

**Project-Based Learning in Adult English as a Second Language Programs:  
A Multiple Case Study**

by

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## **Abstract**

Given the influx of internationals immigrating to the United States (US), English language learners (ELLs) are now the fastest growing group of students in the country with 65% of them being born in the US (DaSilva, Combs, & Moll, 2012). According to Kanno and Cromley (2013) the quantity of ELLs in the K-12 setting in the US is estimated to increase from 10% (currently) to 25% by the year 2025. The problem is the academic achievement of ELLs in the US reflects repercussions of a long history of educational inequity for students of racial/ethnic minorities (Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how elements of Project-Based Learning (PBL) align with the learning experiences of adult ELLs with English acquisition at the collegiate level. PBL provides opportunities for language learners to develop all four language skills in an integrated and contextualized way; it mirrors real-world language (Fleming, 2000). Due to the immense effect that immigrants and ELLs have on the US as a whole, this study is essential to the success of properly educating the growing population.

This qualitative study explored the experiences of international students learning English in American colleges. This multiple case study utilized data that collected via face to face interviews. Participants were international students who are in college and are in an Intensive English Program (IEP). Lastly, data analysis employed qualitative research methods. The analysis included data transcription and coding to reduce the data. After data reduction, themes that emerged were notated and synthesized.

Findings illustrated major themes that emerged from the interviews which were barriers to learning English, learning English in the US, real life application, enhancing English learning, and elements of learning English. Each theme had components that were experienced by the participants. From review of literature and the interviews several assertions were made. First, motivation is the key to the success for ELLs learning English. Next, curriculum should be well rounded and not solely focused on one aspect, such as grammar. Third, conversation is essential for any ELL program. The participants stressed how important it was to have conversation practice with fellow students, especially native English speakers, while learning English was another assertion. Finally, project based learning could be valuable approach to help ELL learn English.

The intent of this study was to explore project based learning as a means to help college aged English language learners learn English in the college more efficiently. There is little research regarding international students and learning English in college employing a project based learning approach. This study serves as a bridge to close the gap in research pertaining to how English language learners feel about learning English, how project based learning could be utilized to help the mentioned population as well as add to the existing body of research regarding English language learners and project based learning.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgments .....	iv
List of Tables .....	xiii
Chapter I. Introduction of the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Adult English Language Learners and Project Based Learning .....	4
Advantages of Project Based Learning .....	5
Drawbacks of Project Based Learning.....	8
Research Questions .....	9
Significance of the Study .....	10
Assumptions of the Study .....	10
Limitations of the Study .....	11
Definition of Terms .....	12

Chapter II. Literature Review .....	13
Introduction.....	13
Project Based Learning Definitions .....	13
Where Project Based Learning Started .....	15
Early Reports of Project Based Learning.....	17
Methods used in Project Based Learning.....	18
Scaffolding .....	18
Differentiated Instruction.....	20
Working Collaboratively .....	22
Elements of Project Based Learning .....	25
The Joy of Learning .....	25
Technology .....	27
Learner Centered .....	27
Real Life Learning .....	28
Critical Thinking .....	30
Literacy Development .....	30
Assessment .....	32
Teacher’s Role in Utilizing Project Based Learning .....	34
Challenges Teachers Face with Project Based Learning .....	37

Adult English Language Learners .....	39
Challenges Associated with Project Based Learning.....	42
Conclusion .....	43
Chapter III. Methods .....	47
Introduction.....	47
Design .....	47
Population .....	51
Sampling.....	51
Instrumentation .....	52
Procedures.....	52
Data Collection .....	52
Study Variables.....	57
Data Analysis .....	58
Data Collection .....	58
Transcription.....	58
Open Coding.....	59
Standards and Validations.....	61



Assumptions.....	63
Limitations .....	63
Summary .....	64
Chapter IV. Findings.....	65
Introduction.....	65
Purpose of Research.....	65
Research Question .....	65
Interview Question.....	66
First Established Codes.....	67
Codes after Data Reduction .....	67
Table of Coded Data .....	68
The Participants .....	69
Findings.....	70
Barriers to Learning English.....	72
Time .....	72
Inadequate Teachers.....	74
Age .....	77

Other Barriers.....	74
Problems with Communication.....	75
Slang .....	76
Pronunciation .....	76
Learning English in the US.....	78
Learning Styles .....	78
How English is Learned.....	79
Best Atmosphere for Learning English.....	80
Facilitation of English Language Learning.....	81
Enhancing English Language Learning .....	81
Time .....	81
Motivation.....	82
Qualities of the Teacher .....	86
Knowing English Grammar but not Being Able to Speak.....	89
Support.....	90
Conversation Practice .....	92
Elements of Learning English.....	93

Standardized Testing.....	93
Grammar and Vocabulary.....	95
Conversation .....	95
Freedom of Speech in Class.....	96
Immersion .....	96
Significance of Language Structure.....	97
Real World Application .....	98
Contextual Learning.....	98
Job Related Learning .....	98
Tools for Improvement .....	99
Technology .....	100
Conclusion .....	102
Chapter V Summary, Limitations, Implications and Recommendation.....	103
Introduction.....	103
Discussion of Findings.....	104
Barriers to Learning English.....	106
Learning English in the US.....	109

Enhancing English Language Learning .....	110
Elements of Learning English.....	112
Real World Application .....	114
Research Question Discussed .....	115
Assertions.....	117
Motivation.....	117
Well Rounded Curriculum.....	117
Conversation in English Language Learning Classes.....	118
Quality of Project Based Learning for English Language Learners .....	118
Limitations .....	119
Implications for Future Studies.....	120
Conclusions.....	121
References .....	125
Appendix A Interview Protocol .....	141
Appendix B Consent Form .....	142

