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## Exploring Adult Punjabi-Speaking Immigrants' Path To English Language Acquisition: A Case Study

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EXPLORING ADULT PUNJABI-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS' PATH TO ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY

By

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A DISSERTATION

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2015

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Abstract

Punjabi-speaking immigrants to the United States find many successes and face many challenges as they strive to become full citizens of their new communities. There are success stories and obstacles faced by immigrants as they embark upon a journey from another country. This study examined what major obstacles Punjabi speaking immigrants face when they immigrated from India, including poverty, lack of employment, and stress specifically related to moving from the Punjabi to English language that ultimately affect the acculturation process for the entire family. The study also looked at support received by Punjabi immigrants from others in the community and at the workplace. Interviews were conducted with 10 participants, of which five were former employees and five were individuals from the community. Their experiences and stories shaped the focus of this study. There were three major findings from this study. First, the native language was an obstruction to understanding. Second, English language is so essential to the execution of common tasks that Punjabi speakers experienced Maslow level-one fears. Third, learning a language is a function of community, and for Punjabi speakers, community cannot be assumed to exist at the language center. The greatest amount of support received by the participants was at the workplace. The workplace was a safe haven in which they could practice their English skills freely and be supported by their colleagues.

University of New England  
Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership  
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“Progressive organizations give power to employees as well as invest in their development. Empowerment includes keeping employees informed, but it doesn’t stop there. It also involves encouraging autonomy and participation, redesigning work, fostering teams, promoting egalitarianism, and infusing work with meaning” (Bolman & Deal, 2008 p. 149).

I would like to begin by saying that we are all unique and have different ways of greeting everyone we come across. For example, “Welcome to the supermarket and deli” (English) or “Namaste, store mein anaaa kaa shookriyad” (Hindi). I present my research topic, which will take us on a journey from India with recent immigrants who would like to share their English-learning experience in the United States. They will discuss obstacles faced and support they received that helped them achieve their goals.

This journey started with a young man by the name of Pankaj (myself) who emigrated from India with his family at the age of 10. Pankaj’s mother and father hardly spoke a word of English and worked as migrant farm laborers. He witnessed the hurdles they encountered first hand, as work was hard to find and limited communication skills made it that much more difficult to keep food on the table. From these experiences Pankaj shaped a vision, realizing that he wanted to change things and wanted to provide opportunities for individuals struggling to speak English as a second language in the United States.

Pankaj’s vision surfaced 11 years later, when he became a partner in his first supermarket and deli in Northern California. His vision provided opportunities to many immigrant families who were struggling to find work because of their limited English-speaking skills. He shares his story because it connects people with his goals and ambitions to do more to help these English-language learners. Brown (2006) noted that “stories show what people do. Stories connect us to

actions, not abstractions. Stories connect people directly with one another with a power that generalities miss” (p. 33). Here are stories about what immigrants from India did to learn English make their way in their new communities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Immigrants to the United States find many successes and face many challenges as they strive to become full citizens of their new communities. There are success stories but there are also obstacles faced by immigrants as they embark upon a journey from another country. This study will examine what major obstacles some immigrants face when they embark upon their journey from India, including poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and other stressors that ultimately affect the acculturation process for the entire family. However, perhaps the biggest obstacle facing Punjabi language immigrants is learning the English language, which is the special focus of this study. The study will also look at support received by Punjabi immigrants, including support from others in the community and at the workplace.

The journey to the United States for an immigrant is not the end of their struggles but for many is the beginning of a long succession of obstacles they are about to face. Many East Indian immigrants come to the United States as single men, many of whom leave a wife and children in India, as nuclear families often with school-aged children, or as extended family members joining already settled relatives. The inability to express one's self through the English language can be a difficult and emotional obstacle to face for new immigrants. Due to the inability to speak English many employers refrain from hiring immigrants, which further compounds the struggles and obstacles they face. The immigrant journey for those making their home in the United States can be strenuous and intimidating for many.

Language barriers are a fundamental hurdle for immigrants and appear to stop them from making vital connections in their communities. Garrett (2006a) described an experience from an

Arab immigrant in New Jersey who cried because she was unable to answer a simple question at a grocery store. Garrett noted the immigrant said, “So, I cried, not for the food, but because I was unable to express myself in English” (p. 5). Many immigrants also feel their personal life suffers from the numerous daily strains of not finding any work. Immigrants tend to feel they are growing apart from their children due to the language barrier and are also suffering from the inability to provide for their family.

Immigrants who are unable to communicate effectively in the new language find themselves in situations where they are unable to acculturate because of the stress associated with the language barrier. The stress factor further prolongs the ability to learn the new language as other factors such as low motivation and anxiety can combine to form a mental block that can prevent learning from taking place.

In Chapter 2 the literature review will set the stage for understanding the immigrant experiences of those who must learn to speak English in the United States. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study. In Chapter 4 the interviews will capture meaningful data regarding the immigrant experience in the home, workplace and community; gather their perceptions about obstacles they faced; and capture their experience with language acquisition. In Chapter 5 analysis of the data in light of the literature may be useful to others interested in providing opportunities to those who might be struggling to learn English in the United States.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Lack of English facility prevents employment, which either causes poverty or continues it. Unfortunately, there have been many instances where new immigrants and their children have been unable to escape the poverty they left behind in their native countries because they lacked the English language communication skills needed to secure even a minimum-wage job and provide for their families. As Slavin and Madden (1998) noted, “On the average, higher

percentages of English language learner (ELL) students come from families mired in poverty” (p. 100).

Poverty leads to stress and a lack of acculturation and further blocks the immigrant English learner from achieving his or her language goals because they are distracted tasks required for daily survival. Martinez and Wang (2010) stated that “limited English proficient families were also twice as likely to report experiencing food insecurity and hunger than English proficient families” (p. 16). A research study by Children’s Health Watch (2010) concluded that food insecurity played a significant role in the increasing rates of fair or poor child health, especially among those who are children of immigrants. The struggles faced by the immigrant become struggles for the entire family—including the children, who typically are facing similar concerns, such as striving to become a part of their new social network and becoming acculturated with their new environment. Slavin and Madden (1998) noted,

Also, the parents of ELL students usually cannot use the English language adequately, and, as a result, find it difficult to help their children function in an English speaking world ultimately resulting in many new immigrants returning to their native countries. (p. 100)

It may be that speaking a limited amount of English is the biggest contributor to less than successful acculturation and financial security for Punjabi immigrants as they try to establish a home as new residents of the United States.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore adult Punjabi-speaking immigrants’ path to English language acquisition. The immigrant stories shared by the participants may reveal many clues to the paths individuals took to learn to speak English in the United States. Perhaps the interviews will show that there is a commonality that exists amongst the responses that occur

when individuals first immigrate to the United States and encounter great difficulties. Perhaps these interviews may also show that there are ways to help immigrants overcome such hurdles and make it easier for individuals to succeed in learning English in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions sought to determine how emigrants from India learned to speak English in the United States. The first five participants in this study received English-language-learning support at the workplace while they were employees of the researcher. The second five participants were immigrants from the community who learned to speak English through other means available to them.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What experiences helped or hindered newcomers from India in learning English in the United States?
2. What were the experiences of adult Punjabi-language speakers while learning English in their: (a) home setting? (b) workplace setting? and (c) community setting?
3. Do Punjabi-language speakers identify major obstacles they had to overcome as they were learning English?
4. How do adult Punjabi-language speakers describe their continued growth in language acquisition after they left employment with the researcher or other significant employment?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework illustrates a journey taken by most immigrants from India (see Figure 1). The theoretical concepts that inform the research aligned with participant experiences moving from one experience to the next. Each experience is supported with a literature review section explaining its relevance. The journey starts with the experience of being an immigrant and includes the obstacles faced by most immigrants. Those obstacles consist of

poverty, lack of language acquisition, lack of employment, and other stressors. Each of these obstacles are major factors that contribute to more general life challenges that newly arrived English-language learners have to overcome.

**Poverty.** Many immigrants come from situations of extreme poverty. Due to a lack of income many newly arrived immigrants have to settle in areas where there is a high level of poverty and crime or in rural farming communities. Rhodes (2005) stated, “new immigrants to the US typically first settle in highly segregated areas of deep poverty either with urban contexts or in rural farming communities. Unfortunately, their neighborhoods are often plagued with gangs and their schools are often overcrowded and poorly funded” (p. 2).

**Lack of language acquisition.** Today, as in the past, limited English proficiency remains one of the most critical challenges facing many immigrant families. Martinez and Wang (2010) concluded that

limited English proficiency impedes immigrants’ ability to improve their employment prospects and increase their earnings. It also limits their ability to help their children prepare for and succeed in school. Limited English skills can drive a wedge between the generations, as adolescent children immersed in English at school lose their first language and parents struggle to gain fluency in English. (p. 5)

**Lack of employment.** Due to the high rates of immigration, limited English proficient individuals have great difficulty finding secure jobs and sometimes even temporary jobs. Martinez and Wang (2010) noted immigrants who have a limited amount of English proficiency have difficulty finding employment and those who do are limited in their chances for a raise in the near future. Unemployment and underemployment contribute to creating or worsening living conditions for immigrants and their families.



**Other stressors.** Learning English in the United States is not only difficult to achieve but for many can be very stressful. According to Krashen (1982), the difficulties faced by English language learners are further compounded due to the stresses of acculturation. Chun, Marin, and Organista (2010) defined acculturation as “a culture learning process experienced by individuals who are exposed to a new culture or ethnic group” (p. 102). Stress results due to adjustments to new environments and social norms and is further complicated due to the stress of having to learn a new language (Vernez, Abrahamse, & Quigley, 1996). Krashen’s (1982) research suggested that many immigrants who face stressful situations are also unable to learn English because their affective filter is on high, which prevents language communication from occurring.

**How adults learn.** The next portion of the conceptual framework examines how adults learn and what influences and/or opportunities come into play to make learning possible. Influences such as motivation and having the opportunity to learn English are a part of the immigrant English-learning experience. Finally, having support from others makes a difference in learning the target language, English, and will be discussed in detail in the literature review.

**Workplace learning.** The last concept in the conceptual framework is workplace learning. Workplace learning is support provided at the workplace. Workplace learning emphasizes the role the employer plays in helping the English learner to achieve his or her target language goal(s). Each of the preceding theoretical concepts informs the research and leads to this last concept.

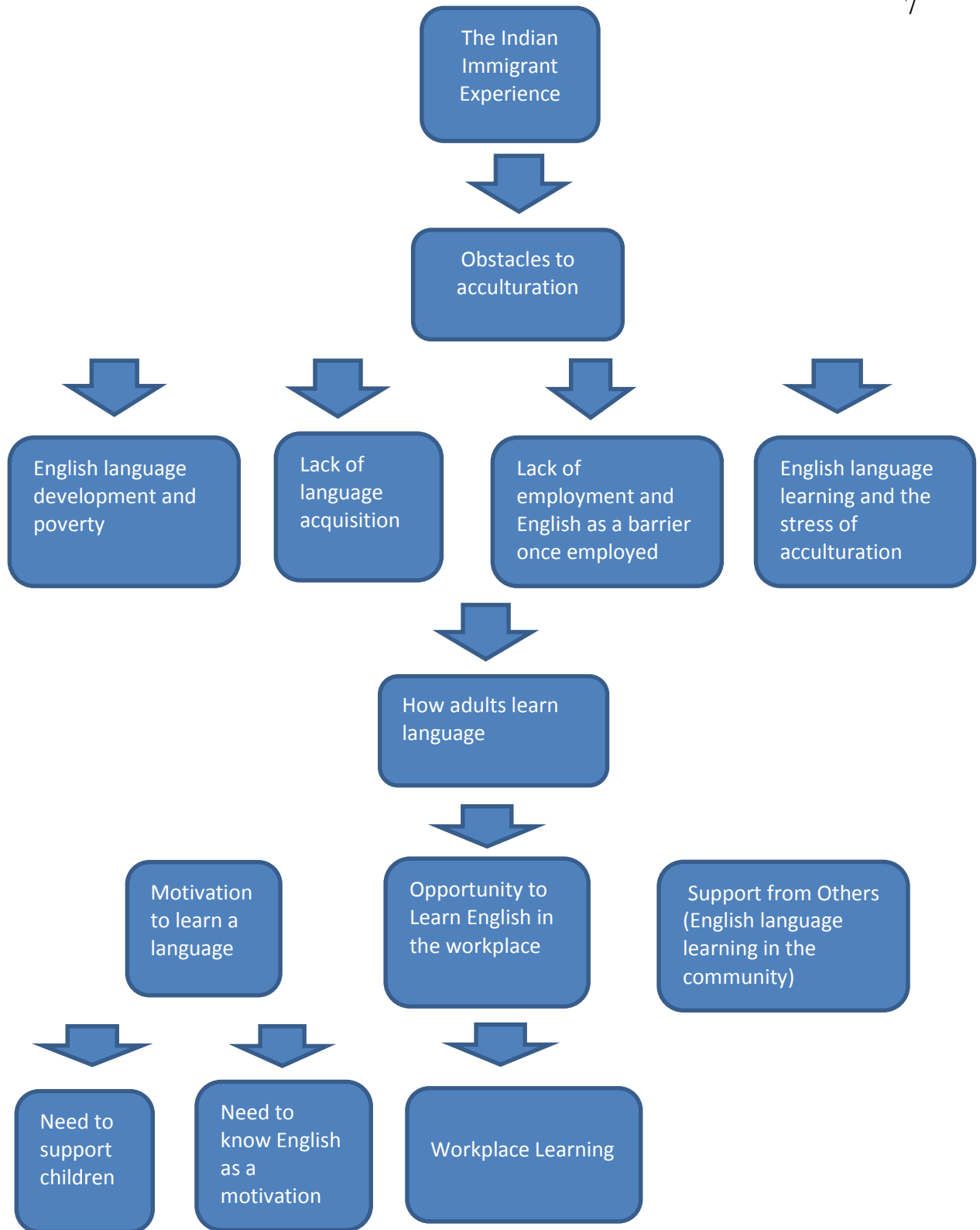


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

The researcher asked five former employees and five individuals from the community to participate in the study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) cited Maxwell (2005) who discussed participant reactivity. Maxwell (2005) described participant reactivity as “a related limitation in which interviewees have difficulty adjusting to the researcher taking on the role of the interviewer because the participants knew the researcher” (p. 127). Recognizing these limitations the researcher took the following measures. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) noted, “First, they acknowledge their research agenda and stated their assumptions up front” (p. 126). In order to reduce the limitation of potential bias during the data analysis the researcher did, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested, “remove all participant names and code all interview transcripts blindly so as not to associate any material or data with any particular individual” (p. 127). The goal of the researcher was to limit bias and have a transparent study which will share the stories of those who embark upon a journey from India to the United States speaking a limited amount of English.

