findings also signaled the expectation for the availability of ESL services in the schools with the expectation that the services have a system to test the students and set goals before admission into the program. There was also an expectation of academic progress visibility in students in the program and an exit criterion to ensure students were not in the program indeterminately. The expectation that the programs provide the needed help in reading and writing echoed what the parents felt was one important feature of ESL services.

### **Implications**

One clear discovery was that the parents interviewed were partially versed with what ESL services are and how the services support their children. There is also a clear confusion with homework help at home and direct student help in school with academic language. Additionally, there was a proposal to have all ELs tested before being placed in an ESL Program. This confirms the notion that the parents may not be aware of the process the school uses to screen students for academic language support.

The process involves first identifying the need for language screening using the information given by parents in the HLQ that every parent fills upon registering in a new school. If the HLQ indicates that the student has a diverse language and cultural background, the student is given a language screening test. Our school district uses the W-APT (WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test) a language proficiency “screener” test given to each identified student that determines their language proficiency level. Language proficiency is defined by WIDA as ‘a measurement of where students are in the process

of language development.’ WIDA uses a one through six continuum to determine language support needs. WIDA defines language development as ‘a process that takes time and students move along this process at different rates’ (WIDA, 08/04/2017). After the student is tested, and the results indicate a need for academic language support, the parent is notified and services are started immediately. ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 is a language proficiency assessment administered to kindergarten through twelfth grade. In WIDA consortium member states, ELs take the ACCESS test annually to monitor students’ progress in acquiring academic English (WIDA, 08/04/2017). This assessment is one of multiple measures also used to determine if a student is ready to exit language support programs.

It is also evident that the parents feel that ESL services are for students who are either new to the country or those whose parents are not literate in English or their first language. It should be obvious that a parent who is not literate may not be able to assist their child with day to day homework skills but we need to remember that reading and writing are not the only tools for a successful student. There are other virtues like persistence and perseverance that play a role in student success. So, the parents can still be encouraged to help the students in other ways and not dismiss any efforts from their parents to help due to lack of literacy.

Another speculation that came up was that if a child was born in the United States, they spoke English well and therefore does not need EL support to be successful in school. This down plays the need for support for students who speak English as a second language or have another home language other than English. As Nelson, (1991) points out, unlike Native English speakers, EL writers require direct and deliberate

instruction to acquire grammatical and linguistic patterns that are acquired naturally acquired by native English speakers from their own language and culture. MDE Defines an ESL Program as a program for the instruction of pupils of limited English proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking (MDE, n.d.). According to MDE, an English language learner is a student who needs additional support developing academic language in English needed to be successful in school and beyond. According to the participants, ESL services were for those who did not speak English well inferring that speaking English well is good enough for academic success in school without EL support. But according to Cummings, there are two types of language acquisition, BICS and CALPS. It is clear the parents are not knowledgeable in the process of second language acquisition, which they are not required to, and it would be in the best interest of the EL teachers to make it part of their job to enlighten parents on the basics of second language acquisition in regard to social language and academic language.

I also picked up the notion that ESL services according to the participants were meant for support precisely in reading and writing. While the parents are partially right as studies have proved that ELs need direct instruction in writing and reading in order to acquire English language patterns that may not be in their native language, ESL Programs focus on all strands of language acquisition, speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The parents may not be aware of the academic benefits of giving support in all strands. As discussed in chapter one, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), asserts that participation in ESL Programs by ELs can improve students' English language proficiency which in turn, has been associated with improved educational outcomes. (NCES, 2015).

Another probable cause of denial of services for their children was the belief that all ESL services involved only a *'pull-out'* model. It is also not unheard of to find a school districts with separate schools for EL students, such that children living in the same neighborhood, end up going to separate schools from their native speaking neighbors. Although this may be true in some schools or districts, it is not a universal procedure in all schools. As I listened to the participants there was a shared fear of isolation from peers. I agree with the parents that pull-out model is the most common model used in schools but it is also clear that parents are not aware that there are other EL models as discussed in chapter one that are used by various schools. One participant mentioned that there were less prospects in an EL class compared to the challenging work offered in the mainstream class. This view by the parents interviewed is not new as seen in chapter one where Richard Rodriguez believed in sink or swim approach where EL students are placed in a class with no support. I personally think this is a risky path to take because, while it may work for some students, studies have proved that lack of or inadequate academic language support have led to an academic underachievement for the EL students.

