

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Understanding the Persistence of Adult Literacy Learners in English for Speakers of Other Languages Programs

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Numerous immigrants with limited formal education have recently arrived in the U.S. These immigrants, lacking native language literacy skills, enroll in adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs to improve their literacy skills and learn English. Research indicates that 100-150 hours of instruction are needed to make a learning gain equivalent to one grade level, but that learners attend for an average of 58 to 128 hours. The purpose of this study was to determine which adult ESOL literacy learners persisted the longest with formal coursework, so that follow-up studies might investigate their persistence strategies.

The study examined the records of 462 adult ESOL literacy learners enrolled in a federally-funded ESOL program within a three-year period. Persistence was defined as the total percentage of hours attended for all classes and the total number of classes enrolled in. Learners were predominantly Latino and over half were female. The average age of the group population was 36 and learners reported a mean of four years of formal education in their countries.