## **Significance**

Stakeholders such as community support organizations and other entrepreneurs who operate similar businesses may benefit from the stories that will be shared by the 10 participants during the interviews. The findings uncovered by the interviews may assist entrepreneurs in understanding the hurdles and challenges many immigrants face when they come to the United States from India. Stakeholders can influence change by becoming aware of these struggles and offering support to those with situations similar to the struggling English language learners who participated in this study.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined English-language learners who emigrated from India to the United States. The literature review will offer a synthesis of related research and a conceptual framework for the study and the methods chosen to engage participants in the type of study that allows understanding the experiences of immigrant English learners. Chapter 2 will examine the literature and current research regarding immigrant poverty, stress, and language acquisition. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology, the type of data that was collected, and how it was analyzed. Chapter 4 will discuss the specific data collected from the interviews and its analysis, and Chapter 5 will provide recommendations, conclusions and further implications of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The immigrant journey for those making their home in the United States can be strenuous and intimidating for many. There are obstacles to overcome for those who wish to establish a sustainable standard of living including obtaining employment and English language acquisition, both of which are essential to survive above a level of poverty. The literature review focuses on immigrants as they experience poverty, language learning, and gaining employment. It further examines how adults learn, what motivates them, what they need to know to gain employment; what opportunities must be present for them to learn; and what support they need to make learning a reality.

#### **The Indian Immigrant Experience**

The immigrant experience of those who emigrate to the United States from other foreign countries including India can be full of challenges, especially when it comes to surviving with only a limited amount of English. Individuals immigrate to the United States for many reasons that include fleeing difficult economic and political circumstances. However, there are some immigrants who end up retreating to their native country, overwhelmed by their circumstances, while others are able to succeed and make a life for themselves and their family in the United States.

India is the third most frequent country of origin for United States immigrants, and East Indians are one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the United States with a population that exceeds one million (US Census Bureau, 2010). Many East Indian immigrants come to the United States as single men, many of whom leave a wife and children in India. Others arrive

with nuclear families with school-age children, or as extended family members joining already settled relatives. Many Indian immigrants are fleeing poverty and harsh living conditions.

Baptiste (2005) concluded,

They come to the United States to escape dismal economic and social conditions in their home countries, to improve their educational and/or professional opportunities, to improve their economic condition, and to ultimately ensure a better life for themselves, and their families. (p. 346)

Individuals who emigrate from India to the United States bring with them their goals for a successful life in the United States. While striving to achieve their goals they often become overburdened by stressors that ultimately cause them to retreat to their native country. Santosh Joshi, who has resided in a central valley town in California for the past 45 years, commented on this struggle. She immigrated with her husband and children to the United States for a better future for herself and her family. Joshi and her husband worked diligently and achieved success in the United States while many of their fellow immigrants did not. She stated,

I had family who immigrated to the United States looking for a better future but left the country and returned to India because they could not face the struggles most immigrants face. They could not find a job to support their family back home and they also did not speak good English. (Personal correspondence, October 4, 2014)

There are many benefits and obstacles associated with immigrating to the United States. Once an immigrant and their family embark on a journey to the United States the obstacles they face can be overwhelming and for some unbearable. Each individual's experience helps determine the path to their success or failure. Failure can result in a return back to the life they left behind.

## **Indian Culture and Language**

While all non-English-speaking immigrants face enculturation challenges, Punjabi speakers have an additional burden of starting from a place where translation to English is hindered by the structure of the language. Here is some historical background about the Punjab people:

The Punjab means the land of the five rivers. It has a history that flows from the ancient civilization of the Indus valley in approximately 2000 BC, through a series of empires and Mogul dynasties, to the founding of Sikhism in the 15th century. It is important to note that Sikhism is neither sectarian nor communal. Although it gave the Punjab a unique culture, its gift was secular tolerance in government and public life. The Punjab came under British rule in the 19th century and, on independence in 1947, the region was split between India and Pakistan, leaving a much smaller state of Punjab. (McDonnell, 2000, p. 7)

The Punjabi language is spoken in many Western countries, and in each setting, Punjabi speakers are moving from an ancient language to a complex, modern language:

Punjabi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by about 130 million people mainly in West Punjab in Pakistan and in East Punjab in India. There are also significant numbers of Punjabi speakers in the UK, Canada, the UAE, the USA, Saudi Arabia and Australia. Punjabi descended from the Shauraseni language of medieval northern India and became a distinct language during the 11th century. (Omniglot, 2015, p. 1)

One of the reasons the transition to English is so challenging is that the Punjabi language is tonally complex, rather than have many words for one idea:

Modern Punjabi is a very tonal language, making use of various tones to differentiate words that would otherwise be identical. Three primary tones can be identified: high-

rising-falling, mid-rising-falling, and low rising. By using these tones properly, Punjabi language speakers are able to differentiate between words that otherwise appear to be the exact same as one another. (Accredited Language Services, 2015, para. 8-9)

Dr. Sodhi, an English lecturer from Guru Kashi University in Punjab, India stated, “There is only one word to explain something in the Punjabi language. This is why you have individuals using the same word to express their thoughts when you talk to them in Punjabi” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). In essence, there is only one word in the Punjabi language to express something versus having many cognates. Jernail Singh, who is a retired principal in Northern California, stated,

Punjabi language commonly only has one word to explain something. You can't substitute another word for it. There are hundreds of millions of Punjabi speakers worldwide. It is very easy to converse with them once you get to know the vocabulary. (personal communication, June 01, 2015)

In essence, this characteristic results in individuals who speak Punjabi using the same word over and over to express their feelings.

The Punjabi language has historical roots dating back to 2000 BC as described above. It is spoken by over 130 million people all over the world. The tones of the language are different but, as Dr. Sodhi explained above during his interview, there is generally only one word to express a thought. There are not many cognates; therefore, individuals who speak Punjabi use only one word to express an idea. Therefore, the researcher was expecting similar vocabulary words to be used when he conducted his study with the participants.

### **Obstacles to Acculturation**

A safe arrival to the United States for an immigrant is not the end of the obstacles they will face, but for many is just the beginning of a long succession of new obstacles. The inability



to express one's self through the English language can be a difficult and emotional obstacle faced by many new immigrants. Another obstacle immigrants face is unemployment. Employment opportunities are very scarce for those individuals who speak limited English. Due to some immigrants' inability to speak English many employers refrain from hiring them. This liability further compounds the struggles and obstacles faced by many immigrants as they strive to provide for their family and acculturate into their new community.

Abraham Maslow's (1970) motivational pyramid, traditionally described as one of 'needs', proposes a hierarchical structure of values. In Maslow's scheme, biological needs are prepotent—people generally value (and will seek) sustenance of the body, protection from pain and danger, and facilitation of pleasure in preference to activities that do not serve this end. When biological needs are largely satisfied, social needs (values) are pursued: acceptance by others; a sense of belongingness; receipt of attention, approval, and praise. Once secure in the social realm, psychological values—those regarding achievement, knowledge, and understanding—are often pursued. Finally, people tend to pursue even 'higher' values of beauty, self-actualization, creation, and transcendence of identity barriers. One implication of Maslow's structure is that when a person is forced to choose between a behavior that only fulfills a lower-order need and one that only fulfills a higher-order need, it is natural to choose the former. (Miller & Rollnick, 2002, pp. 285-286).

Saul Mcleod (2007), author of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, indicated, "Maslow stated, 'people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled, a person seeks to fulfill the next one and so on'" (p. 1). Maslow's hierarchy of needs are divided into the following five:

1. Biological and physiological needs—food, shelter, and a safe haven.

2. Safety needs—protection from fear itself, order, and stability.
3. Love and belongingness needs—love from family, friends, and community.
4. Esteem needs—achieving a certain benchmark and establishing a status.
5. Self-actualization needs—realizing one’s own potential and striving for personal growth.

An emigrant from India arrives in the United States with a biological need for food and a physiological need for a safe haven and shelter. The biological need for food has to be met before an immigrant is able to move onto the next stage of finding a safe haven for their family. Next, their safety needs have to be met before they can overcome their fear of speaking to others in English. Language barriers are not easily overcome and prevent them from becoming acculturated to their new community. The next stage in the hierarchy of need, love, and belongingness is essential because immigrants must be supported during their learning. This takes place in the form of support given by the community and friends and family. The next hierarchy of needs is esteem. This takes place after immigrants learn English, gain approval, acculturate into the new community, and can help others do the same. The last need, self-actualization, occurs when immigrants have met the first four needs and have begun to experience greater achievements in life.

Garrett (2006b) cited the Lake Snell Perry Mermin/Decision Research (LSPM/DR) study, conducted using 32 focus groups between May 2004 and March 2005 in 10 cities across the United States, during which researchers spoke with immigrants about the hurdles they encountered in their daily lives. These immigrants were desperate to learn English and were willing to do what it took to keep their anxiety level under control. For many immigrant families commonplace tasks such taking a bus from point A to point B, grocery shopping, or finding a doctor were overwhelming.

Language barriers are a fundamental hurdle for immigrants and appear to stop them from making vital connections in their communities. Garrett (2006a) described an experience from an Arab immigrant in New Jersey who cried because she was unable to answer a simple question at the grocery store. Garrett noted the immigrant said, “So, I cried, not for the food, but because I was unable to express myself in English” (p. 5). The LPSM/DR study shared other stories as told by immigrants who faced language obstacles when they immigrated to the United States. For example, one Chinese immigrant in Chicago was in a car accident and could not describe his role in the car accident to the investigating police officer. Another experience was shared by an Arab immigrant who went to the hospital emergency room after she fainted and came home without treatment or medication because she could not communicate with her providers about her health condition. Many immigrants from the LPSM/DR study felt they could not improve their lives and/or get a job until they learned to speak English in the United States.

Garrett’s (2006a) study also noted many participants claimed “their family life suffers from numerous daily strains due to the lack of not finding work and parents feel they are growing apart from their children” (p. 5). Immigrants were having a great deal of difficulty finding secure jobs due to their inability to speak English and therefore faced poverty-like conditions. The current era of immigration has included a large percentage of labor migrants with less than a high school education who are drawn to construction and other services types of work. Singer, Suro, and Wilson (2011) stated, “Aside from requiring little schooling, those jobs share at least three other characteristics: low pay; conditional, often temporary, and increasingly suburban locations” (p. 11).

Martinez and Wang (2010) noted that, due to the barriers to getting a job in the United States, “limited English proficient families experience greater levels of economic distress than their English-fluent counterparts” (p. 15). The authors further noted “higher levels of joblessness

lead to greater poverty levels amongst Limited English proficient individuals” (p. 15). Poverty is the direct result of being unemployed, which leads to unbearable conditions for many families and their children. Sometimes the difficulties they encounter are so severe that many immigrants return to their native countries.

### **English Language Development and Poverty**

Unfortunately, many immigrants who are unable to find work due to their inability to communicate effectively face poverty. Limited English-proficient families are much more likely to face poverty-like conditions than those who are English-proficient. Dealing with poverty often leads to immigrants having to reside in areas where there are high levels of unemployment, resulting in possibilities of increased crime and violence amongst the newcomers. Further, poverty often results in individuals not receiving proper medical care and children having to struggle with hunger and emotional distress.

Many immigrants come from situations of extreme poverty. Because of financial constraints, many newly arrived immigrants have to settle in areas where there is a high level of poverty and crime or in rural farming communities. Rhodes (2005) stated, “New immigrants to the US typically first settle in highly segregated areas of deep poverty either with urban contexts or in rural farming communities. Unfortunately, their neighborhoods are often plagued with gangs and their schools are often overcrowded and poorly funded” (p. 2). Rhodes commented that children who are raised in such difficult environments often experience anxiety, depression, and delinquency. Settling into farming communities often keeps new immigrants isolated and away from resources such as adult education and public medical and financial support facilities. According to Singer et al. (2011), there are 2.7 million foreign-born poor immigrants in the suburbs, which represents one of every five suburban resident living in poverty. A combination of these characteristics often leads to poverty-like conditions for immigrants who are already

facing difficult situations. Statistics reveal many students who are English Language learners (ELL) come from poverty-stricken environments. Slavin and Madden (1999) stated that “on the average, higher percentages of ELL students come from families mired in poverty” (p. 16).

Conditions of poverty often cause great difficulty for the entire family. Children experience emotional distress from living in such conditions. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2014) reported,

More than 24 percent of the nation’s children—over 17 million—have at least one foreign-born parent. Immigrant families are disproportionately likely to experience poverty and other hardships that can place children at risk, and research points to significant gaps in meeting their needs. (p. 3)

A study conducted in Los Angeles and New York examined limited English proficient individuals and poverty (Martinez and Wang, 2010). The study concluded,

Limited English proficient families with children were nearly three times as likely to live in poverty as similar English proficient immigrant families and limited English proficient families were also twice as likely to report experiencing food insecurity and hunger than English proficient immigrant families. (pp. 15-16)

A research study by the Children’s Health Watch (2010) concluded food insecurity played a significant role in the increasing rates of only fair or poor child health, especially among those who are children of immigrants. Lack of nutrition and food insecurity are major obstacles facing children who live in poverty-like conditions, especially impacting the child’s ability to succeed in school and ultimately in life. Limited English proficient families face great economic difficulties and, as the study noted, when immigrants have children, the entire family is stricken with poverty-like living conditions. Limited English language acquisition profoundly exacerbates family poverty.