My findings also indicated that there were concerns about what seemed to be an extended stay in the program. Some examples given were two years after starting the program students were still in the program. This extended from elementary school to middle school and sometimes from middle school to high school. The parents are partially right about their children speaking good English which is the everyday conversational language identified by Cummins 2001 as BICS. This type of language is acquired in about two years. What the parents may not be aware of is how long it takes

for students to be proficient CALP, which is the language targeted in ESL Programs in school for academic success. Cummins states that this takes up to five years depending on the student as each student is different. As stated in chapter, one child may need more time while another may only need a few years.

### **Recommendation**

We can conclude from these results that, teachers need to do a better job enlightening parents about the ESL Programs in their school. According to MDE, families of language learners have the right to know and understand how their child is progressing in his or her English language development (MDE, 8/03/2017). This includes all the basics like; entrance and exit criteria, testing and taking time to explain the test results for each individual student and sitting down with the parent and student and setting goals. This will include showing the parents and students where the student stands, what proficiency means and looks like and then setting an achievable goal. This is also echoed by WIDA that EL families are critical stakeholders and therefore by providing families with what it means to be an ELL, the WIDA standards and assessment and how to interpret student language proficiency scores, parents will be better prepared to have meaningful discussions about their Child's language instruction and progress (WIDA, 08/04/2017)

The Minnesota Department of Education has adopted WIDA, an educational consortium of state departments of education. Currently, 37 U.S. states and the District of Columbia as well as Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands depend on it as a valued resource in supporting the education of language learners. WIDA's mission is to advance academic language development and academic achievement for children and

youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse, through high quality standards, assessments, research and professional learning for educators. WIDA runs the ACCESS and WAPT tests given to students to screen for language support and eventually given annually to qualifying students to monitor their progress.

Although parents receive a notification indicating the entrance test given their student and an annual assessment is shared with them in their language of choice, my findings indicate that we need to do more than sending the letter home and meeting at conferences. It came into my attention in recent months that the Somali language was only put into print in the last decades and most of the parents may not actually be literate in Somali. This may shed some light into their resistance to ESL services based on the fact that even though the school is sending annual assessment data that shows student growth, the parents are not able to access that information due to their incapability to read in their first language. A goal setting meeting is merited at the beginning of the year. This would involve sitting down and explaining ACCESS test results and explaining what they mean in terms of normative growth, accelerated growth and proficiency.

Although the classroom teachers may take time to explain the students test scores, I think the EL teacher may need to present the same data to incorporate the two, making sure they are well understood. If the student growth was not adequate, then brainstorming with the parent what might be causing the lack of growth so that the EL teacher, classroom teacher and parents are all well informed and are in agreement.

As Omar pointed out, teachers may not always know their students beyond school and therefore teachers should reach out and get to know their students beyond the school walls. Home visits might be one way to get to know the children beyond school and to

open other doors of communication. According to Kronholz (2016), home visits improved student/teacher relationships, parent involvement in school, and hence school attendance and academic achievement.

### **Limitations**

The interviews were done with only three people which is a very tiny fraction of the total number of Somali families in the Midwest. Sometimes my questions were not understood and needed to be paraphrased. In one incident, I was given an answer that did not match the question and I could not interfere so I waited until the end and then paraphrased the question. Sometimes the responses were out of topic for the questions asked but yet relevant for a different question. One of the participants was not personally opposed to ESL services but had the opinion of others who questioned the effectiveness of the program.

During the interviews, some respondents stated that services were offered to students who needed support before they could get into a mainstream classroom. This might be the case in middle school and high school where students may be required to take an ESL class for a block that may not necessarily count towards their graduation obligations. Even though the classes are necessary for the student's success academically, students end up using a block of their school schedule receiving ESL services. This may be looked at by parents as a disadvantage to the student because the class is taking away time for other classes that count toward graduation. While in elementary level, the services provided are in addition to what the student receives from their classroom teacher and are required to be in addition to and not to replace classroom teacher instruction.