## List of Tables

Table 1.1 Table of Coded Data .....	68
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## **Chapter I. Introduction to the Study**

### **Introduction**

It is well known that the United States of America is a melting pot of cultures with people relocating there from all over the world. Families are coming at a constant rate which affects the cultural dynamics not only in the K-12 school population, but in colleges and universities as well. Over the past six years, new international student enrollment has increased from 173,121 in 2007 to 250,920 in 2013(Fast Facts). Auburn University ranks as number 2 in Alabama for the highest population of international students with 1,089 of foreign students on the (Open Doors Fact Sheet, 2013). Although not all immigrant students are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs), recent data show that international students make up 3.9% of the total higher education population in universities in the United States (US) (Fast Facts, 2013). ELLs are now the fastest growing group of students in the country with 65% of them being born in the United States (DaSilva, Combs, & Moll, 2012). The influx of ELLs coming into the schools, shows the urgency for exploring proper education methods.

Immigrant students who do not speak English are often called English Language Learners (ELLs) and are usually placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. These students tend to be placed into environments where they are learning new languages as well an academic content and some of those students fail academically (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix & Clewell, 2000). This factor could also lead to other negative factors like a rise in the dropout rate, low test scores, an unsuccessful academic experience and not fluently learning the English language. The causes of academic failure or stress are clearly multi-dimensional, ranging from institutional practices

such as academic tracking (Callahan, 2005; Sharkey & Layzer, 2000). Academic failure for this population has also been linked students' level of first language literacy, to poverty (Janzen, 2008). On the other hand students who do well in school, immigrant or otherwise, tend to enter into better opportunities and economies (Perez, 2007).

English language learning is a growing research field with most of the research being geared toward young learners (Campbell, 2012). The current body of research gives information about learning strategies to help ELLs in the K-12 setting but a closer look was taken into adult ELL students and how they learn. In this study, the review of literature is heavily saturated with research relating to students in the K-12 setting, given the lack of research directly pertaining to college level English language learners.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The quantity of ELLs in the K-12 setting in the United States is estimated to increase from 10% (currently) to 25% by the year 2025 (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Not only does this statistic include K-12 ELLs but students in the postsecondary education setting as well (PSE) (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Even though the increase could impact the educational system, little is known about ELLs' college-going patterns (Perez, 2007). This lack of research could lead to the difficulty of integrating ELLs into American society (Perez, 2007). Another problem is the fact that ELL students, who are not properly taught, could have negative educational experiences. Also, because the education of ELL students is different than that of native students, teachers may not be prepared to teach them. English language learners may also have diverse learning styles that need to be studied to ensure they are properly educated. In my personal experience, I have witnessed time and energy being used to assist the special education

population and little attention given to ELLs. This is a huge problem given that the ELL population is continuing to grow in the United States and it should be properly studied.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There has been research done over the years relating to K-12 English language learners (ELLs) but more, especially research that includes adult and/or higher education learners, need to be completed. Overall, more research has been done with students in the elementary and upper elementary grades than with high school learners (Janzen, 2008). However, students in the middle and high school levels are less likely to receive targeted language instruction than are elementary school learners (Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2002). This means that there could be inconsistencies with the ways that ELLs are educated at different educational levels. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine project based learning (PBL) as an approach to help adult ELLs with English language acquisition at the collegiate level. It will also shed light on the ELL students' of this study self-perceived learning styles to investigate if project based learning could be a good approach to help with learning English as a Second Language.

English language learners usually fall into categories other than linguistic backgrounds and are rarely studied in their own right (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). In current research, researchers tended to focus on ELL's linguistic challenges, which have the potential to leave categories like access and success under represented (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). This study explores linguistic and learning styles of ELLs to investigate strategies to make the ELL experience more successful given the underperformance of the ELLs in United States schools, which highlights the need for change (Koelsch, Chu & Banuelos, (2013). Project based learning has components like scaffolding, differentiated instruction and working in groups that has the



potential to help ELLs. Research regarding this issue is scarce and this study will investigate this idea to add to the current body of literature.

### **Adult English Language Learners and Project Based Learning**

The experience of an ELL adult learner could be maximized given that “PBL connects utilizing English in a classroom setting and using English in real life situations out of the classroom” (Fried-Booth, 1997) (as cited in Moss & Van Duzer, 1998, p. 2). This authentic use of language could make the experience more genuine which could be considered meaningful to the student. The student may then be able to remember the language better and communicate more effectively. In an authentic learning environment students are also taken out of their comfort zone, become active, and start the process of learning by doing (Dewey, 1938). According to Stoller (2006) in some settings, PBL is a natural extension or an enhancement of what is already taking place in class.

Project based learning at university institutions arose in the 1970s in Europe as a part of a move for curriculum change and the democratization of the university (Kotze, Astrid, & Cooper, 2014). Kotze, Astrid and Cooper (2014) gave details about how at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU) students worked in groups, in a sustained way over a number of weeks, on a project that was usually built around a problem. This is significant because according to Tims (2009) group work as a communicative activity provides good advantages for adult learners and ELLs as well. Not only could adult ELLs learn another language using a PBL approach but they could also learn skills like team work which could be used in the real world.