For many new immigrants who are facing poverty, finding housing can be very difficult. Garrett (2006a), author of *Living in America: Challenges Facing New Immigrants*, conveyed that many immigrants spent months with their extended families when they first arrive in the United States, often cramped in small quarters. Though eager to move from this stressful environment, they have no place to go. A recent immigrant was cited in the LSPM/DR study as stating, “I was paying 60% of my income towards rent and I was hiding my youngest child. If I didn’t do that, they would have required me to rent a three-bedroom apartment which I can’t afford. I was hiding my youngest for two years” (p. 10). Many states place a ceiling on the number of individuals who can reside in one dwelling. Therefore, immigrants are forced to hide their children and reside in very tight quarters. Additionally many landlords ask for employment verification and prior rental history, which many new immigrants are unable to provide, further limiting their ability to find proper housing.

Immigrants who live in poverty-like conditions have difficulty accessing medical care for themselves and their children, which often prolongs illnesses and other harmful health conditions. The United States National Library of Medicine (2010) stated that children of immigrants are more likely than others to have only fair or poor health and to lack health insurance. The study further notes immigrant children and their families tend to be poor, uninsured, and uneducated. The strong correlation with poverty and lack of access to health care is such that the study found that between 1987 and 2007, 71 percent of individuals without health care residing in the United States were immigrants.

### **Language Acquisition**

Today, as in the past, limited English proficiency remains one of the most critical challenges facing many immigrant families. Martinez and Wang (2010) concluded,

Limited English proficiency impedes immigrants' ability to improve their employment prospects and increase their earnings. It also limits their ability to help their children prepare for and succeed in school. Limited English skills can drive a wedge between the generations, as adolescent children immersed in English at school lose their first language and parents struggle to gain fluency in English. (p. 5).

Due to the high rates of immigration, limited English proficient individuals have great difficulty finding secure jobs and sometimes even temporary jobs. Martinez and Wang (2010) noted that immigrants who have a limited amount of English proficiency have difficulty finding employment and limit their chances for a raise in the near future. Unemployment and underemployment contribute to difficult living conditions for immigrants and their families. They concluded that English fluency is associated with an astonishing 76 percent in higher earnings compared with a modest 4 percent for those with fewer English-speaking abilities. Language acquisition is essential especially when it comes to job security and income gratification.

The entire family suffers in one way or another when there is no source of income coming into the household. Martinez and Wang (2010) claimed, "their family life suffers from numerous daily strains due to the lack of not finding work and parents feel they are growing apart from their children" (p. 5). It is often the case when parents are unable to speak English clearly or understand English that the lack of English fluency can undermine a parent's ability to protect, guide, and motivate their children to succeed. Lack of communication skills puts the parents in a position where they tend to exclude themselves from their children's educational career path, often resulting in difficulties for the entire family. These researchers also indicated that parents who speak limited English and lack knowledge of American culture can seriously hinder their child's education. The reason for this is because they are not aware of programs

available to their children at an early age such as Head Start because the literature is in English and has not been translated. Monolingual parents also have difficulty communicating with their children's teachers because they do not know how to speak English. Lack of English communication skills can lead to very difficult situations for the entire family, and can have long-term impacts on their children's future.

Martinez and Wang (2010) further noted that "between 1970 and 2003, the U.S. foreign-born population tripled to an estimated 33.5 million and accounted for almost 12 percent of the U.S. population" (p. 11). Studies show almost one in five working adults between the ages of 18 and 55 speak a language other than English at home. The inability to speak English effectively often results in immigrants not participating in civic events within their communities and also puts them in a position where they are not able to vote or become naturalized citizens. In order to become a United States citizen one must be able to effectively communicate with an immigration officer to a certain extent. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office invites immigrants who have resided in the United States for at least 3 years to apply to become United States citizens. According to the USCIS website (2014), in order to effectively pass the test an individual must be able to communicate effectively with the immigration officer and answer questions pertaining to their application for citizenship.

There are many benefits associated with learning English, such as employment opportunities, support of children's success, and the ability to engage in civic activities. Children also benefit from learning English, which makes them better able to succeed in school and extracurricular activities. Children who do not learn English while in school face difficult situations navigating within and outside of school, and some drop out due to the stress factors faced when attending school. These factors contribute to their lack of academic success and employability.



## **English as a Barrier Once Employed**

Many new immigrants are overcome with the challenge of finding a job that provides a sustainable living while those who do find a job are often fired because of language barriers. Employment opportunities hinge on language skills, age, and employer's interpretation of immigrants' previous skills and knowledge from the home country.

A study conducted by the Washington College of Law (2010) examined a large employer in the Maryland and Delaware area who hired workers in the crab industry. According to the study, many individuals who were in management positions in the crab industry spoke only English while workers who knew English only as a second language had great difficulty communicating with their management team. The study noted workers who spoke English as a second language were often forced to communicate through hand gestures. Many new immigrants were fired or faced dangerous situations due to their lack of English knowledge. The study noted,

The language barrier makes it difficult for employees to express day-to-day concerns, creating an atmosphere of misunderstanding that can jeopardize worker safety.

Employers are likewise unable to convey basic information about workplace rights and train workers to perform their jobs correctly. (p. 38)

Employers could be putting immigrants in dangerous situations.

Elderly immigrants in many communities face employment obstacles which at times seem greater than for those who are younger and can learn English more quickly. The Los Angeles Times published an article entitled "No Country for Old Immigrants" (Gorman, 2009) in which Ali and his wife Razia, both aged 63, who had moved to the United States recently were interviewed. Ali, who had held a government job in his native country, looked for numerous jobs in the United States but claimed he was turned away because of his white hair. Many older

immigrants feel as if they are given the cold shoulder due to their age and inability to speak English. Older immigrants' problems are further compounded when many employers are unable to recognize their previous knowledge and skills when contemplating offering them a job.

A *Canadian Business* (2014) study identified language skills and problems related to recognition of foreign credentials as significant obstacles that impeded immigrants' entry into the labor market. "English language and literacy and the recognition of foreign credentials and experience present the largest impediments to successful transition into the labor market" (p. 4). The study concluded that when an employer makes an employment decision and does not take the time to look at the factual information in front of them it does no justice to the immigrant worker who is struggling to find work. This type of discrimination is unacceptable and is unfortunately the factor that prevents hiring in many instances (Canadian Business, 2014). This in turn leads to stressors that further compound the difficulties faced by the immigrant.

### **English Language Learning and the Stress of Acculturation**

Learning English in the United States is not only difficult to achieve, but it can be very stressful for many. According to Krashen (1982), the difficulties faced by English language learners are further compounded due to the stresses of acculturation. Chun et al. (2010) defined acculturation as "a culture learning process experienced by individuals who are exposed to a new culture or ethnic group" (p. 102). Stress that results from adjusting to new environments and social norms is further complicated by the challenges of having to learn a new language (Vernez et al., 1996). Krashen (1982) concluded that many immigrants who face stressful situations are also unable to learn English because their affective filter is on high, preventing language communication from occurring.

The ability to effectively immerse oneself in a new culture depends upon one's ability to learn a new language and effectively communicate with others in the community using the new

language (Chun et al., 2010). Individuals who are unable to communicate effectively in the new language find themselves in situations where they are unable to acculturate because of the stress associated with the language barrier. This produces what Chun et al. (2010) called “acculturative stress.” Vega and Gill (1996) noted, “The significance of language competency in promoting acculturative stress is more marked amongst recent immigrants” (p. 119). Vernez et al. (1996) noted, “immigrants face diverse special needs due to their inability to communicate effectively as a result of stress” (p. 9).

Krashen (1982) claimed that the affective filter plays a crucial role in the language acquisition process as it relates to the stress level of one learning a new language. Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis states that “variables such as stress and anxiety play a role in second language acquisition” (p. 29). Schütz (2014) concurred with Krashen, claiming that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation and anxiety can combine to raise the affective filter, which forms a mental block and prevents comprehensible input from occurring.

McCarthy (n.d.), Schutz (2014), and Chun et al. (2010) claimed stressors result in difficulties in learning the target language. Chun et al. (2010) further explained that immigrants are not able to acculturate themselves into their new environment and surroundings due to the stress of speaking a completely different language. Learning is possible, as Krashen (1982) noted, if adult learners are able to lower their affective filter and allow themselves to become a part of their surroundings.

### **How Adults Learn Language**

Research presented by the National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics (2008) suggested that adult learners who have not had any previous formal education in the English language tend to take longer acclimating themselves into the English learning

mode than those who have had previous English knowledge experience. The research also stated that learning a second language depends upon the immigrants' educational background, opportunities for interaction, and vocabulary knowledge.

Literacy in the first language can promote language development in the target language, English (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). However, many English language learners do not have the opportunity to draw upon a prior educational background. Adult English language learners who have limited literacy often had little or no former schooling in their native country (Burt, Peyton, & Schaetzel, 2008). This may be due in part to coming from rural countries where schooling was not emphasized or because there was little educational availability (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). "As a result, they need focused instruction to help them increase their reading, writing, and oral proficiency skills in English. Limited background knowledge is supported by the opportunities to have focused instruction in the target language English" (Burt et al., 2008 p. 5).

Table 1 summarizes the general behaviors of limited English proficient (LEP) students at each stage of acquisition, according to Krashen (1982). Table 1 characterizes language growth at each stage of development based upon opportunities for interaction.

Table 1

*Language Acquisition Chart*

Stage of Language Acquisition	General Behaviors of LEP Students
Silent/Receptive Stage 10 hours to 6 months 500 repetitive words	Point to objects, nod, or use gestures Say yes or no Speak hesitantly
Early Production Stage 6 months to 1 year 1000 receptive/active words	Produce one or two word phrases Use short repetitive language Focus on key words and context clues
Speech Emergence Stage 1-2 years 3000 active words	Engage in basic dialogue Respond using simple sentences
Intermediate Fluency Stage 2-3 years 6000 active words	Use complex sentences State opinion and original thoughts Ask questions
Advanced Fluency Stage 5-7 years 7-10 years Content-area vocabulary	Converse fluently Argue and defend academic points Read appropriate level textbooks

The National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics (2008) noted, “interaction provides learners with opportunities to receive language input (through hearing the language) and feedback (when the conversational partner responds, corrects or asks for clarification)” (p. 4). Providing opportunities to communicate with others allows English language learners the freedom to converse between the primary and target language, making learning a motivating experience (Burt et al., 2008). English language learners often find themselves learning a new language based upon incidental vocabulary, which asserts new words

are learned when one is focused on a meaningful task, such as hearing or reading a story, rather than on specifically learning a new word. Further, support for the adult English learner can be provided by giving them literature that is appealing and interesting for them to read (National Center for Family Literacy and Applied Linguistics, 2008). The National Center for Family Literacy and Applied Linguistics (2008) and the Virginia Department of Education (2006) have both stated that learning a new language is based upon many factors, such as prior knowledge and opportunity for interactions. According to Burt et al. (2008), providing such opportunities motivates students to achieve their goals and learn the target language.

### **Motivation to Learn A Language**

Motivation is intrinsic based upon our individual goals and can be extrinsic when we want to express what we learned to others (Dornyei, 1998). The author further noted that motivation to learn English is based upon our own needs, our attitudes towards the target language, English, and the role English language can play in supporting our children.

Cherry (2014) defined motivation as “the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors. Motivation is what causes us to act, whether it is getting a glass of water to reduce thirst or reading a book to gain knowledge” (p. 1). Dornyei (1998) noted that, without motivation, it would be extremely difficult to accomplish and set goals for other challenges and obstacles one might face. Pierce (2001) described a workplace where the company established and publicized a process for achieving promotions or higher pay. Pierce (2001) noted “one of the skills workers had to demonstrate was a certain level of English literacy and oral proficiency” (p. 9). Once employees reached certain benchmarks they were rewarded with promotions or higher pay.

Martinez and Wang (2010) stated that motivation to learn a language is based upon the critical fact that learning English is essential to carry out our daily routines. Oxford and Shearin

(1994) identified six factors that impact motivation in language learning: (a) attitudes (sentiments towards the target language), (b) beliefs about self (do I expect myself to succeed?), (c) goals (what are my family's goals?), (d) involvement (participation in learning experiences), (d) environmental support (employer, community support), and (f) personal aptitudes (age, previous learning experiences).

Gardner (2001) claimed the attitude towards the target language contributes to the overall motivation to learn the new language and further noted that if the attitude towards the target language, in this case English, is positive then learning the new language will be more comprehensible. However, if one does not have a positive attitude towards the target language, then learning it will be difficult. Dornyei (1998), Martinez and Wang (2010), and Garrett (2006a) all concluded that motivation to learn a language is based upon our own unique personal situation, which motivates us to learn the target language. Without motivation it would be difficult to achieve such goals. Once motivated there becomes a need to know the target language.

### **The Need to Support Children**

Garrett (2006a) explained the importance English language can play in supporting the needs of children, noting that parents often become motivated to learn to speak the target language based upon situations they have to confront such as parent-teacher meetings or other demands for supporting their children.

Batt (2008) noted,

In recent decades, English Language Learner (ELL) student populations have grown rapidly in most school systems in the United States. What has happened in the State of Idaho is typical, where the growth in limited English proficient (LEP) students in the decade from 1990 to 2000 was more than 200 percent. (p. 59)

Many of the large urban school districts now serve students from families that have immigrated to the United States from all parts of the world and speak upwards of 100 different languages and dialects; but about 80 percent of the ELL students in the United States speak Spanish as their first language.