### **Future Research and Communication**

This research was meant to start a conversation about why some Somali parents refuse ESL services for their qualifying children? The findings in this study can be used a baseline to do further research. A survey could be developed using some of the findings to see how many other Somali and Non-Somali families in the same region have the same views and then using the results to make improvements to the ESL Programs provided in schools. The findings will be shared with other EL teachers in the school district and probably shared during a conference where other EL teachers are in attendance from different parts of the state.

### **Reflections/Conclusion**

I must say I was humbled beyond words hearing the parents speak about a program and services that are so dear to me. My most significant finding was that as an EL teacher, I have a lot more to do to ensure the parents who are the main stakeholders get more involved in the program. I have a responsibility to ensure that the parents get the information they need and that sending written information and report cards are not enough to satisfy the needs of our families in getting connected to school. I put the parents in a vulnerable situation to talk to me about a service that my children once benefited from, a program which I strongly advocate for. I always felt qualified to discuss all matters pertaining ESL services until I was the one on the other side of the desk and instead of being the parent, I was the one in the limelight. I believe, following this research, I am a better advocate not only for the students I teach but for their families.

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## APPENDIX A

**Letter of Informed Consent Requesting Permission of Adults to Take Part in  
Research: English**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in an interview. I am a graduate student at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I am doing a research with Somali parents of English Learner (EL) students around the metro area in the twin cities. The purpose of my study is to find out why Somali parents may resist ESL services for their children even when the children qualify. The findings will be stored and shared in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons. My results may also be shared in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference with colleagues. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

The interviews will be recorded and may last about 30 minutes. The interview questions will be provided ahead of time and an interpreter will be provided. There is little to no risk if you choose to be interviewed. No real names will be used. The interviews will be conducted at a place and time that are convenient for you. The interview recordings will be destroyed after completion of my study. Participation in the interview is voluntary and, at any time, you may decline to be interviewed or to have your interview content deleted from the capstone without negative consequences.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to me in person. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Kipchumba (EL Teacher)

Bel Air Elementary

762-318-9780

beckykoech@gmail.com , rkipchumba01@hamline.edu

*Keep this full page for your records.*

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be interviewing parents of EL students. I understand that being interviewed poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

---

Signature

---

Date:

## APPENDIX B

**Letter of Informed Consent Requesting Permission of Adults to Take Part in  
Research: Somali**

**Letter of oggolaansho la wargeliyey Codsashada Ogolaansho dadka waaweyn in ay  
Qayb Qaadashada Cilmi Baadhista**

Gacaliye \_\_\_\_\_,

Ujeeddada warqaddan waa in aad codsato in aad ka qayb-wareysi. Anigu waxaan ahay arday ka qalin at University Hamline, St. Paul, Minnesota. Iyadoo qayb ka ah shaqadayda graduate, Waxaan samaynayaa cilmi ah waalidiinta Soomaaliyeed ee Barashada Luqadda Ingiriiska (EL) ardayda ku wareegsan meesha metro ee magaalooyinka mataanaha ah. Ujeedada aan waxbarasho waa si aad u ogaato sababta waalidiinta Soomaaliyeed ay iska caabin ah waxaa laga yaabaa in adeegyada EL carruurtooda tan iyo markii carruurta u qalanto. Natiijooyinka ayaa lagu kayd in doonaa oo la wadaago ee Hamline ee Bush Library Commons Digital. Natiijooyinka My sidoo kale laga yaabaa in la wadaago in joornaal xirfadeed ama kulan shir ah oo khibrad leh asxaabta. Xaaladaha oo dhan, aqoonsigaaga iyo ka qayb qaadashada daraasaddan waa qarsoodi.

waraysiyada la duubi doono oo socon karaa ilaa 30 daqiiqo. su'aalaha wareysiga waxa la siin doonaa waqti kahor iyo turjubaan la siin doonaa. Waxaa jira in yar oo khatar ma aha haddii aad doorato in aad la waraystay. No magacyada dhab ah waxaa loo isticmaali doonaa. Waraysiyada waxaa lagu qaban doonaa meel iyo waqti in ay yihiin kuu haboon. cajalado Wareysiga waxaa loo wada baabbi'in doonaa marka la dhameystiro

aan waxbarasho. Ka qayb qaadashada waraysiga waa ikhtiyaari oo, mar kasta, aad hoos u dhici karta in ay la waraystay ama ay content wareysi aad la tirtiray ka dhagaxa aan cawaaqib xun.