The idea of the use of PBL with adult ELLs still has a long way to go given that the emphasis is usually placed on younger students, but this study will help to close the gap in research regarding adult ELLs in the university setting. Knowles (1973) study showed that adult

students want the time they spend in a classroom to be as useful as possible not only for themselves as students but also as human beings, which means that English as a second language (ESL) classes should provide the students with the necessary tools that allow them to connect what they learn in the classroom to their real world and to make the time in the classroom meaningful and worthwhile (Tims, 2009). This is not surprising since most people want to maximize their educational experience while in school.

Project based learning is an approach, like many others, that has been tested for years. The advantages as well as the drawbacks have been documented and will be discussed briefly here, and in more detail in chapter two.

### **Advantages of Project Based Learning**

There are several advantages of using a PBL approach, the first being it is learner centered in nature. It focuses on the students' learning needs, providing them with a more meaningful learning experience (Fleming, 2000; Stoller, 2006). By concentrating on the learner, the teacher may know exactly how to help him/her. The teacher could also choose topics that really interest the student which could lead to a more motivated learner. For adult learners, what they want and need would be more explicit leaving the student possibly feeling like they are really a part of the learning process. This goes along with Knoll (1997) who stated that students can become more motivated and interested in learning since they are not passively stuffed with knowledge but rather engaged in applied learning designed to develop initiative, creativity, and judgment.

Motivation, which is another advantage of PBL, is increased because the students work on strategies that entice them and it happens in a way that best suits their abilities (Fleming, 2000). Having motivation is very important because students may lose motivation for a number

of reasons. Adult learners, as stated before, want to make the most of their learning experience and the fact that they are exposed to real life situations could possibly motivate them to do their best. These students could also have heightened motivation because instead of rote memorization they are learning by doing (Adderley, Ashwin, Freeman, Goodlad, Greene, Jenkins, Rae & Uren 1975; Blumenfield et al. 1991; Dewey, 1938). This could lead to more success in the learning venture.

Regardless of the path someone takes, the ability to work as a team will more than likely be a qualification that may be required. According to Richards (2001) “in a PBL setting students are encouraged to interact with their classmates collaboratively and productively” (Fleming, 2000, p. 13). PBL groups are sustained by the contribution that each member can make in the group, not just within the discipline, but with regards to each other’s skills and knowledge (Kotze, Astrid & Cooper, 2014). In regards to adult learners, the elements of group work are an integral part of their development. As adults there are skills that are important for living successful lives such as the ability to plan, organize, negotiate, make points and arrive at a consensus about an issue (Stein, 1995). Employers also deem those types of skills listed above important especially in a high performance workplace (US Department of Labor, 1991). Collaboration is also important for adult ELLs because within group work integral to projects, individuals’ strengths and preferred ways of learning strengthen the work of the team as a whole (Lawrence, 1997).

Project based learning takes into account that everyone is different and has diverse learning styles, which is a great advantage of this type of teaching method.

Honigsfeld and Dunn (2006) found that:

No two adult learners approach the same task with identical strategies. Some read and highlight everything deemed of importance, whereas others spend hours searching the Internet to download information. We know people who immediately pop a book-on-tape into their car cassette player before turning the ignition key and others who listen to tapes or read while running or walking on the treadmill. These four strategies are examples of what appeals to visual, tactual, auditory or kinesthetic learners who naturally turn to the approach that works best for them. (p. 15)

PBL also recognizes the link between learning and other activities, and at its best, it encourages students to explore how, and not simply what they learn in the process of engaging with people and the world (Kotze, Astrid & Cooper, 2014). Based on the flexibility of PBL addressing all learning styles simultaneously, PBL had the potential to stimulate lateral thinking and creativity, which is essential for adult ELLs (Kotze, Astrid & Cooper, 2014).

Adult English language learners' knowledge can be enhanced by project based learning, which is an advantage. PBL provides opportunities for language learners to develop all four language skills in an integrated and contextualized way; it mirrors real-world language use where skills are rarely used in isolation (Fleming, 2000, p. 33). According to Stoller (2006) "many language professionals praise project-based learning because it creates purposeful opportunities for language input, language output and explicit attention to language-related features (e.g. forms, vocabulary, skills, strategies)" (p. 32). Stoller (2006) also explains that "in order for PBL to be successful it is the teacher's responsibility to obtain language related pre-project activities that way the students have a better chance contextualizing their learning" (as cited in Tims, 2009, p. 11). Lee and Avalos (2002) also support the idea that ELLs English vocabulary will continually improve as they are learning new concepts in their new language. With PBL

supporting the learning, adult learners may have a better chance at contextualizing their knowledge.

Lastly, PBL seems to be equivalent or slightly better than other models of instruction for producing gains in general academic achievement and for developing lower level cognitive skills in traditional subject matters for K-12 students (Thomas, 2000, p. 34). Also, recently in the United States and Texas, more specifically, there has been a push toward project-based, group learning, as well as increased research in the education concerning project-based learning (Gourgy, 2009).

### **Drawbacks of Project Based Learning**

This approach has been evolving for several years so the drawbacks should be mentioned along with the advantages. This is important because no research is perfect and by listing the drawbacks the research could be considered more transparent. Also, when the drawbacks are mentioned, they may be more easily addressed with a solution which could make the approach better.

The first drawback is time. Projects can demand a lot of the student for instance; it takes a long time to do an acceptable project. Not only does it take a lot of the student's time, it is time consuming for the teacher as well because students may need extra supervision, the method needs to be carefully designed to work well, attending preparatory training exercises, the projects may involve extra expenses, and are time-consuming to assess (Henry, 1994). Fleming (2000) stated that it may also be difficult for teachers to supervise their students in the different stages of the project activity. Adult learners tend to have personal responsibilities so time could be very important to them so anything that takes a lot of time would be a drawback.