McCormick and McLaughlin (2000) noted,

Learning a second language is not easy for students. It is estimated that it takes, on the average, 5 to 7 years for a student to acquire a new language and use it proficiently; many students never succeed in learning a second language well. (p. 52)

A student entering an elementary or high school in the United States with limited English proficiency is at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to learning the English language since, at the same time, they are trying to learn course content in classes where the English language is the only one used for teaching purposes. August and Hakuta (1997) reported that “as a result, the dropout rate for ELL students is much higher than for native English speaking students reaching levels above 40 percent, compared to around 10 percent for students that grew up speaking English” (p. 23). McArthur (1993) (quoted in Slavin and Madden, 1999) further stated that “even after ELL students achieve some level of proficiency in English, they are still unable to match the performance of their English-only school peers in overall school performance” (p. 98). Also, the parents of ELL students usually cannot use the English language adequately, and, as a result, find it difficult to help their children function in an English-speaking world” (p. 100). Duff (2001) noted, “At school, the ELL student often feels isolated from the mainstream and culturally dominant English speaking students and humiliated as a result of their inability to learn English and perform adequately academically” (p. 51).

Garrett (2006a) noted that many immigrant families feel frustrated because they do not have the English language skills necessary to assist their children with what they need to know in



school, resulting in a lack of academic support for the children. Brown (2006) further suggested that a lack of communication hinders the wellbeing of the family as frustration and tension hinders language acquisition. These factors, in turn, further compound the difficulties of the ELL student trying to learn English and perform well in school, and eventually contribute to the high dropout rates that plague student populations of ELL students.

### **Need to Know English as a Motivation**

The benefits associated with learning English have been emphasized by Martinez and Wang (2010). The authors claimed it is important to learn English in order to support and become a part of American society. The motivation to need to know English has been further explained by Garrett (2006a) and Brown (2006), who both claimed English is essential in order to contribute to the wellbeing of the family. Rubin (2011) articulated the importance of learning English in order to prevent miscommunication from occurring. These factors influence immigrants' motivation to pursue English language learning in their new communities.

Martinez and Wang (2010) noted, "Like generations of immigrants who came before them, today's newcomers play a vital role in our society, fueling our social, economic, cultural, and civic life with their strong work ethic, idealism, and resilience" (p. 6). New immigrants need to be able to immerse themselves into their new culture in the United States in order to thrive and support communities in embracing diversity and collaboration (Huerta-Macias, 2003).

Rubin (2011) claimed "miscommunication from language barriers affect many companies. Two in three executives surveyed (65%) said that in managing diverse workforces, language barriers existed between their companies' managers/executives and other workers" (Rubin, 2011, p. 2). The impact of not being able to communicate effectively can be significant. According to Rubin (2011), consequences of miscommunication led to inefficiency amongst 67% of the respondents. More than 40% of the executives noted that miscommunication resulted

in collaboration difficulties and that productivity was lower than it should be, resulting in loss of employment for English learners.

Garrett (2006a) reported that there were instances when miscommunication occurred when children are asked to speak for the parents because the parents were not able to communicate in the target language, English. Garrett (2006a) explained that if parents do not learn English, they will find themselves counting on interpreters or their children to communicate with English-speaking community members. This can be a stressful task due to scheduling and time conflicts. Filling out legal paperwork can also be a challenging task for many immigrant families. Garrett (2006a) noted that children of immigrant families fill out important legal documents, making mistakes that often result in more hurdles and trouble for the immigrant family.

Martinez and Wang (2010) and Brown (2006) claimed it is important to learn English in order to live a productive life in the United States. There are many benefits associated with learning English, especially when it comes to providing for and supporting a family. Garrett (2006a) concluded opportunities to learn English should not be avoided but should be considered an opportunity.

### **Opportunity to Learn English in the Workplace**

Alamprese and Kay (1993) and Burt (2004) noted that learning English takes place when opportunities are provided to English language learners. Burt (1997, 2004) noted the opportunity to learn the English language was supported by ESL development at the workplace.

Additionally, support from all leaders in the workplace was essential in promoting ESL development. Finally, Moore (1999) noted, encouragement and motivation among the team was essential in promoting and giving English learners the opportunity to learn English.

Burt (2004) noted, “Sometimes there is a naïveté about the use of language in general. In order to choose to speak a language, there needs to be a need to speak that language. At the work place, code switching can occur with bilingual workers” (p. 5). Burt defined code switching as shifting from one language to another during a conversation. According to Burt, ELL’s are able to switch between the primary and target (English) language based upon comfort and knowledge. Further, Crocker, Dlott, Sherman, and Tibbetts (2002) encouraged employers to “develop knowledge and skills in a context that is relevant and meaningful to English language learners, rather than teaching isolated vocabulary and facts” (p. 4).

Burt (2004), Alamprese and Kay (1993), and Moore (1999) have offered recommendations to promote ESL development at the workplace. Burt (2004) shared the example of a 3-week course for preliterate Latino housekeepers in which three goals—greeting residents, supervisors, and co-workers; expressing a lack of comprehension; and asking for clarification—were reached successfully at a nursing home in Falls Church, Virginia. He found that “providing short, targeted classes with limited goals can be effective in the workplace” (p. 6). He concluded, “When classes are focused and objectives are clearly stated and realistic as to what can be accomplished in a short time, it is easier to assess and monitor outcomes” (p. 6).

Burt (2004) found that “it is professional wisdom in workplace instruction that, before beginning the classes, the instructor needs to get all the support of all employer stakeholders including chief executive and operating officers, human resource personnel, and direct supervisors of the workers” (p. 8). According to Alamprese and Kay (1993), gathering the support of all members of an organization builds a strong support network for English language learners. This kind of support network builds trust, commitment, and dedication amongst the entire team, which results in lower turnaround rates for employers and higher productivity for the company.

Moore (1999) claimed support and encouragement among the entire workplace team had multiple advantages when it comes to providing opportunities to learn the target language, English. The decision not to use the new language and behaviors may be affected by the attitude displayed by employers and co-workers when immigrant workers use what they have learned. Moore (1999) stated, “At one worksite, learners trying to speak English at team meetings reported being laughed at by native English-speaking co-workers for demonstrating non-native like pronunciation” (p. 9). Moore (1999) concluded that humiliation and taunting did not work in an environment where ELLs are struggling to learn English. Support from one another and native speakers is greatly needed.

Linguists have studied English language acquisition for decades, including Krashen (1982) and Cook (2011). Sherriah (2013) defined L1 as the first language learned and L2 as the target language or the second language that is being learned. Huerta-Macias (2003) offered a linear model for using the L1 and L2 and suggested:

The topic of discussions are introduced in the native language; key English vocabulary items are taught; hands-on activities (such as those involving workplace machines) are carried out in English and assessed in English; technology activities follow, with discussion in native language; and the final discussion and question and answer activity is held in whichever language each individual student prefers (p. 218)

According to Alamprese and Kay (1993), Burt (2004), and Pierce (2001), opportunities to learn English should be grasped and utilized. English language learners who are employees within companies should be rewarded for setting standards for themselves and working towards achieving their English learning goals. Support should be made available to assist them so they and the company achieve their goals together.

## **Support From Others**

Adult immigrants studying English in the United States have a combination of diverse educational backgrounds. Some have limited education while others have none (Matthews-Aydinli, 2007). Burt and Florez (2001) highlighted the support components that need to be in place in order to make learning meaningful. The authors further stated that it is important to understand the culture of the immigrant English learner being assisted. Finally, according to Burt and Florez (2001), support in the form of encouragement and student participation is ideal in promoting ESL development.

Matthews-Aydinli (2007) noted that it is important for the support person to take the time to understand the culture of the ESL learner one is communicating with. Burt and Florez (2001) emphasized that having some previous knowledge of the other person's culture will allow the support person to diversify learning strategies by personalizing the lesson with their own cultural experiences, giving them the opportunity to teach and learn at the same time.

Literacy support groups have formed within many communities to further enable the English language acquisition of immigrants. Many of these community support groups are free of charge and are nonprofit, usually funded at the local, state, or federal level. The literacy center at the Sutter County Library located in Yuba City, California, for instance, has been helping people learn to read and write in English for two decades (Bitton, 2014). The literacy coordinator indicated that "when people leave, they are better prepared to deal with the practical skills of life" (p. 1). She further noted the literacy program offers English as a second language classes, limited one-on-one general education development assistance, and even assisted parents in becoming involved in their child's education. Many students who are a part of the community program according to the article claimed that "without the program, I wouldn't know what to do" (Bitton, 2014, p. 1).

According to Herr (2007), “Many English learners come from countries in which student participation is not encouraged which results in lack of encouragement and student support” (p. 24). In order to promote student involvement in such situations Herr (2007) further stated, “a positive and supportive environment has a significant influence on student comfort level, participation and success” (p. 24). Matthews-Aydinli (2007) concluded supportive learning environments encourage English language learners to reach greater heights of success.

### **Workplace Learning**

Workplace education is defined in the Tennessee *ESOL in the Workplace* handbook as “Education services offered in collaboration with business, industry, government and/or labor for the purpose of improving the productivity of the workforce through improvement of literacy skills” (University of Tennessee Center for Literary Studies, 2003, p. 102). According to Arkoudis et al. (2009), as organizations and communities continue to grow so does the importance of providing workplace learning for English language learners. Crocker et al. (2002) recommended that entrepreneurs and other agencies understand the importance of contextualized learning that promotes real life learning scenarios. Finally, organizations benefit the most from providing English language training to their workers (Canadian Business, 2014).

The Aspen Institute (2014) indicated organizations such as McDonalds have begun to provide workplace programs that support English language learners. The support offered allowed workers to move from line to management jobs and was reported to be highly successful. In over 45 sites, with over 2,500 participants, an over 9 percent completion rate was maintained with an 88 percent one-year retention rate. Perhaps most importantly, over 95 percent of participants increased their wages following participation in the program. The Aspen Institute (2014) concluded the program was successful in supporting employees and keeping a high rate of retention amongst employees after graduation. “For workplace learning, skills are embedded in

scenarios, tasks, and activities related to real life or work situations. This is commonly referred to as contextualized learning” (Crocker et al., 2002, p. 84). The authors further noted that contextualized learning consists of shifting the focus from acquisition of skills to the application and learning from hands-on activities.

Canadian Business (2014) reported that “new research shows that, when executed well, workplace literacy, essential-skills training and other initiatives can make employers money” (p. 2). A study that involved the hotel industry found a 25 percent return on investment for training programs, with some companies reporting as high as a 300 percent return (Canadian Business, 2014). The study further described the indirect benefits that were associated with training English learners, such as more customer satisfaction, productivity gains, and fewer production mistakes.

The Aspen Institute (2014) and Canadian Business (2014) have both emphasized the importance of providing English language support within the workplace and indicated the benefits gained by employers who provide a quality instructional program within the workplace. The Aspen Institute (2014) shared a comment made by an English language learner participant in the study at McDonalds, who claimed that “before I took the class, I was afraid of a lot of things—when I was at work, talking to the customer, and with my co-workers. I was afraid of talking to my kids’ teachers. . . . But now the people that I work with and my customers CAN understand me. I have relationships with them” (p. 2).

According to the Aspen Institute (2014), Ninke and Weeks (2003), and Arkoudis et al. (2009), literacy skills make a huge impact on the lives of English language learners. Each author stressed the importance of creating an English-supportive workplace environment in the lives of the employees. The employers also benefitted by higher retention rates and more productivity over a period of time (Aspen Institute, 2014).

## Summary

Limited English proficiency remains one of the most critical challenges facing immigrant families. Martinez and Wang (2010) noted, “limited English proficiency impedes immigrants’ ability to improve their employment prospects and increase their earnings” (p. 5). Furthermore, lack of employment puts the family in a very difficult situation as they face financial and emotional distress as a result of limited English.

The inability to speak English affects the entire family in more than one way, from problems catching a bus to take one’s children to the doctor’s office to finding a minimum wage job to keep food on the table. Martinez and Wang (2010) noted that learning English is critical in order to become a contributing member of society. Garrett (2006a) suggested opportunities to learn English should not be avoided but should be considered an opportunity. Santosh Joshi also indicated that “individuals who emigrate from India to the United States bring with them their hopes and goals for a successful life in the United States” (personal correspondence, October 4, 2014). Garrett (2006a) concluded the opportunity to achieve one’s goals by learning English should be grasped and valued. The results are endless opportunities for the entire family (p. 24).

Chapter 3 will explain the methodology that was used to study the experiences of the 10 participants who shared their English learning journey with the researcher. The methodology section will identify data collection measures, primarily interviews, and how they were transcribed to support the study. The analysis and interpretation of their responses will also be discussed.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 2, the literature review provided background and research about experiences shared by those who embark upon a journey to the United States. It discussed the struggles faced by the entire family and how common tasks immigrants were able to do in India such as catching a bus became a difficult task for them in the United States. Chapter 3 presents the methodology that was used to gather and analyze data for this case study.

The purpose of this case study was to explore adult Punjabi-speaking immigrants' path to English language acquisition. The case study will seek to document adult Punjabi-language speakers' English learning experiences and/or answer the following research questions:

1. What experiences helped or hindered newcomers from India in learning English in the United States?
2. What were the experiences of adult Punjabi-language speakers while learning English in their: (a) home setting? (b) workplace setting? and (c) community setting?
3. Do Punjabi-language speakers identify major obstacles they had to overcome as they were learning English?
4. How do adult Punjabi-language speakers describe their continued growth in language acquisition after they left employment with the researcher or other significant employment?

The methodology is a qualitative case study that consisted of interviews. Creswell (2013) noted that “questions should be open-ended, general, and focused on understanding your central phenomenon in the study” (p. 163). The interview sessions allowed the participants to share their ESL journey with the researcher and answer the interview questions (see Appendix B).