Haddii aad ogolaato in ay ka qayb, this page sii. Buuxi heshiiska nuqul in ay ka qayb on page laba iyo waxa ii soo noqotaan oo qof. Haddii aad qabto wax su'aalo ah, fadlan ila soo xiriir.

Daacadnimo,

Rebecca Kipchumba (EL Macallin)

Beel Air Hoose

762-318-9780

beckykoech@gmail.com, rkipchumba01@hamline.edu

Ka dhig page this buuxda diiwaankaaga.

Waxaan helay waraaq ku saabsan daraasaddan cilmibaadhista taas oo aad loo wareeysto doonaa waalidiinta ardayda EL. Waxaan fahamsanahay in la waraystay waxay muujinaysaa wax yar in aan lahayn wax khatar ii, in aqoonsi la ilaalin doonaa, oo aan ka laaban kara ka qayb wareysi mashruuca mar kasta oo aan cawaaqib xun.

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Saxiixa

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Taariikhda:

## APPENDIX C

## Home Language Questionnaire


**Home Language Questionnaire**  
 ED-01336-08E

*The following is to be completed by School District Personnel:*

| STUDENT IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION  |       |                 |
|---|-------|-----------------|
| Student's Full Name   |       |                 |
| Date Of Birth   | Age   | Grade Level     |
| DISTRICT INFORMATION/VERIFICATION INFORMATION   |       |                 |
| School name   |       | District number |
| I hereby verify that the above information is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief. |       |                 |
| _____   |       |                 |
| Name (Printed)  |       |                 |
| _____   | _____ | _____           |
| Signature – Responsible Authority   | Title | Date            |

*The following is to be completed by Parent/Guardian:*

| STUDENT LANGUAGE INFORMATION  |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Dear Parents and Guardians:</i>  |  |
| <i>In order to help your child learn, your child's teachers need to determine which language your child uses most. Please respond to the questions below by checking the appropriate box.</i> |  |
| 1. Which language did your child learn first?   | <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____ |
| 2. Which language is most often spoken in your home?  | <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____ |
| 3. Which language does your child usually speak?  | <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____ |

| PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION  |       |
|--|-------|
| I hereby verify that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. |       |
| _____  |       |
| Name (Printed)   |       |
| _____  | _____ |
| Signature – Parent/Guardian  | Date  |

## APPENDIX D

**Interview Questions**

1. What do you know about the ESL Program in your child's school?
2. What are the most helpful things in the ESL Program you are familiar with?
3. What do you expect from an ESL Program?
4. What are some least helpful things you know in an ESL Program?
5. What are some of your experiences in an ESL Program?
6. Would you recommend the ESL Program to friends and family? Why or why not?
7. What are some suggestions you would have for an ESL Program?

## Demographic

1. Female  Male
2. Age  
 20-30 years \_\_\_\_\_ 31-40 years \_\_\_\_\_ 41-50 years \_\_\_\_\_ Above 50 years \_\_\_\_\_
3. Number of years in the U.S  
 0-2 years \_\_\_\_\_ 3-5 years \_\_\_\_\_ 6-10 years \_\_\_\_\_ Over 10 years \_\_\_\_\_
4. Highest Education Level  
 High School Diploma or GED  
 Bachelors  
 Post Graduate  
 Master and Above
5. Child/Children Participation in ESL Programs Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

**Interview: Abdullahi Transcript**

Demographics

Sex: Male

Age: 40-50 years

Number of years in the US: Over 10 years

Highest Level of Education: Bachelors

Child/Children Participation in the ESL program: No

**1. What do you know about the ESL Program in your child's school**

Response: I don't know about specific school ESL program but my brother's kids went to ESL classes. They went separate (pull out) speech classes. They get help with writing and reading. But in my kid's school, I don't know.