No matter what approach is used, the ability of the students to get along is significant to the success of the approach. The group of students the instructors are working with dictates the success of PBL implementation (Boaler, 1997; Beckett, 1999; Eyring 1989). If the students cannot get along or do not work well together, the effectiveness of the approach may be compromised. Parks and Raymond (2004) is an example of group work not working well as it could. The study that states that international students in the university setting had difficulty intervening in small group work discussions because the native speakers tended to not regard them as “equal partners”. Hindle et al. (1995) also stressed that in order for a team to be successful they need to encompass certain skills like tolerance, readiness to listen and learn, and be a team player. This could be difficult for adult ELLs because they may be coming from diverse backgrounds but as long as the team is respectful to one another, the team could have a better chance at being successful.

The ELL classroom is a place where students are learning a new language and academic content at the same time. The problem with that is teachers may not be well versed in a certain topics. Also, in PBL students may choose to do a project that is outside the teacher’s expertise. The students’ interest in a topic that is outside the instructor’s expertise may constitute a drawback as well (Jakar, 2006). Jakar (2006) also expressed that since teachers are primarily English as a Foreign Language (EFL) specialists, it is not reasonable to expect them to function as interdisciplinary experts, although they should be encouraged to exploit their own talents and interest where possible.

### **Research Questions**

Project based learning is an approach that has the possibility to be successful for adult and/or college level English language learners. It is an area of research that continues to grow

and this study will add to the current body of research. The following questions helped to guide the research and helped to explore this phenomenon.

1. What are the benefits of using project based learning to assist English language learners with English as a second language acquisition in a university setting?
2. In what ways do self-reported learning styles of the English language learner relate to the potential effectiveness of a PBL approach in a university setting?
3. What are the challenges associated with PBL as an approach to aid English language learning in a university setting?

### **Significance of the Study**

English language learning is an area that continues to grow as English language learners migrate to the United States and as foreign families continue to grow. English language learners may have problems academically given they do not speak English and they tend to be immersed into schools in the K-12 and the university setting that will only teach in English. These students, like any others, learn in different ways so there needs to be diverse approaches in order to help ELLs learn. Project-based learning has been known to be successful and incorporates aspects that may be beneficial to assist this population in need. There has not been much research done on this topic especially for the adult and college aged population. This research is important because it will add to the body of research relating to PBL and English language learning. Due to the immense effect that immigrants have on the United States as a whole, this study is essential to the success of properly educating the growing population.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Before starting this research endeavor, I already had some ideas about project based learning and how utilizing this type of approach could affect adult learners. I have personal

experiences as an educator and had been exposed to PBL. My personal background led me to see how project based learning could be been effective with helping ELL students learn English. It is assumed that by using PBL with elements like group work, collaboration, real-life learning, differentiated instruction, and a student centered environment, adult learners may be more successful academically. It is also assumed that as the student's English level increases, so might the entire academic experience. Another assumption is that PBL is the preferred method of learning for ELLs. Lastly, by using this approach they may be more motivated and engaged in the learning process and may have easier time learning.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current study was completed using a qualitative approach. Five international students were interviewed to explore the use of PBL with adult ELLs. The interviews of the participants were then transcribed and analyzed using a qualitative approach. With any study there will be limitations and this current study has a few. One limitation is that it only addressed ELL students from Italy, Turkey, Korea and Brazil who are attending a southern university as international students to learn English. Even though there is a limited number of cultures being represented, results may differ between students from different cultures, but this diversity could serve as a contribution to the study as well. This study addresses the adult population so there may be different effects between different ages of the participants. Most of the students who participated in the study were high level Intensive English Program (IEP) learners. It also contained one student who recently finished the program. The results of the study may have been different given the level of English ability of the participants. All of the limitations however, could be opportunities for further research. Since this study is qualitative it does not aim to generalize.



## Definition of Terms

**Authentic assessment:** measurement of important abilities using procedures that simulates the application of these abilities to real-life problems (Woolfolk, 2007).

**Autonomy:** independence (Woolfolk, 2007).

**Constructivism:** view that emphasizes the active role of the learner in building understanding and making sense of information (Woolfolk, 2007).

**Differentiated Instruction:** Teachers vary their instructional practices, both processes and procedures, to accommodate the needs of varied learners (Levine & McClosky, 2010).

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** a field of study dedicated to teaching English as an additional language (Levine & McClosky, 2010).

**English Language Learner (ELL):** students at the beginning to advanced level of acquiring English who are identified as meeting special instruction in English (Levine & McClosky, 2010).

**English to speakers of other languages (ESOL):** a course in which the content is the study of English for speakers of other languages. This acronym is sometimes used in place of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Levine & McClosky, 2010).

**Project-Based Learning (PBL):** an instructional method in which the students work in groups to use resources, especially technology, to engage in content learning (Thomas, 2000).

**Scaffolding:** providing contextual supports for meaning during instruction or assessment, such as visual displays, classified lists, or tables or graphs (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996).

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

This review of literature serves a lens to view project based learning (PBL) as a possible approach to help English language learners (ELLs) learn English in the United States. The review starts with an overview of definitions used to define project based learning so that the reader has a high-quality understanding of the terms. It then moves on to a description of the origins of project based learning. Next, an array of components of the PBL approach are discussed in detail as well as challenges associated with them. After that, the review attends to other items that are associated with PBL, for example, real world learning, critical thinking, literacy development and assessment. The review would not be complete without a section discussing the teacher's role in PBL as well as the role of the adult learners they teach.