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real life, contemporary bounded system (a case) . . . over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . and reports a case description and case themes. (Creswell, 2013, p. 97)

Patton (2002) noted, “Narrative analysis extends the idea of text to include in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction” (p. 33). Merriam (2009) noted,

The key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning middle and end. . . . First-person accounts of experience constitute the narrative ‘text’ of this research approach. (p. 32)

According to Yin (2009), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Creswell (2013) further noted, “In the final interpretive phase, the researcher reports the meaning of the case, whether that meaning comes from learning about the issues of the case (an instrumental case) or learning about an unusual situation” (Creswell, 2013 p. 101).

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was a semi-rural community in the California central valley. The community was diverse and well-known for its large Punjabi-speaking immigrant population. Many immigrants from all over the world, especially India, reside in the study site region because of its rich culture and diversity. There are three Sikh temples in the community and one very large Hindu temple where Punjabi individuals worship and pray.

## **Participants/Sample**

The participants for this study were five previous employees of the researcher and five individuals from the community, all of whom were selected because they had emigrated from India and learned to speak English in the United States. They each had a story to tell about their English-learning experiences and the study presented and interpreted their stories. The five former employees who were participants to this study have moved into other types of workplace settings. The study documented what language acquisition experiences supported these former employees in achieving their goals. The five participants from the community were interviewed to determine what experiences supported or hindered their English-language development in the community. The two groups are presented as cases, and then the cases are compared.

The first five participants were previous employees who wanted to share their stories of learning English with the researcher and others who might benefit from their experiences. The other five participants were members of the community who attended the local Sikh or Hindu temple. These individuals wanted to share their English learning experience as well to benefit others who need the support.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of conducting 10 interviews. Creswell's (2013) protocol for collecting data was followed. Interviews took place individually, in person, in a private business office either in the participant's facility or in a third-party community office facility, wherever it was the most convenient for the participants. Privacy of participants was of the utmost importance in the study and was strictly maintained. The researcher was the only one who had access to the data, which was locked in a desk drawer and not accessible to anyone else. The interview information was recorded on audiotape and was destroyed once it was analyzed. The researcher collected the data during February and March, 2015.

## Interview Questions

In order to provide consistency to the study, all of the interviewees were asked the same series of open-ended questions (Appendix B).

1. Who immigrated with you to the United States? (family members, relationship).
2. What city and state did you first immigrate to when you entered the United States?
3. How did you learn to speak English in the United States?
4. How long have you been residing in the local community?
5. What was your first job in this community? Did it require English and did you have sufficient English to do the job?
6. What experiences gave you the confidence to move into an English-centric work setting?
7. What strategies, if any, did you use to learn the English required in the workplace?
8. Describe an experience where you learned English within the workplace setting.
9. Describe an experience that moved you to the point where you could communicate with customers in your work environment.
10. What steps have you taken outside the workplace to learn English?
11. What strategies, if any, did you use to learn English in order to communicate in the community?
12. Do you have plans to take formal English language course work in community centers?
13. Are there any individuals who have been role models for you in the community?
14. What challenges and/or obstacles have you faced in learning English within or outside the workplace?

15. If you lived in a poverty-type environment, what did you do to overcome such a hurdle?

16. What motivated you to want to learn English and not retreat or give up?

17. What feedback would you like to give others who would like to learn to speak English?

The interviews were conducted in Punjabi by the researcher, who is also a native Punjabi speaker. The researcher then created a Punjabi transcript of the interviews from which an English transcript was developed. The English transcript provided the basis for the quotes in the dissertation. The English transcript stood as the document of verification for any third party request for data review.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was conducted by the researcher utilizing Creswell's suggestions for interpreting qualitative data. Creswell (2012) noted, "These steps are not always taken in sequence, but they represent the following:

1. Engaging in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it.
2. Using the codes to develop a more general picture of the data-descriptions and themes.
3. Representing the findings through narratives and visuals.
4. Making an interpretation of the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and on the literature that might inform the findings.
5. Conducting strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings" (p. 237).

The researcher collected text or words through interviewing the participants and then transcribed the Punjabi audiotape narratives into text data. Next, the data was coded. Creswell (2012) noted, "Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in data" (p. 243). The list of codes was reduced to themes as described by

Creswell. According to Creswell (2012), “Themes also called categories are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database” (p. 252). According to Merriam (1988), “the number of categories of constructs depends on the data and the focus of the research” (p. 135). “Much of the work in category construction is a form of content analysis. One is, after all, looking at the content of the data in developing categories” (Merriam, 1988, p. 136). “Developing categories, typologies, or themes involves looking for recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam, 1988, p. 133). Merriam (1988) noted the importance of the number of people who mention the same thing. A comparison table was created. Creswell (2012) noted, “Create a visual image of the information on a table that compares different findings” (p. 254).

Interpretation of the findings involved what Creswell (2012) noted as the “researcher steps back and forms some larger meaning about the phenomenon based on personal views, comparisons with past studies, or both” (p. 258). Alongside this, comparisons to the literature were also made. In order to validate the accuracy of the findings, the researcher sought to triangulate data, which Creswell (2012) defined as “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 259). This method ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws upon multiple sources of information. Creswell concludes his explanation of the triangulation method by noting “it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible” (p. 259).

Lastly, the researcher developed findings or outcomes of the study. “A discussion of outcome of the inquiry which may most usefully be thought of as the ‘lessons learned’ are not generalizations but ‘working hypotheses’ that relate to an understanding of the site” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 362), or in this researcher’s study the experience of the Punjabi speakers who immigrated to the U. S.. The findings are provided in Chapter 5.

## **Participant Rights**

The researcher translated the consent/assent material from English into the native language of the Punjabi participants (see Appendix A). The goal of this effort was to have the participants volunteer to participate in the study without any confusion or misunderstandings whatsoever. Participants had at the minimum 10 days to review the written consent/assent material prior to the interviews taking place and could opt out with no penalty at any time and without any stated reason. The researcher was dedicated to the complete privacy of the participants. To further protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned.

Care was taken to make the participants comfortable with the interviews. The following statements were used to assure the participants they were in control of the process, that they could opt out of the process at any point, and that there would be no negative impact if they chose not to participate.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University [or with other cooperating institutions]. If this project involves students as participants mention that their decision to participate will not impact their standing as students. If employees are involved, that their decision to participate will not impact their relationship with their employer.

You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

### **Potential Limitations of the Study**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested that a study can be limited if its research sample was restricted, as in this case. Bloomberg and Volpe 2012 noted, “Therefore, a critique of the research might be the limited possibility of generalizing this study to other groups and other programs” (p. 127). Furthermore, the authors noted, “by way of thick, rich description, as well as detailed information regarding the context and background of the study; it was anticipated that knowledge could be assessed for its applicability and applied appropriately in other contexts” (p. 127).

### **Research Question Development**

The researcher had the opportunity to gather feedback and discuss the research questions with the participants. Based upon the feedback provided, the questions were modified to best suit the needs of the participants and the study. Participants consist of former employees who were contacted and were found to be interested in participating, and participants from the community also eager to participate and share their English-learning experience in the United States.

### **Summary**

The methodology, a qualitative case study, reflects alignment with the research questions and the process in place to answer these questions. The response given by the participants in their primary language, Punjabi, gave them the opportunity to personalize their experiences in a manner as if they were living their journey once again. Each participant shared their experiences and provided rich description about the obstacles and challenges they faced once they arrived in the United States.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Chapter 3 discussed the methodology which was used to gather and analyze the data for this case study. Chapter 4 presents the experiences of the participants and the major themes that came from the interviews. The purpose of this case study was to explore adult Punjabi-speaking immigrants' path to English language acquisition. This study addressed four research questions:

1. What experiences helped or hindered newcomers from India in learning English in the United States?
2. What were the experiences of adult Punjabi-language speakers while learning English in their: (a) home setting? (b) workplace setting? And (c) community setting?
3. Do Punjabi-language speakers identify major obstacles they had to overcome as they were learning English?
4. How do adult Punjabi-language speakers describe their continued growth in language acquisition after they left employment with the researcher or other significant employment?

This chapter summarizes the data and interprets responses to the research questions; the findings will then be discussed, with implications and recommendations, in Chapter 5. The data emanated from transcripts of recorded one-on-one interviews with 10 participants over a 3-week period. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Overall, four themes with connected elements emerged out of the data reduction and analysis process.

#### **Background Profiles**

The background profiles of the 10 research participants are shown in Table 2. The research participants' ages varied across the board as did their immigrant status and date of first

arrival to the United States. Some were recent while others had been in the United States for more than 7 years.

The background profiles of the 10 research participants are shown in Table 2. The research participants' ages ranged from young to middle adulthood (21-49 years old). Their tenure in the United States ranged from 2-15 years. Two had immigrated to the United States alone, the rest with their parents or spouse and children. Seven of the 10 had no formal schooling and three had only primary education (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade). All participants were seeking to escape poverty, become employed, and build a more secure life in America.

Table 2

*Background Profile of Participants*

Participants	Age	Years in USA	Immigrated with Whom	Reason for Relocation	Previous Education
Participant 1	34	8	Father, mother, sister.	Escaping poverty	None
Participant 2	30	2	Husband	Visa was granted for admission	Completed 5 <sup>th</sup> grade in India. Very little spoken English.
Participant 3	21	5	Father and Mother (other families members could not travel due to denial of visas)	Visa was granted for admission—seeking better life for family.	None
Participant 4	28	4	Self	Seeking better life	Completed 8 <sup>th</sup> grade in India
Participant 5	31	8	Wife, daughter, and son	Escaping poverty	None
Participant 6	29	3	Wife and 2 sons	Job opportunity	None
Participant 7	49	15	Wife and 3 daughters	Escaping poverty	None
Participant 8	33	2	Self	Job opportunity	Completed 7 <sup>th</sup> grade in India. Still speaks very little English.
Participant 9	29	5	Wife, son	Better life for family back home in India.	None
Participant 10	33	4	Wife, baby	Better life conditions in the USA	None

The researcher has heard many immigrant stories of settling in the United States as a result of having been an ESL (English as a second language) support activist as well as being an English language learner. The researcher chose a methodology that would allow participants to narrate their experiences of learning English while in the United States. Creswell (2012) stated, “People live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts” (p. 501). The researcher is using the case study platform to share the experiences and stories of the participants. “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

### **Themes**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) noted, “Analysis is essentially about searching for patterns and themes—that is, the trends that you see emerging from your findings” (p. 175). This researcher identified themes by examining the transcripts of each participant and choosing quotations that characterized the essence of the experience. Table 3 shows each main theme with its corresponding connected elements and examples, which were derived from the coding and thematic analysis.

Table 3

*Summary of Main Themes and Connected Elements*

<i>Main Theme</i>	<i>Connected Elements</i>	<i>Examples</i>
A. Fearfulness	A. Accent	Scared to communicate due to accent. Many participants did not participate in their children's school events.
	B. Starve to death in America	Unable to find any employment opportunities made participants feel they would starve to death.
2. Unattainable Daily Necessities	A. Transportation	Getting groceries and making it to doctor's appointment using the transportation system.
	B. Filling out forms	Participants experienced great difficulty filling out basic required forms.
3. Immersion in language study was needed	A. Bilingual support was needed at community centers	Majority of the participants expressed there was no Punjabi speaker available to assist and understand the content in English at community support centers.
	B. Lack of support provided at community centers	Limited time availability for support offered in community center.
4. Support received at the workplace	A. Increased confidence to move into English-centric work setting.	Improved social and confidence levels have given participants the ability to move into English-centric work settings.
	B. Improved interpersonal skills	Grasping new opportunities, helping others learn English.

**Theme 1: Fearfulness.**

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was fearfulness. Participants feared talking with others due to the fact many had an accent. Even though they had the vocabulary to

express an idea, their pronunciation of the word(s) resulted in confusion on the part of the hearer. This lack of understanding of their communication eventually stymied any attempt to talk to anyone. Additionally, participants feared they would starve to death in America due to their inability to manage daily activities, provide food for the family, and gain employment.

***Connected elements 1a: Accent/pronunciation.*** Participants often refrained from talking to others in the community because of their accent. They experienced difficulty pronouncing words in English. This created fearful situations for them as people were not able to understand what it was they were trying to say and in many cases made having conversations impossible.

During the interviews participants used the Punjabi word “pasha,” which means *accent*, to explain their fear of talking to others in English. All of the participants used the Punjabi word pasha during the interviews. Dr. Sodhi, an English lecturer from Guru Kashi University in Punjab, India stated, “There is only one word to explain something in the Punjabi language. This is why you have individuals using the same word to express their thoughts when you talk to them in Punjabi” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). In essence, there is only one word in the Punjabi language to express something versus having many cognates. The researcher also spoke with Jernail Singh, who is a retired principal in Northern California. He stated “Punjabi language commonly only has one word to explain something. You can’t substitute another word for it. There are hundreds of millions of Punjabi speakers worldwide. It is very easy to converse with them once you get to know the vocabulary” (personal communication, June 01, 2015). In essence, this results in individuals who speak Punjabi using the same word over and over to express their feelings.

The following quotes were expressed by the participants:

Participant 1: I was scared to communicate because of my accent. I would just use hand gestures, so I wouldn’t have to talk.

Participant 2: People could not understand me because of my accent. I felt I would embarrass myself because of my accent.

Participant 3: I was so scared to even try to speak English to other people. I could not even talk to my neighbors. I think just the thought of if I pronounced a word incorrectly because of my English and accent, people would laugh at me.

Participant 4: Coming from India with very little English knowledge made my accent very strong. I would quite often hesitate from getting into conversations because I would be worried about my accent rather than how to talk to someone.

Participant 5: I always feared talking to others because of my accent. We needed help financially, but I always felt I could not have a decent conversation with someone because of my accent.