**2. What are the most helpful things in the ESL program you are familiar with?**

-One sibling told me they get extra help or attention maybe because of small group or ESL teacher herself has ESL background and they can help a lot.

**3. What are some least helpful things you know about the ESL program?**

My wife does not approve of ESL classes. She says there is isolation of students when they are pulled out of their classroom and this makes them feel inferior.

She says she does not see any reason to isolate them from their classroom affecting child's self-esteem. Also, the children were born here and they speak very good English and they don't need the extra help because they can speak really well.

**4. What do you expect from an ESL program?**

-I don't know, in my opinion, the programs help someone improve reading, writing in English.

**5. What are some of your experiences in an ESL program?**

My children did not go to ESL program so I don't know.

**6. Would you recommend the ESL program to friends and family**

-I don't recommend things that I don't believe in. For families who come from another country, like most families from East Africa are not literate in their own language, which means they cannot help with their kid's homework or school work, in that situation, I believe the kids will benefit from ESL programs. ESL is for the not privileged group. But for me I read to my kids and buy books.

**7. What are some suggestions you would have for an ESL program?**

-I don't know, in my opinion, the programs help someone improve reading, writing in English.

Try to convince the families and reach out to them about the ESL program.

## APPENDIX F

**Interview: Omar Transcript**

Demographics

Sex: Male:

Age: 30-40 years

Number of years in the US: Over 10 years

Highest Level of Education: Bachelors

Child/Children Participation in the ESL program: Yes

**1. What do you know about the ESL Program in your child's school?**

Okay, as far as ESL I would say not too much but that it's a process where students that need some development in the English language whether it is reading, writing, abilities

It is program that is setup to assist students before they get into the mainstream English for, for the schools.

**2. What are the most helpful things in the ESL program you are familiar with?**

-some helpful things that I have noticed is that teachers try to work with the student in their pace. A lot of students coming from different countries where English is their second language, struggle with the reading and the writing. And as you know we have different cultures have different ways of communicating, specifically in my culture, East African Culture, we are oral more Oral than anything else and so we see a lot of kids struggle and have difficulty in reading and writing and so teachers, one thing that I have noticed is that teachers they take their time to understand that this is

a different culture, and there is a different way to learn they take their time to work with students at their pace. Sometimes difficult in the mainstream because the teachers in the mainstream is expecting everyone in the mainstream classroom is are expected to have a common level of understanding and before they come into their class that is not always the case.

**3. What are some least helpful things you know about the ESL program?**

-least helpful things, aaa least helpful things again, I would say comes back to the teacher not being able to understand the students that he or she is working with. Not knowing the supports that are at home, a lot of these families that take ESL programs don't have the supports at home. The parents don't speak English, they don't necessarily know the benefits of enrolling their kids in after school programs, academic enrichment programs and so when you have teachers that are not aware of that information that have the student in the classroom, that is one of the things that causes or that might cause that student to have difficult time advancing in the English level.

**4. What do you expect from an ESL program?**

-I would expect for example if I have a kid in the ESL program obviously before they are put in the program, that they test the child to see what the level is and where they are supposed to be. In order for this kid to be in a mainstream program or in a mainstream English classroom, what needs to be done is explained and there is a timeline. One of the things that's not happen often is that there is no timeline that happens, A lot of the time you find a kid that started in the ESL program in third grade, fourth grade, you find this kid is still in the same

program in middle school and sometimes even in the high school, and then you start to question, is this an effective program there is an expectation that there is development if the kid is in the ESL program that the kids making progress.

**5. What are some of your experiences in an ESL program?**

-uhm, my experiences you know are...is it is working with for families who have kids in ESL program dealing with teachers and students and the parents, I would say it goes back to kind of getting an overview of what the program is about, what is being taught in this classroom, other than that I don't really have the experience very direct experience with the program.