The research in this review focuses on PBL, ELLs, and adult learners to investigate how they are connected. There was little research about using PBL with adult ELLs so much of the review entails PBL in the K-12 setting. This was done because it was assumed that if PBL is considered successful with K-12 ELLs, there may be similar results with adult ELLs.

### **Project Based Learning Definitions**

Project Based Learning is an approach that has different definitions so if one chooses to utilize it, it is imperative to have an excellent understanding of this teaching and learning strategy. It also contains many aspects so a view of the major descriptions would be essential for background knowledge. One problem with defining PBL is that, according to Stoller (2006) PBL is so versatile that “a single definition would not do justice to the various ways in which the

concept could be translated into practice” (Stoller, 2006, p. 23). This review of definitions serves as an overview of what PBL encompasses.

“Project based learning (PBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects” (Thomas, 2000, p. 1) and could be confused with other methods that utilize projects. Creating lessons that have a project included is not considered true project based learning. Project based learning tends to include authenticity, constructivism, and the importance of learning new basic skills (Diehl et al., 1999). Thomas (2000) suggests that there is a set of criteria that helps to determine if a project is project based learning. The criteria include centrality, driving question(s), constructive investigations, autonomy and realism.

The main component of PBL is the use of projects. Projects are complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in design, problem solving decision making, or other investigative activities. The projects that the students are a part of give them the opportunity to work on project alone or in groups to complete a “real-life” project (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffit, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller, & Michaelson, 1999). These projects usually include an authentic (“driving”) question, a community of inquiry, and the use of cognitive (technology-based) tools (Krackjck, Blumenfeld, Marx, & Soloway, 1994; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Blunk, Crawford, Kelly, & Meyer, 1994).

Moursund (1999) states other defining features of PBL found in literature include “authentic content, authentic assessment, teacher facilitation but not direction, explicit educational goals” (Thomas, 2000), cooperative learning, reflection, and incorporation of adult skills (Diehl, Grobe, Lopez, & Cabral, 1999) (as cited in Thomas, 2000, p. 1). Students who are in a PBL environment work on real life issues/problems individually or in small groups to produce concrete outcomes (Moursund, 1999a). The students, whether they are working in small

groups or individually, learn via facilitated problem solving which have the propensity of not having a single correct answer (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

This method also creates learning opportunities which are student-driven, teacher-facilitated and where student choice is key (Bell, 2010). Savery (2006) states that, “the learner centered nature of PBL empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem.” (p. 12). This could potentially allow students to be active learners, and connect what they learn in the classroom to their real life (Peterson & Meyer, 1995).

Duch, Groh and Allen, (2001) also thought that:

The methods used in PBL helps to develop specific skills like the ability to think critically, analyze and solve complex real-world problems, find evaluate and use appropriate learning resources; as well as to work cooperatively to demonstrate effective communication skills, and to use content knowledge and intellectual skills to become continual (as cited in Savery, 2006, p. 12).

Based on these definitions of PBL, a working definition of project based learning was created for this current study. Project based learning is a learner-centered, teacher-facilitated approach that allows for investigative procedures to gain knowledge through the use of authentic activities that enhances the cognitive ability of the learner.

### **Where Project Based Learning Started**

Project based learning originated in the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Adderley et al., 1975). Even though project based learning has been thought to be an exceptional teaching method that has been used for years, Snedden was the first to apply PBL to

teach science in an American vocational agricultural class (Beckett, 1999). There may have been others before Snedden but from what was found in this review of literature, he was the first to be documented in the United States. Project based learning is believed to stem from (a) Outward Bound wilderness expeditions; (b) postsecondary models of “problem-based” learning; (c) university-based research in cognition and cognitive science applications (Thomas, 2000, p. 4).

These traditions grew from Dewey’s idea that the learner should take an active role in the learning process because it would increase their motivation (Adderley et al., 1975; Beckett, 1999; Blumenfeld 1991). Rousseau is also important to mention because his views closely match Dewey’s. Dewey sided with Rousseau, who stated that “the learner is more likely to learn from personal experience rather than from instruct and percept from others” (Adderley et al. 1975, p.7). Vygotsky (1978) should also be mentioned because he stated that “learning occurs first in purposeful social interactions within the zone of proximal development and is gradually appropriated and internalized” (as cited in Koelsch, Chu & Banuelos, 2013, p. 642).

Student activity, in PBL, is directed to constructing a project (Helle, 2006). The PBL method that is known and used today evolved from Dewey’s mentee, W. H. Kilpatrick who grounded Dewey’s work, problem based learning, into the project method (Adderley et al., 1975). The difference between the two is that problem-based learning is directed at studying and a project is not necessary, whereas in project based learning, it is directed at constructing a project.

Not only does project based learning have history in the United States but it has origins in other countries as well. Project based learning at university institutions arose in the 1970s in Europe as a part of a move for curriculum change and the democratization of university (Kotze, Astrid, & Cooper, 2014).

## **Early Reports of Project Based Learning**

“Expeditionary Learning” (EL) is a PBL design that grew out of Outward Bound (OB), an adventure and service-based educational system, which is also referred to as Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) (Thomas, 2000). ELOB publications report that in 1993 ten schools participated in expeditionary learning and nine of the ten schools demonstrated significantly better test scores on standardized test of academic achievement. Expeditionary Learning Outward Bounds, 1999a (ELOB) stated that expeditionary learning was the most successful program of the six New American School designs implemented in (1993), and expeditionary learning schools have continued to deepen their implementation and improve year to year. These improvements occurred at a time when there was an increase in the English language learning population from 6% to 22% (ELOB, 1993b). This is interesting because if this increase happened at a time that there was a rise in the population of English language learners, it could mean that PBL was helping ELLs learn. It was also found that the “Academy for Educational Development (AED) report rates in the areas of retention, suspensions, and other indices of disciplinary problems to be lower in expeditionary learning schools” (Thomas, 2000, pp. 9-10).