Participant 6: I would hesitate talking to others because of my accent. I would just wave my hand and continue walking. This was rude of me but my fear of having to talk to someone overcame me.

Participant 7: Because of my accent, I would find reasons to not attend my children's school programs. The last thing I wanted to do was embarrass my daughters for having an accent.

Participant 8: My accent made me disabled and I feared talking to others in English because of it.

Participant 9: My accent created challenges for me. It made me feel as if people would not understand me and question me on everything I had to say.

Participant 10: My accent always got the best of me. I would get nervous and scared when I had to talk to others in English.

The participants felt their accent undermined their pronunciation of words and phrases and therefore their capacity to communicate. This inability to communicate limited their chances to acculturate and find greater opportunities for themselves and their families in the United States. When participants were unable to pronounce words or were not able to make others understand what it is they were trying to say because of their accent, this caused them to shut down their communication and thinking. Therefore, their ability to communicate shut down and they could not go forward in carrying on conversations with members of the community. Butler (2015) reconfirmed this finding by asserting,

If you expect more than what I can think, I will shut down. The adult ESL learner needs a comfortable learning environment in which he feels free to experiment with the new language and take risks without the fear of failure. (p. 1)

Butler (2015) also continued, “The adult ESL learner should be met at his cognitive level, not his language level” (p. 1). Arnsten, Mazure, and Sinha (2012) noted,

The response to stress is not just a primal reaction affecting parts of the brain that are common to a wide array of species ranging from salamander to humans. Stress, in fact, can cripple our most advanced mental faculties, the areas of the brain most developed in primates. (p. 2)

Saul McLeod (2007) referred to Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs pyramid and noted, The deficiency, or basic needs are said to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the need to fulfill such needs will become stronger the longer the duration they are denied. For example, the longer a person goes without food, the more hungry they will become. (p. 1)



The English language learner who is scared to communicate because of their accent will be stuck at the first level of the pyramid (physiological) and will not be able to move up and fulfill other needs for themselves and their families.

***Connected element 1b: Starve to death in America.*** Participants were fearful they would starve to death in America because they could not speak English. They were not able to get financial support from their family members and their situation continued to deteriorate day by day. Many participants felt learning English was the only way to overcome their starvation.

The Punjabi word used by the participants during the interview was “phook,” which means *to starve* in English. This was a common word used by the majority of the participants to express their fear of starving to death in America. Participants expressed their feelings as such:

Participant 1: We lived in poverty and struggled to overcome poverty. My family was starving because I did not know who to turn to for help.

Participant 2: Keeping food on the table was extremely difficult. There were days when we had nothing to eat. We had no choice but to starve and suffer.

Participant 3: I needed help because my elderly parents and I were starving. I did not know who to go to for help.

Participant 4: There were times when I felt I should grab something to eat out of the trash can. I was struggling and there was nobody to help me.

Participant 5: I came to the United States to escape poverty but found myself in poverty once again. Our situation only got worse.

Participant 6: Because of my English, I could not find any work. I was struggling and could not find anyone to help me. I was starving and was scared I would die on the streets.

Participant 7: My family was struggling and starving literally because I could not keep food on the table.

Participant 8: I did not know where to go for help. This caused me to struggle and find myself facing poverty. It was horrible.

Participant 9: Not only was I affected by poverty but my wife and son were also. I dreaded the thought of telling them every day I can't find any work.

Many participants struggled through poverty and feared they would starve to death in America. Participants were not able to find sources of support, which caused their poverty conditions to worsen. Many participants were distraught by the thought of coming home and telling their family members they were not able to keep food on the table. Many participants had come from a life of poverty in India yet found themselves struggling through it again in the United States.

### **Theme 2: Unattainable daily necessities.**

Theme number two was unattainable daily necessities. This consisted primarily of transportation struggles faced by the participants and difficulty filling out forms. Transportation is considered a gateway activity. It is essential to be able to get one's self from one location to another in order to become acculturated within the new community. If individuals are unable to get to various destinations, they will be hindered from completing basic activities and unable to effectively become a contributing member of society.

*Connected element 2a: Transportation.* The transportation system in the United States is complex and in most cases requires individuals to be able to read and understand English. Participants struggled when it came to getting from point a to point b in their everyday journeys. Without adequate transportation participants were unable to get to the grocery store or make it to

their doctor's appointment. Due to their inability to get to their various destinations, many suffered from health-related problems, unemployment, and poverty. Participants claimed:

Participant 1: I could not get my family members on a bus to take them to the doctor.

There were so many stops in-between I could not understand where to get off the bus.

Participant 2: This is a very big country. Because of my English I could not communicate street addresses. This made me miss out on applying for jobs.

Participant 3: I could not take my parents nor myself to our appointments. We sought assistance from a church to help us with food, but could not find any transportation to get us to the church.

Participant 4: I did not understand the signs on the bus. I also could not speak English clearly because of my accent. I struggled to get from point a to point b every day. Finding work became difficult day by day.

Participant 5: I tried to find a way to get us to our appointments. Most of the time we would walk. When appointments were further away, we could not go because I did not know how to get from one point to another. I was scared we would get lost.

Participant 6: I would find myself struggling to tell others I need to get to this location. I had nobody to help me. I would walk because when I got on the bus, I did not know how to communicate where I needed to go.

Participant 7: My daughters spoke better English than I did. They would help translate on the bus for me at times. When they weren't around I had great difficulty getting from one place to another. I was having difficulty finding work during the day when my daughters were in school because I could not communicate where I needed to go.

Participant 8: I had a little baby who needed medical care. I was scared because I did not know how to get my baby the care he needed. Half the time I found myself lost when riding the bus. It was a very scary feeling knowing I was lost in this big country.

Getting from one location to another was a very troublesome experience for the participants due to their limited English speaking skills. The inability to get to their final destinations resulted in loss of employment opportunities for some and for others it caused them to miss important medical appointments. In some instances participants counted on their children to help get them to their final destinations, but it made them uncomfortable to depend upon a child. How can you depend upon a child who is dependent upon you? Getting from point a to point b seems like a basic task, but it was a huge challenge for the participants. The participants who were adults became childlike and expressed feeling isolated. They were unable to escape this situation because they could not speak English effectively enough to get from one location to another. This also resulted in participants not being able to lead a normal life. This further compounded the struggles they were facing already.

***Connected Element 2b: Filling out forms.*** Forms that need to be filled out in the United States are most commonly available in English only. Forms such as job applications, request for assistance, and rental applications are the most common forms that newcomers to the United States fill out. These are basic forms that have to be filled out to get the service one seeks. Participants were unable to translate English vocabulary words from the forms into Punjabi nor were they able to predict what the form was asking of them. The person handing them the form in many cases only spoke English and was not able to help them understand the form in the Punjabi language. It was a very difficult situation.

The Punjabi phrase “kaagaz purnaa” means to fill out a form in English. The majority of the participants used this phrase during the interview to express their concern and frustration they faced when they had to fill out forms they did not understand.

Participants expressed their feelings as such:

Participant 1: Because I could not read, write and speak English, I was not able to fill out basic forms which my family needed to fill out. I also could not apply for jobs because I did not understand what the forms were asking for.

Participant 2: I tried to find help filling out forms, but there was nobody to help. I would guess on many of the questions, and was denied for many support programs.

Participant 3: We had a child help us fill out a form because I could not understand how to fill it out. We were denied benefits.

Participant 4: Finding work was difficult because I struggled with filling out forms on top of having an accent when I speak English. I could not fill out the forms well and nobody would hire me.

Participant 5: Filling out forms were huge struggles for me. I did not know how to fill out basic forms.

Participant 6: I would dread having to fill out forms. Many times I would ask the person giving me the form to help me fill it out, but they couldn't. I did not know who to turn to for help with filling out the forms.

Participant 7: I could not fill out job applications because I did not know how to answer many of the questions on the form. My daughters were too young to help me. I also did not know how to fill out forms which parents needed to fill out for their children.

Participant 8: I felt I was disabled because I could not speak English nor could I write English. I had to fill out forms for an apartment, but could not do so. They did not give me the apartment I needed to keep a roof over my head.

Participant 9: I had major challenges when it came to writing and filling out forms. My wife did not know English very well, so we both hesitated when it came to filling out forms.

Filling out forms created obstacles and challenges for the participants. They hesitated to fill out the forms because they could not understand what the questions were asking of them. Many felt they were disabled because they could not speak English. The inability to fill out forms was another part of their disability.

Filling out a form was a basic task for the participants when they resided in India. Now, since they were asked to fill out forms in English, this basic task turned into a very difficult situation. Not being able to fill out a basic form meant there would be no job, no food, and no shelter in many cases. Feelings of anger and frustration begin to set in because one cannot accomplish the basic task of filling out a form.

### **Theme 3: Immersion in language study was needed.**

It is essential to have someone who can help one connect a new language with the speaker's existing language. This helps with development and being able to expand thinking and conversation skills. In this particular instance, participants claimed they sought support from the literacy center within the community but there was nobody there who spoke the Punjabi language to help them understand the content being presented. This made understanding the new English language difficult because they were not able to connect a new vocabulary with their existing vocabulary. Another challenge participants faced was the amount of support offered. The amount of time offered by the literacy center, often one or two hours per week, was too short

to meet the language development needs of the participants. This perpetuated the slow acquisition of language and therefore the cultural assimilation that English language would make possible.

The Punjabi word “shaher” means community in English, which was quite often used by the participants during the course of the interviews. The majority of the participants used this word to describe their experiences at the community literacy center. They were seeking support from the community but they remained outside the community because there was no way for them to be part of it when their language skills created such a barrier. There was a language barrier they could not overcome between other students, their teachers, and their tutors. They were in effect isolated within the community.

*Connected element 3a: Bilingual support was needed.* Bilingual support was needed at the workplace in order to understand English vocabulary. Participants were new to the English language, and needed someone who could help translate words from English to Punjabi and from Punjabi to English. The support programs had tutors in place, but many only spoke English.

It is difficult to learn a second language when you are unable to make connections with the primary language. The majority of the participants came from a monolingual background so this was their first time being exposed to the English language. The participants were hearing a new language but were not being provided with a hanger to hang their ideas upon.

Participants described their experiences with formal tutoring:

Participant 1: I went to go learn English at the community center but there was nobody there who spoke Punjabi to help me understand. The tutor only spoke English.

Participant 2: It is very hard to learn at the community because you can't understand many of the words in English.

Participant 3: I initially went to the community center for English support but because I had an accent and spoke very little English, I wasn't able to communicate or get help from them.

Participant 4: The community center was not able to help me because there was no translator there who spoke Punjabi. I did not understand what they were saying to me.

Participant 5: I went to the literacy center to learn English. There were so many other students there who did not speak Punjabi. The tutor spoke Spanish. I did not understand anything.

Participant 6: I need someone to help me understand English, but the tutor at the literacy center did not speak Punjabi. I was not able to learn because I could not understand.

Participant 7: Learning English at the community center was very difficult. I could not put two and two together. The tutor did not speak Punjabi and this made things more difficult.

Participant 8: I went to the literacy English center in our community to learn English. I tried to get help, but the tutor spoke English only and was not able to help me with translating words from English to Punjabi.

Participant 9: I went to the community literacy center for a couple of weeks and stopped going. They did not have a tutor available who could help me understand vocabulary words in Punjabi. I was getting lost, so I stopped going.

Participant 10: I tried to get help from the local community center. I was given a tutor, but he did not speak Punjabi. I struggled and he was frustrated because he couldn't help me learn.

The structure of the support in place at the community literacy center was not beneficial in responding to the needs of the participants. They went to seek help to improve their living



conditions but did not receive the type of help they needed to acclimate themselves into a new learning environment. When one has a tutor who cannot speak the primary language it makes answering questions from the participants very difficult or in some cases impossible because he or she does not know how to effectively communicate so the participant can understand clearly. It becomes a very challenging and frustrating situation for both the tutor and the English learner.

***Connected element 3b: Lack of support provided at the community literacy centers.***

Learning a new language is challenging. Therefore, it is essential to put in the time and effort needed to learn it effectively. Participants felt the amount of support provided at the literacy centers was very minimal. They were beginning English language learners and needed more time and support in learning English. Participants claimed:

Participant 1: I was only offered 30 minutes of support at the community literacy center. I was not able to get the type of support I was looking for.

Participant 2: There was not enough time given to help me learn English at the community center.

Participant 3: The literacy center only offered short time slots which did not support me in learning English.

Participant 4: I went there for a short period of time. They went over my homework and practiced new vocabulary words. The time offered was very brief.

Participant 5: It was difficult for me to learn English at the community center because there was not that much time offered for one-on-one support.

Participant 6: The tutor at the literacy center was only available for a short time period. I was not able to learn English because I needed more time and support.

Participant 7: There were so many students there already. The tutor was not able to provide one-on-one support to help me learn English.

Participant 8: I was struggling to learn English and the tutor tried to help me.

Unfortunately, he could only help me one day out of the week for a short period of time.

Participant 10: I needed help, but I was not able to get the amount of time I needed to learn English.

The participants were beginning English language learners and needed more time to learn English than what was being provided at the literacy center. There were many factors in play that required the participants to get as much support as they possibly could. For example, they needed to learn English to apply for jobs and fill out basic forms. The limited time offered by the literacy center resulted in more agony and frustration on the part of the participants.

#### **Theme 4: Support received at the workplace.**

Participants described the support received at the workplace as providing life-changing experiences for them. Poverty, starvation, and frustration were major hurdles they were able to overcome with the support they received at the workplace. Accomplishments attained at the workplace developed skills that further motivated them to achieve more for themselves and their families. Given the support of the workplace the participants were able to move from Maslow level 1) food and shelter, to level 2) freedom from fear, or level 3) seeking support from others. Participants were able to overcome their fears by receiving support at the workplace. Once their fear was overcome they were able to move on to the next step and face the challenge of communicating with others.