**6. Would you recommend the ESL program to friends and family?**

It depends, some programs are a lot more effective than others, usually for families that have kids that need minimal support, I would not recommend ESL services. I would instead recommend that this kid be in the mainstream program while they are getting support in the classroom that is the mainstream classroom. In the mainstream classroom, there is more expectation and a little more challenging especially for families that have kids that need more support. As far as for kids whose parents do not speak English as a first language, and the kid is new to the country, I think the ESL program is a program that have been shown to be effective if you have the right things in place.

**7. What are some suggestions you would have for an ESL program?**

-I have a lot of suggestions so I will just talk about a few. One suggestion I would mention is a lot of these programs, parents enroll their kids in, parents I would say parents don't necessarily have all the information, they don't know what the program is

they don't know what the outcome is supposed to be. I would suggest that they have a sit down with the parents with a very in-depth explanation of what will look like for this kid, what is expected for the child to accomplish every year, parents know what they are supposed to be doing at home and that the teachers know that the parents have a good understanding of what is expected of the child.

## APPENDIX G

**Interview: Fatima Transcript**

Demographics

Sex: Female (Fatima)

Age: 30-40 years

Number of years in the US: Over 10 years

Highest Level of Education: Less than High School Diploma

Child/Children Participation in the ESL program: Yes

**1. What do you know about EL? about the ESL Program in your child's school?**

-I know it's provided in my district, and I know that eeh my kids can enroll and I can take them off anytime I want. And I know as a parent my kids benefit from it. Not all my kidz went to ESL but some of them did and they benefit from that and they grew out of ESL to become better English Learner.

**2. What are the most helpful things in the ESL program (that) you are familiar with?**

-Grammar, (oh ha) yah, Aah because I've seen kids, because my kids noticed kids from, my country who born here and they speak the same English but still different. Understand? (Yah)

**3. What are some least helpful things you know about the ESL program?**

Ahh just that small group, and in one class kids benefit from it, a lot. That's what I've seen with my children he my twenty year old now, he went here and he was having ESL classes and he did fantastic yah! (that's good)

Sometimes I feel like it goes a long time maybe it the kids maybe it's the program how they teach.

**(What were some things that were not helpful with the ESL program)**

Mmmh! Sometimes I feel it goes like aam it takes long time some kids to grow out of it. Maybe it's the kids maybe it's the program how they teach, maybe its usual sometimes I feel it takes a long time from for example second grade to fifth grade some kids they go to middle school, high school, so again it depends on yah yah teaching kids I don't know. That's little bit, I wish like they have a goal, like set a goal, like the we have this goal to teach like from like second grade to fifth grade that kid to exit ESL.

**4. What do you expect from an ESL program? (As a parent)**

-Aah to continue and to make sure that they provide more information for parents like me, aah how the kids benefit from it and how to how they grow out of ESL to become English Learner. Proficient English learner

**5. What are some of your experiences in an ESL program? (Some things that happened or you experienced in an ESL program)**

Mmm! Only I can say positive, from my experience, positive, because ahh I have seen the kids academically ( mmh ) from where they were and where they are now, so that's why.

**6. Would you recommend the ESL program to friends and family?**

Absolutely!

**(And why would you recommend it?)**

Because I have seen the benefits

**7. What are some suggestions you would have for an ESL program?**

-again, to provide more information to the parents and that's

**Note: I know you said yes for me to interview you, but what about other parents that you know**

-not all parents but some of the parents I speak with, they say, this kid is born here in America, He is a citizen, is born here in Minnesota, why would he go to ESL class, I wouldn't say the word discrimination but I think they feel like their kid left behind or not go on track with the other kids, at the same grade level that they are, but they are, that's the most parent afraid of, (is for their child to feel discriminated against). I don't want to use that word but something like that like taking out of the class (in the pull out) yah the pull and not being part of that class and still behind.

So you think they are missing out in their c

So, you think they feel

Well that makes sense

**Anything else:**

That's information they know ESL is like for English beginners but it's like their kids were born here they are not English beginners. (okay wau)