According to Barrows (1992) the original problem based learning model was developed in Canada for use with medical students. It was created to help interns with their diagnostic skills (Thomas, 2000). This was thought to help the students because they were using their hands and authentically applying knowledge. More recently, problem based learning has been extended to math, science, and social science at the elementary and the secondary level (Stepien & Gallagher, 1993). Even though problem-based learning may have tutorial elements not found in the average PBL design, the problem based learning studies all have defining features of PBL.

Because of the aspects listed above, it is hypothesized that PBL will be a successful method to aide ELLs in their acquisition of English.

### **Methods Used in Project Based Learning**

It could be argued that the objective in an educational setting is to have the student learn the set curriculum. Thomas (2000) contended that projects developed by the students must take the curriculum they are working with into account, and if they do not, it cannot be called PBL. There are several supports that could be used to maintain curriculum relevance as well as enhance the project based learning approach.

The supportive methods are important because:

Given that curriculum instructions for ELLs focus on atomistic elements of language “academic” words, synthetic structures, rigid conceptions of genres (Walqui et al., 2010)- teachers will need additional support to realize the pedagogical scaffolding to engage ELLs in disciplinary practices of explaining, arguing, and reasoning (Lee, Quinn, & Valdez, 2013) (as cited in Koelsch, Chu, & Banuelos, 2013 p.642).”

The use of supports can be beneficial for adult ELLs given that research indicates that perceiving one’s environment as supportive can reduce the psychological impact of stressful events (Thoitis, 1986)(as cited in Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007). The methods that will be discussed in this study are scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and group work.

### **Scaffolding**

Project based learning is an approach that has been used by educators, incorporating elements like scaffolding to assist learners and from an epistemological perspective, pedagogical approaches influenced by socioconstructivist/sociocultural theory have proved much more effective in this regard than modes of teaching focused on lecturing (Parks & Raymond, 2004).

Among the many methods used in PBL is a technique called scaffolding. Interventions that were designed to support PBL have been referred to as scaffolding (Guzdial, 1998) or “procedural facilitation” (Scardamalia, Bereiter, McLean, Swallow & Woodruff, 1989).

Thomas (2000) stated that:

Research on experts and novices has also given practitioners ideas for enhancing students’ ability to benefit from project based learning, primarily through the introduction of varieties of “scaffolding” (learning aids, models, training strategies) introduced to help students become proficient at conducting inquiry activities (p. 7).

In terms of helping ELLs “the teacher’s role is to support students using techniques like scaffolding” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1997)(as cited in Parks & Raymond, 2004, p. 377).

Teachers should support students by breaking down tasks; using modeling, prompting, and coaching to teach strategies for thinking and problem solving; the responsibility can be released to the learner over time (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). “The reality is that learners who are new to PBL require significant instructional scaffolding to support the development of problem-solving skills, to a level of self-directed learning skills, and teamwork/collaboration skills to a level of self-sufficiency where the scaffolds can be removed” (Savery, 2006, p. 15). Scaffolded instruction helps to ensure success (Bell, 2010). Land and Greene (2000) found that scaffolding may enable students to achieve greater coherency and experience less frustration.

Not only do the teachers use scaffolding as a support to utilizing PBL, students may use it as well. Anton and Dicomilla (1999) explored scaffolding as a method for informal writing. They found that the adult students, some of whom were native English speakers studying Spanish, used their native language to scaffold and engage their interest in their writing. These students were also working in groups as a means to complete the writing task. The study also



showed that collaborative dialog about language form in the context of meaning-based tasks is one source of second language learning. All of which could support Thomas' (2000) assertion that the projects the students develop should allow them to move up some steps in their development toward acquisition of knowledge on the topic they are studying. In the terms of adult ELLs, with the proper supports, they may be able to build their English speaking proficiency as well as enhance academic content knowledge.

Accommodations could also support the learner in PBL approaches. Accommodations are an important topic in PBL and could also be considered a form of scaffolding. "District and school policies in the K-12 setting could allow accommodations such as flexible time restrictions, availability of dictionaries in their home languages and English, use of assessment materials in home languages, and use of multiple measures" (Lee & Avalos, 2002, p.14). Given that the accommodations have been used in the K-12 setting, perhaps they could be used in the university setting as well. Future research could tell us about the use of accommodations in the university setting.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Not only could PBL be supported by scaffolding, it could also be supported by differentiated instruction. Several PBL practitioners have stated that PBL, because of its various features, is better to address students' various learning styles or "multiple intelligences" (Gardner, 1991) than is the traditional instructional model (Diehl et al., 1999). Rosenfeld and Rosenfeld (1998) were interested in students who were "pleasant surprises" (students who perform poorly in the conventional classrooms, but do well in PBL activities) and "disappointing surprises" (students who do well in the conventional classrooms, but who turned in poor projects or no project at all) (as cited in Thomas, 2000). They also suggest that students who did not do

well in traditional classrooms may have learning styles that were not conducive to the style in which the instructor was teaching (Thomas, 2000). ELLs, like any other students, have different learning styles so an approach like PBL, with its flexible features, may be very useful when working with adult ELLs.