*Connected element 4a: Increased confidence to move into English-centric work setting.* Participants were able to practice English at their workplace settings, which gave them the confidence to move into different work settings. Others indicated practicing English in the workplace improved their confidence levels. The National Center for Family Literacy and Center for Applied Linguistics (2008) noted, “Interaction provides learners with opportunities to receive

language input (through hearing the language) and feedback (when the conversational partner responds, corrects or asks for clarification)” (p. 4). Providing opportunities to communicate with others allows English language learners the freedom to converse between the primary and target language, making learning a motivating experience (Burt et al., 2008).

The Punjabi word “nokreepeiy” means workplace in English. Another common Punjabi word used during the interviews was “English bolnaa kumpeiy” meaning English-centric. The majority of the participants used these words during the interview to explain themselves.

Participants claimed:

Participant 1: The one-on-one English support I received at the workplace gave me the confidence to move into an English-centric work setting.

Participant 2: Working 8 hours a day and talking to customers in English gave me the ability to talk to others in English.

Participant 3: My first employer provided English and Punjabi support to me at the workplace. I was able to practice using English and learned very quickly at the workplace. This gave me the confidence to talk to others.

Participant 4: I was able to learn English at the workplace. I would practice talking to customers and with employees. This is how I learned and everyone was nice and helped me. My English improved because of this.

Participant 5: I overcame my fear by talking to others without fear in English at my first job. I was provided support in Punjabi and English. By overcoming my fear I was able to help customers at the store. This improved my confidence level.

Participant 6: I get the opportunity to talk to customers when I ring them up at the cash register. My English is improving as I continue practicing talking to customers.

Participant 7: I learned English at the workplace, which gave me the confidence to work in an English-centric work setting. The support given there helped me learn English and talk to others in the community.

Participant 8: I am now able to speak and understand English because I had the opportunity to talk to others in English at my job. This improved my confidence, which allowed me to go into an English-centric work setting.

Participant 9: The experience I got at the workplace gave me the ability to move into an English-centric work setting. I was able to practice learning English with customers every single day on the job.

Participant 10: I practiced English every day at my job. This was a job which I needed and it kept food on the table. By practicing English, my English improved. This is how my English improved and I applied for more English-centric jobs.

Participants were given the opportunity to learn English by conversing with other customers while others received one-on-one support from their employer and even Punjabi-to-English support. The ability to talk to customers without fear or hesitation promoted English language development. In addition, having the opportunity to work several days in the week and practice learning English is beneficial when learning English. The work setting provided one-on-one support, immersion in English, and significant repetition of relevant vocabulary.

***Connected element 4b: Improved interpersonal skills.*** Participants were able to take on new challenges and even helped others in learning English. They understood the challenges faced with learning how to speak English and took it upon themselves to assist others with their goals as well. Participants claimed:

Participant 1: I am now working as a commercial truck driver and speak English with others. When I get a chance, I help others who are also struggling to learn English.

Participant 2: Since my confidence level has improved, I try to help other family members learn English as well.

Participant 3: I have begun to live my dream. I have opened my own market and on my days off, I go to literacy centers to help people learn to speak English. I know how hard it is when there isn't anyone there who speaks Punjabi.

Participant 4: My confidence level has improved because I learned English. I am now able to help others who live near me with learning English as well.

Participant 5: I feel good when I help others learn English. My confidence level is improved as well.

Participant 6: Because my English has improved, I help family members who are struggling with English like I was.

Participant 7: I am volunteering at my daughter's school events and even help others with learning English. My confidence level has improved because I am able to speak English.

Participant 8: Since I am able to speak English better now, every time I see someone struggling with English, I take the time to help them as well.

Participant 9: My confidence level has been improving and so has my English. I like helping others in my family who are struggling with English like I was.

Participant 10: Gradually, my confidence level has been improving. I am now able to help my child at home and my wife learn English as well. Being able to take a torch and shine a light onto someone else's life who is filled with darkness because they are struggling with the English language is a very big accomplishment.

Participants were able to support others who were struggling like they were with learning English. Since their confidence level had improved with the support they received at their workplaces, they felt they could do something for others as well. Many took the time to help

others in their family, while others took to their communities and assisted those who were walking in the same very shoes they walked in when they first immigrated to the United States.

### **Summary**

The first theme that emerged from this study was fearfulness. Participants feared talking with others due to the fact many had an accent. Even though they had the vocabulary to express an idea, their pronunciation of the word(s) resulted in confusion on the part of the hearer.

The second theme that emerged from this study was unattainable daily necessities. This consisted of transportation struggles faced by the participants and difficulty filling out forms. Transportation is considered a gateway activity. It is essential to be able to get one's self from one location to another in order to become acculturated within the new community.

The third theme was that immersion in language study was needed. It is essential to have someone who can help one connect a new language with the speaker's existing language. This helps with development and with being able to expand thinking and conversation skills.

The last theme was support received at the workplace. Participants described the support received at the workplace as providing life-changing experiences for them. Poverty, starvation, and frustration were major hurdles they were able to overcome with the support they received at the workplace.

The purpose of this study was to explore adult Punjabi-speaking immigrants' path to English language acquisition. The men and women who participated in the study told stories of hope for a better life in the United States that was frustrated by the barriers they faced. Leaving lives of poverty in India, participants expressed the obstacles and challenges they faced on their English language learning journey. The path to English language acquisition and cultural acculturation shared by the participants revealed specific barriers including fear and an inability

to acquire daily necessities as well as the need for a community that supported their language learning needs.

As Butler (2015) emphasized, the English Language learner needs an environment where they can learn without fear or hesitation or they will shut down. Upon arrival in the United States, the participants were unable to perform common tasks at which they were competent in their former home and as a result were unable to acculturate into the United States. Chapter 5 will present the findings based on the data collected in the interviews and answers the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. It also provides recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS

Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the themes developed in Chapter 4, answer the research questions, and suggest some opportunities for further research. The purpose of this case study was to identify the paths taken by English language learners who immigrated to the United States from India speaking Punjabi. Their shared stories and experiences shaped the form of this case study, and created the framework necessary to identify the challenges and struggles they faced in the United States.

This case study relied on qualitative approaches that allowed interpretation of participants' experiences as explained in a narrative form. For Patton (2002), "Hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose" (p. 114). Patton placed hermeneutics within the narrative tradition by referring back to earlier authorities such as Palmer (1969), who commented, "To make sense of and interpret a text, it is important to know what the author wanted to communicate, to understand intended meanings, and to place documents in historical and cultural context" (quoted in Patton, 2002, p. 114), and Kvale (1987), who noted, "The understanding of a text takes place through a process where the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of text" (quoted in Patton, 2002, p. 98). This researcher sought to interpret the meaning of both the experiences conveyed by the interviewed participants and the language used to convey the experience.



## **Research Questions**

The following section includes the answers to the research questions and aligns the findings with concepts presented in the Literature Review.

### **Research Question 1: What experiences helped or hindered newcomers from India in learning English in the United States?**

The major obstacle participants claimed hindered their ability to speak English in the United States was their fear. Fear of communicating with others because of their accent, and fear they would starve to death in the United States because they could not find any employment were repeatedly highlighted by the participants. Initially, participants were unable to move beyond the level of fear, which placed them at the lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Abraham Maslow's (1970) motivational pyramid, traditionally described as one of 'needs', proposes a hierarchical structure of values. In Maslow's scheme, biological needs come first—people generally value (and will seek) sustenance of the body, protection from pain and danger, and facilitation of pleasure in preference to activities that do not serve these ends. It is only when biological needs are largely satisfied that social needs (values) are pursued, such as acceptance by others; a sense of belongingness; receipt of attention, approval, and praise. Once secure in the social realm, psychological values—those regarding achievement, knowledge, and understanding—can then be pursued. Finally, once people feel secure and that their basic needs are being met, they then tend to pursue even 'higher' values of beauty, self-actualization, creation, and transcendence of identity barriers. One implication of Maslow's structure is that when a person is forced to choose between a behavior that only fulfills a lower-order need and one that only fulfills a higher-order need, it is natural to choose the former (Miller & Rollnick, 2002, pp. 285-286).

Maslow's theory suggests that adult learners who are very goal-directed about their learning gravitate toward a learning situation that supports meeting their particular goals. For the language learner faced with survival as a goal, the need to adjust the learning environment for maximum success is essential because, as Maslow indicates, anyone will meet the basic need for survival first. The adult Punjabi-speaking immigrant faces this kind of situation. "He therefore seeks a particular kind of teaching which is, in Maslow's words, 'receptive rather than intrusive,' doesn't 'condition, reinforce, or boss,' but helps him discover his own problems, his own aptitudes, and his own answers" (Moore, 2005, p. 81).

When Punjabi speakers could not access this kind of teaching at the community learning center, many became so desperate they returned to India, while others stayed but remained unable to acculturate. Those who found a community setting that supported their learning, such as the workplace, were successful and made the transition to life in the United States. The term accent, used repeatedly by the interviewees, would seem at first glance to be a peculiar issue to introduce Maslow level-one fear. However, when accent is understood as a placeholder term for the more complex concern of nonfunctioning language mechanics, it surfaces as an all-encompassing issue upon which the very success of emigration depended. For the Panjabi speakers their native language did not easily correspond to English. This issue is further explained in Finding 1.

**2. What were the experiences of adult Punjabi-language speakers while learning English in their: (a) home setting? (b) workplace setting? and (c) community setting?**

Hermeneutics theory argues that one can only interpret the meaning of something from some perspective, a certain standpoint, a praxis, or a situational context whether one is reporting on one's own findings or reporting the perspectives of people being studied (and thus reporting their standpoint or perspective. (Patton, 2002, p. 115)

According to Yin (2009), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Creswell (2013) further noted, “In the final interpretive phase, the researcher reports the meaning of the case, whether that meaning comes from learning about the issues of the case (an instrumental case) or learning about an unusual situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 101). The meaning of the home, community, or workplace for the participants as the situational basis for their learning was deeply dependent on the support each of these situations offered. The phenomenon of support-while-learning was not possible at home or within the community learning center. The unusual situation of having neither home nor community language center respond to life-threatening concerns, which created a crisis for the participants at a Maslow level-one degree.

Participants did not have the support necessary to help them learn English in the home setting. The participants had minimal educational background when it came to speaking English; therefore, learning English within the home setting was very difficult for them. The community setting was not beneficial as well due to the fact there were no Punjabi-speaking tutors available. Many of the tutors were bilingual, generally English and Spanish, but did not speak Punjabi. When the participants went to get support it was difficult for them to connect their background knowledge with the new content being presented to them.

The workplace setting proved to be a beneficial and advantageous venue for support for both the participant and the employer. Participants claimed the workplace support they received gave them the ability to communicate with others and learn how to speak English more effectively. Some of the participants even went on to help others who were struggling with learning to speak English while others embarked upon their own entrepreneurial journeys. It was the support that was made available within the workplace that made the greatest difference for

the participants in this case study. The workplace setting opened up the ability of the participants to move from a Maslow, level-one fear to a Maslow, level-five goal of achieving self-actualization needs—realizing one’s own potential and striving for personal growth.

**Research Question 3: Do Punjabi-language speakers identify major obstacles they had to overcome as they were learning English?**

The inability to carry out their normal daily routines was the biggest obstacle participants claimed affected their day-to-day living. Their lives changed suddenly because the common tasks they were so used to doing in India seemed impossible to do in the United States. Simple things like catching a bus to filling out a form seemed like impossible tasks for the participants. Because of their inability to speak, read, and write English, many common tasks were left undone. This pattern resulted in increased fear and helplessness.

Participants felt helpless and would often cling to their children for support. Children should be able to count on their parents for support, but in many instances, the parents were counting on the children to help them understand signs to get from point a to point b.

Participants also struggled when it came to filling out common forms because they could not understand what the form was asking of them. Major errors and mistakes were made on the forms, resulting in denied benefits and miscommunications on the part of the participants. Being unable to operate as knowledgeable adults relying on their previously acquired skills increased the participants’ helplessness and contributed to a mounting feeling of desperation and fear.

**Research Question 4: How do adult Punjabi-language speakers describe their continued growth in language acquisition after they left employment with the researcher or other significant employment?**

The life-changing experiences that occurred at the workplace did not occur anywhere else for the participants. It also did not occur for the participants who were not at the researcher’s

workplace. The knowledge they gained at the workplace helped them to remain employed, provide for their family, and assist others who were struggling to learn English. Many have gone on to achieve their goals of starting their own businesses and some have even joined major companies. Their confidence levels have improved and they no longer fear poverty. The struggles and challenges they faced and overcome have given them the tools to help others in similar situations. They have been able to acculturate, participate fully in their community and contribute to the welfare of others.

## **Findings**

### **Finding 1: Their native language was an obstruction to understanding.**

Interview participants' struggle to communicate in English was compounded by the idiosyncrasies of their own native language, Punjabi. Canale and Swain (1980) studied the teaching of a second language and found that linguistic competence included knowledge of the target language's code, such as grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling. Only mastery of linguistic competence led to socio-linguistic competence, which included such things as appropriate application of vocabulary (Canale & Swain, 1980).

For those learning English, with its complexity of word cognates, coming from the Punjabi language was a compounding complication. Often participants used what they believed was a translation of a Punjabi word only to later misunderstand their choice of the wrong English cognate for the Punjabi word they were trying to translate. The one word for a concept that was natural to Punjabi usually did not match well with the English language's many words for the same concept. The participants' fear was that they had said the word incorrectly; they believed that the error was due to their accent and that their accent had not conveyed the word. The interviewees mistakenly collapsed the failure to be understood into the one-word concept of accent.