Differentiation allows students to develop their own interests and pursue deeper learning (Bell, 2010). The active learning process of PBL takes students' various learning styles into account (Bell, 2010). The project based instruction environment allowed the participants to feel comfortable working with their project in a way that best suited their abilities (Grant & Branch, 2005). Some differentiated instruction was observed for the high performing students through extra reading assignments and small group instruction (Campbell, 2012). "To assess ELL's learning progress and achievement in science, teachers need to differentiate students' English language proficiency, literacy development, and science performance" (Lee & Avalos, 2002, p. 10).

To ensure that differentiation is being used properly, teachers may use multiple strategies to enhance literacy standards (Lee & Avalos, 2002). Teachers and designers should plan for varying levels of student knowledge in all three areas, rather than trust student's self-report of their own knowledge or presume that learning is occurring (Land & Greene, 2000). The effectiveness of could depend on the supports provided to them (Thomas, 2000).

There are many different types of students and they may have different learning styles. One way that someone using PBL could differentiate instruction is by creating opportunities for "hands on" activities. Hands-on experiences in science could offer students who are new to the field context for life experience in the classroom setting as well as enrichment for further learning (Lee and Avalos, 2002). It could also create an opportunity for complex and abstract

thinking because it has the ability to reduce the burden of language use (Lee & Avalos, 2002). Hands-on science promotes thinking and reasoning that involves both literacy and science (Lee & Avalos, 2002, p. 4).

According to Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial and Palincsar (1991): Previous attempts at hands-on and discovery learning curricula failed to reach widespread acceptance because developers did not base their programs on the complex nature of student motivation and knowledge required to engage in cognitively difficult work” nor did they give sufficient attention to students’ point of view” (as cited in Thomas, 2000, p. 2).

### **Working Collaboratively**

Working collaboratively may be one of the most important methods of PBL, especially for adult ELLs. Throughout one’s life, working as a team may be a desired ability. Call and Sotillo (1995) studied the impact of grouping, for conversational purposes with ELLs. Conversation was believed to be important for ELLs in language acquisition. They found that students were more successful when they participated in conversation with native English speakers instead of participating in drills about the language (Call & Sotillo, 1995). Leow (2001) also found that students with “enhanced” lessons which included methods for English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, such as turn and talk prompts and think-alouds, were more successful and assimilated knowledge faster when they employed the techniques during homework and testing (Leow, 2001).

Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) who studied students in the K-12 setting, suggests that: ELLs who are transitioning into the mainstream classroom can participate successfully in

grade-appropriate language arts curriculum if they are given the kind of support provided by the instructional conversations and literature logs (p. 296).

Within the North American university system, research on how international students fare in group work with native speakers is scant (Parks & Raymond, 2004). The group work aspect of project based learning encourages the students to get involved. In PBL the students are not passive listeners that just sit and listen to lectures; they have the chance to work together in the group project (Vangeneugden, 1997). Students that share similar interest may choose to work cooperatively, which can nurture twenty-first-century collaboration and communication skills as well as honor students' individual learning styles or preferences (Bell, 2010). Gultekin (2005) expressed that students who are involved with PBL tend to be better researchers which is in line with findings of Demirhan (2002) stating that “projects lead students to reach information by doing research” and that of Erdem and Akkoyunlu (2002) expressing that the “projects make it easy to share the studies and let students work in cooperation” (as cited in Gultekin, 2005, p. 552). Teachers who have the opportunity to utilize PBL in their social studies classes could ensure more effective, fruitful, and generative social studies courses which allows students to actively learn and work collaboratively (Gultekin, 2005).

Working collaboratively can be effective, especially for adult ELLs. They have the opportunity to learn skills that will help them to be successful. Hindle et al. (1995) found that each person interacting within a team required “behavioral skills such as tolerance, readiness to listen and learn and a readiness to be a team player, intellectual flexibility and a responsible strategic goal” (as cited in Campbell, 2012, pp 141-142. Cummings (1984) and Gandara (2005) argue that “the ability to develop literacy and proficiency in two or more languages promotes cognitive flexibility and capabilities” (as cited in Lee and Avalos, 2002, p. 5). In learning

science, before students perform individually, they tend to make observations, imitate, and interact with others (Lee & Avalos 2002). In situations involving participants from diverse backgrounds, students from non-English language backgrounds need to learn ways of interacting and communicating across culturally diverse settings (Lee & Avalos, 2002). If this is not done successfully there is a chance that ELLs may be too timid to contribute their ideas and native speakers could think of ELLs as not being “equal partners” (Parks & Raymond, 2004).

There are adult ELLs that are not successful in their learning programs so finding ways to help them is important. This can also be seen in some K-12 research and will be used given the lack of research in the college setting for ELLs. The fact that some students are not meeting grade level standards is a concern of some teachers and was addressed in a study by Mitchell et al. (2009). In this study a first grade teacher used group learning to teach content standards. The teacher presented the standards to the students and collaborated with them during the planning process. After observations and analyzing the researcher’s field notes, the teacher successfully met “grade level learning needs, and the students were given the opportunity to fuel their learning by expressing their natural interests and curiosities, and become problem solvers” (Mitchell et al, 2008)(as cited in Campbell, 2012, p. 140).

There are also challenges associated with collaboration. Some students, depending on their cultural backgrounds, may have difficulty with inquiry if they come from places where questioning, exploring, or seeking alternative solutions is not welcomed (Lee & Avalos, 2002). Another challenge was that international students, even those with high Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, may have great difficulty speaking out in participatory style lectures, where, within the North American context, such interaction is highly valued (Benson, 1989) (as cited in Parks & Raymond, 2004). Edelson, Gordon and Pea (1999) reported

challenges with secondary students' ability to conduct systematic inquiry activities in high school science. One of the challenges that were discussed was that the students did not participate or were unengaged, some of the students did not have technology, they lacked background knowledge needed for the discussion, and students were unable to stay on task for long periods of time (Thomas, 2000).