Dr. Sodhi, a teacher in the Punjabi language, explained that there is usually only one word in Punjabi to explain a concept that Punjabi speakers want to express or say. This is different from other languages, which use many cognates to convey a concept. Many of the participants used such one-word terms to express their concerns and feelings during the interview session. An English-only listener might interpret their concern over accent as being one of pronunciation when the intent of the Punjabi speaker was the more complex concept of inability to be understood at all. The Maslow level-one fear was that despite their best effort to communicate, they would not be able to understand or be understood at all. Their fear was that they would remain isolated within their own language under conditions where understanding the other language was absolutely essential to survive.

The fear of incorrect pronunciation as the hindrance to being understood had deeper roots in the conundrum that the language structure presented. The expanded meaning of words in Punjabi is determined by the additional language facility of tonality.

Modern Punjabi is a very tonal language, making use of various tones to differentiate words that would otherwise be identical. Three primary tones can be identified: high-rising-falling, mid-rising-falling, and low rising. By using these tones properly, Punjabi language speakers are able to differentiate between words that otherwise appear to be the exact same as one another. (Accredited Language Services, 2015, p. 9)

Punjabi speakers' concern about pronunciation and misunderstanding stems from this linguistic difference. Punjabi speakers had to learn to rely on different English words to express variations in a word's meaning, not tonal inflections. Their perception was that they were mispronouncing words not picking the wrong cognate. Given the limited schooling of most of the Punjabi immigrants, and their limited understanding of learning a language, this is understandable—but it was not anticipated by the language learning center.

Interview participants' struggle to communicate in English, compounded by the idiosyncrasies of their own native language, Punjabi, was not so much an example of Krashen's affective filter as it was the mechanical difficulty of translating from Panjabi, a language with a structure of one word for a concept to English, a language of many words for a concept. The fears the interviewees experienced in acculturating to the customs of the U.S. and the inability to make the systems of transportation, healthcare, and employment work were magnified by the inability to make even rudimentary language translation work. The Panjabi immigrants experienced this as an "accent" problem when in reality it was a much more complex problem rooted in the difference between the primary language, Panjabi, and the second language, English.

**Finding 2: English Language is so essential to the execution of common tasks that for Punjabi speakers it raised significant Maslow level-one fears.**

Further findings discovered common tasks individuals do each and every day such as filling out a form or finding a form of transportation to get to a destination could seem like walking on ice for those who could not speak English clearly. For beginning English language learners it is a struggle to even figure out how to get to the ice rink.

The frustration and challenges are very troublesome. Participants left their country in India feeling at ease doing such common tasks, but encountered fearful situations when asked to do so such basic tasks such as filling out a form. Being unable to accomplish these basic tasks resulted in situations that could lead to total failure to acculturate to life in the U.S. and even such dire consequences as starving to death in America. The Punjabi-speaking immigrant with little or no English upon arrival was suddenly in a situation where they had left home feeling competent but in the U. S. they felt incompetent and dependent in many cases on their own children. This created fears and limited their ability to acculturate in the United States.

McCarthy (n.d.), Schütz (2014), and Chun et al. (2010) all claimed stressors increase difficulties in learning the target language. Chun et al. (2010) further claimed that immigrants were often not able to acculturate themselves into their new environment and surroundings due to the stress of having to learn and speak a completely different language. Learning is possible, as Krashen (1982) noted, if the adult learner is able to lower their affective filter and allow themselves to become a part of their surroundings. According to Krashen (1982), *affective filter* refers to the complex of negative emotional and motivational factors that may interfere with the reception and processing of comprehensible input. Such factors include anxiety of the sort that the Punjabi speakers experienced when their prior experience and learning was rendered useless for operating in the U. S. It would appear that the affective filter Krashen noted was only the tip of the iceberg for the Panjabi speaker. It was no doubt part of the problem, but as noted in Finding 1, there was an even more rudimentary difficulty for Panjabi speakers, that of the nonequivalence of the two languages.

Participants initially feared conversing with others in the community because they thought they had an accent and felt others would laugh at them when they said something. Many felt reluctant to participate in their children's school programs because they could not speak English. This level of fear no doubt also contributed to their ability to learn English. Furthermore, since many participants could not speak English and English was essential to manage the many systems upon which their lives depended, they felt they would starve to death in America, which further increased their stress. Many had families and children to support and were frightened by the fact they would have nothing to eat.

Daily necessities were a constant concern for the participants. Getting from point a to point b such as making it to doctor's appointments, finding job opportunities, and even taking care of loved ones became a difficult challenge. The next challenge faced by participants was



filling out the forms that were required by many agencies and prospective employers and landlords. Participants tried to fill out the forms themselves, but did not understand the questions on the forms. Many asked their children to fill the forms out for them, but still encountered difficulties because of incorrect responses on the form.

**Finding 3: Learning a language is a function of community and for Punjabi speakers, community cannot be assumed to be in place at the language center.**

Participants sought support from community literacy centers but it was not as beneficial as they had hoped. The tutors available at the literacy centers only spoke English, and bilingual support in Punjabi, although essential given the complexity of moving from Punjabi to English, simply was not available. Participants were in large classroom settings and were given instruction in English but were not able to connect new vocabulary words in English with their existing Punjabi knowledge.

Limited time availability provided by the literacy center was also another factor that inhibited language development. Participants were provided support 1 day out of the week and it was only for a short period of time. This approach did not benefit the participants. Burt and Florez (2001) emphasized that having some previous knowledge of the other person's culture would allow the teacher to diversify learning strategies by personalizing the lesson with their cultural experiences, giving the opportunity to teach and learn at the same time.

As Crocker et al. (2002) noted, employers and agencies need to understand the importance of contextualized learning that promotes real life learning scenarios. This finding points to the success participants experienced in a workplace setting. Not only did it accelerate language learning, it taught the learners specifically the target language English they must know to be successful at work. That success was key to getting past the fear of starvation. It also was key to providing a successful relationship with the employer and a healthy business outcome.

Organizations benefit the most from providing English language training to their workers (Canadian Business, 2014). The success of the employee is the success of the employer.

Support received at the workplace allowed the participants to develop their confidence and move into other English-centric work settings. Their ability to learn English and develop their confidence level has allowed them to help others in their families and communities as well. Some have taken on new challenges in their career paths, and others have moved on to different English-centric work settings. Their experiences have shaped their future and they are now able to assist others who are struggling with English as well.

Alamprese and Kay (1993) and Burt (2004) noted that learning English takes place when opportunities are provided to English language learners. Burt (2004) noted the opportunity to learn the English language is supported by ESL development at the workplace and support from all leaders in the workplace. Finally, Moore (1999) noted that encouragement and motivation among the team are essential in promoting and giving English learners the opportunity to learn English.

### **Recommendations**

Participants claimed they did not know who to go to for help when they needed it the most. It would be helpful if upon their entry to the United States, Punjabi speakers who are knowledgeable about American transportation, resources, and medical practices provided the new immigrant with information on where to get support and services for their family. The information should be translated into the native language in order to be accessible to new immigrants.

Participants faced great difficulty in filling out forms for their basic needs. It would be beneficial if the forms they were filling out were in the native language of Punjabi or there was a translated version available to assist the participant. The difficulty in not getting the support they

needed just because they could not understand what was on the form was a life threatening frustration for the participants.

It would be beneficial if public transportation vehicles had maps in the native language of the participants. The stress which results from not being able to get from point a to point b can be overwhelming. Having a small map to assist would help overcome the stress faced by the participants.

Participants frequently visited and worshiped at local faith institutions. It would be beneficial to provide resource information to services such as transportation and medical care at these faith institutions. Faith institutions can also provide language support if possible to help immigrants feel culturally at home and language competent.

Lastly, English learning centers should recruit individuals who speak the primary language of those seeking support. Learning a second language can be extremely difficult if you are trying to help someone learn something but are not able to articulate it for them in their primary language. Making the connection can be extremely difficult. Having someone there who speaks the primary language could assist the participants with their fears and anxiety levels.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Next steps for researchers interested in this topic include finding other support avenues for those who are seeking support in learning to speak English. There are perhaps other ways to help English language learners from India who speak Punjabi learn to speak English in the United States effectively.

Participants expressed great fears when it came to speaking English because of their accent. Individuals who are interested in furthering this study can examine ways to overcome those fears. Perhaps looking at offering support programs in India before immigrants travel to the

United States would help immigrants overcome their fears before they arrive in the United States.

Researchers might benefit from comparing what English language learners from other countries did when they immigrated to the United States. It might be an interesting study to compare what has been done with other immigrating populations and what their experiences were. The study might enlighten researchers in the area of supporting English language learners from foreign countries.

### **Conclusion**

For those who speak no English the journey to the United States is not as seamless as it appears. There are hurdles to overcome and frustrations to face from filling out forms, to getting your child to the doctor's office for medical care, to feeding one's family. There are also hurdles to face along the way in overcoming fear of speaking English, including complexities in transitioning from Punjabi to English—but with the proper support in place, those hurdles can be overcome. Support programs at the community level need to understand the importance of having someone provide instruction in the primary language of the native speaker. There has to be a connection from the prior language to the new language in order for the participants to comprehend new ideas.

Support programs offered at the workplace unfolded success stories for the participants. The support programs provided a safe haven for the participants in which they could express themselves without fear or any hesitations. Participants felt a part of a team and worked collaboratively with their co-workers in learning to speak English. With their new-found knowledge, many of the participants have been able to start assisting others within their community. They understand their struggles because they have walked in their shoes, and want to support them when they too are fearful of speaking English.

## **Reflections**

This study is very dear to me, as I too was an immigrant from India who spoke a limited amount of English and struggled to learn to speak English in the United States. My parents could not find any work because they could not speak any English. They found employment opportunities here and there which required no English skills, primarily in agriculture. I grew up watching their struggles and frustrations and hoped to one day make a difference for others who were struggling with learning to speak English and keep food on the table for their families.

The goal of this study is to enlighten others on the challenges faced by many immigrants who emigrate from India. Perhaps it will assist other entrepreneurs in understanding the importance of offering employment opportunities to those who speak no English. The benefits of supporting employees can benefit not just the employee but also benefit the employer with a dedicated workforce and a commitment to the success of everyone.

This case study can be more than a case study if communities and entrepreneurs embrace the information found within this study and offer opportunities for learning English to emigrants from foreign countries. The researcher is doing a small part by presenting this case study, encouraging others to learn from it, and opening the door to others who are struggling to learn to speak English. The difference made will affect the lives of not just one, but many.

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## APPENDIX A

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Project Title:** EXPLORING ADULT PUNJABI-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS' PATH TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION A CASE STUDY

**Principal Investigator:** Pankaj Sharma

**Introduction:**

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
  
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.
  
- Please do not hesitate to ask for a Punjabi translated version of this form if don't understand something. My goal is to support you and help you feel as comfortable as possible. Once again your participation is strictly voluntary and will not influence or play a role in your employment. This is meant to be a learning experience for all involved.

**Why is this study being done?**

- This study is being done to learn from your experiences and support others who are struggling to learn English. Your stories will shape the path for others who want to learn to speak English. Your generous feedback and time is greatly appreciated.

**Who will be in this study?**

- The first five participants are all adult age English learners who have worked for me in the past at my store and are willing to share their English language learning journey with us. The other five participants' are members of the community who learned to speak English while residing in the United States through other means.

**What will I be asked to do?**

- I will ask you to participate in an interview with myself and a volunteer native Punjabi speaker from our community. The community volunteer will ask you questions related to your ESL journey in learning English in the United States. Your feedback and responses are greatly appreciated. This is completely voluntary and there will be no reimbursement for your participation. The timeframe for the study is approximately one month.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be a benefit to others, the organization.



**What will it cost me?**

- Nothing.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

To further protect the identity of the participants' pseudonyms will be assigned. This researcher is dedicated to the complete privacy of the study participants.

Interviews will take place individually, in-person, in a private business office or most convenient for the study participants either in the participants' facility or a third party community office facility.

Results in general, copy form will be shared with the researcher's committee. No other materials will be utilized such as photos or video.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

- This study is designed to be anonymous, this means that no one can link the data you provide to you, or identify you as a participant.
- Research records will be kept in a locked file in the locked office of the Principal Investigator
- Data will be stored on a password protected computer and on a USM network drive
- Individually identifiable data will be destroyed after the study is complete
- No individually identifiable information will be collected

### **General Requirements Language**

- Institutional Review Board may review the research records
  
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
  
- Audio tapes will be destroyed once transcribed

### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University [or with other cooperating institutions]. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
  
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

### **What other options do I have ?**

- You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting the study is Pankaj Sharma. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact him at [psharma1@une.edu](mailto:psharma1@une.edu)

**General Requirements Language**

- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Pankaj Sharma at [psharma1@une.edu](mailto:psharma1@une.edu) or Michelle Collay at [mcollay@une.edu](mailto:mcollay@une.edu)

**General Requirements Language**

- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu)

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

- You will be given a copy of this consent form

**Participants Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risk and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participants' Signature or Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed Name

**Researcher's Statement**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

---

Researcher's signature

---

Date

---

Printed Name

## APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who immigrated with you to the United States? (family members, relationship)
2. What city and state did you first immigrate to when you entered the United States?
3. How did you learn to speak English in the United States?
4. How long have you been residing in the local community?
5. What was your first job in this community? Did it require English and did you have sufficient English to do the job?
6. What experiences gave you the confidence to move into an English-centric work setting?
7. What strategies, if any, did you use to learn the English required in the workplace?
8. Describe an experience where you learned English within the workplace setting.
9. Describe an experience that moved you to the point where you could communicate with customers in your work environment
10. What steps have you taken outside the workplace to learn English?
11. What strategies, if any, did you use to learn English in order to communicate in the community?
12. Do you have plans to take formal English language course work in community centers?
13. Are there any individuals who have been role models for you in the community?
14. What challenges and/or obstacles have you faced in learning English within or outside the workplace?

15. If you lived in a poverty-type environment, what did you do to overcome such a hurdle?

16. What motivated you to want to learn English and not retreat or give up?

17. What feedback would you like to give others who would like to learn to speak English?