The proceeding discussion included supports that may help students who are being taught with a PBL approach. There are others, but for this study, the above were the ones that were focused on because they were the ones that occurred most in the review of literature and that related to PBL and English language learning. Next, there will be a discussion of the different elements seen in a PBL approach.

### **Elements of Project Based Learning**

This section will discuss elements of PBL like the enjoyment of learning, motivation, technology and autonomy. If the approach encompasses these elements it may be more beneficial for ELLs.

#### **The Joy of Learning**

The PBL approach has been shown to improve academic success, make learning enjoyable, meaningful and permanent, and develop essential and important skills in students (Gultekin, 2005). There are several strengths to using a PBL approach while working with ELL students. The students, both ELL and non-ELL students, greatly enjoyed the PBL environment and the collaboration allowed the ELL students plenty of opportunity for genuine academic talk time (Campbell, 2012). Campbell (2012) also found that the students were more engaged at the beginning of a project and were excited to learn about their new projects. It is important to note other strengths observed by Campbell (2012) which included time management and the

mixing/changing of groups for every project. Learning with a project based learning approach was enjoyable, which was also found by Girgin-Balki (2003) (as cited in Gultein, 2005) who stated that project based learning motivates students and lets them have fun while learning something (Gultekin, 2005). “There is direct and indirect evidence, both from students and teachers, that PBL is a more popular method of instruction than traditional methods” (Thomas, 2000, p. 34).

Children instinctively reach further when they are highly motivated and interested in their inquiry topic (Bell, 2010). Bartscher, Gould, and Nutter (1995) found that after taking part in project work, most of these students (82%) agreed that projects helped motivate them, and most (93%) indicated increased interest in the topics involved. Given this there was still only a 7% rise in homework completion and without a control group, the impact is hard to interpret (Thomas, 2000). The data from this should be looked at closely because the schools’ report could have been generalized because it was hard to tell if the rise was due to the whole school reform effort or, the motivational end product of project based instruction which, in turn, could have lead to increased student attendance, attention, and engagement during the (non-project) periods (Thomas, 2000). Anecdotal reports from PBL practitioners suggest that expected content can be learned because students can be more engaged (Torp & Sage, 2002).

Learner motivation increases when the solution to a problem is taken on by the learner themselves (Savery & Duffy, 1995) and when students take ownership for their own learning (Savery, 1998; 1999). Since PBL has been known to be engaging, motivating and involving forms of experiential learning, learners tend to be close to the problem and the solution (Savery, 2006). “The ELL’s motivation can be enhanced, their self-confidence increased, and their sense

of connection to their mainstream peers developed through well-constructed peer-feedback opportunities” (DelliCarpini, 2009, p. 118).

## **Technology**

English language learners in the college setting will be required to use technology. This is great because PBL is enhanced by the use of technology. The use of technology could also assist ELLs in the learning process.

It is viewed that:

Using technology in project based science makes the environment more authentic to students, because the computer provides access to data and information, expands interaction and collaboration with others via networks, promotes laboratory investigation, and emulates tools experts use to produce artifacts (Krajcik et al., 1994, pp. 488-489).

Campbell (2012) focused on the effect of project-based learning environment on the ELL students’ content literacy and language acquisition. A high school that had been repurposed because of its failure to meet standards for five years was where the study took place. At the school, each of the students received a computer and was taught using a project based learning method that incorporated technology (Campbell, 2012). The content areas were also integrated combining Language Art with History and Math with Science (Campbell, 2012).

## **Learner Centered Instruction**

As educators, the primary goal should be to ensure students are learning the information presented. The learning process is mainly about the learner, so it is important to incorporate student centered approaches. Learner centered approaches could allow the student more autonomy which could lead to a more productive learning experience. Even though this study focuses on adults who probably have lots of autonomy, it is important to note the essential



aspects of the concept of “learner center”. Reggio Emilia is a project based learning approach that began in Italy which includes a student centered approach that encourages children to pursue their natural curiosity (Bell, 2010). The beginning of PBL occurs when students learn in a social environment, work hand-in-hand with their teachers to discover ideas through careful scaffolding, documenting their journey of learning, and finally presenting their learning through projects (Bell, 2010). “Project based learning designs, because of their emphasis on student autonomy, collaborative learning, and assessments based on authentic performances are seen to maximize students’ orientation toward learning and mastery” (Thomas, 2000, p. 6). PBL design includes features such as variety, challenge, student choice, and non-school-like problems to enhance student interest and value (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Students’ self-esteem could also be raised by PBL given that it begins the cycle of success (Dopplet, 2003).

### **Real Life Learning**

The methods and elements of PBL mentioned earlier can affect the learner cognitively. These cognitive effects could lead to more learning especially in adult ELLs. The cognitive effects that will be discussed are real life learning, critical thinking, and literacy development. Montessori’s research supports PBL as a tool to engage students in real-world tasks (Bell, 2010). Real-world projects deepen learning for students (Bell, 2010). “PBL promotes social learning as children practice and become proficient with the twenty-first century skills of communication, negotiation, and collaboration” (Bell, 2010, p. 39). Students working in collaborative groups perform better than students working individually (Skon, Johnson, & Johnson, 1981) and that cooperative group situations enhance higher-level academic problem solving (Qin, Johnson & Johnson, 1995). One of the building blocks of PBL is that it incorporates real-life challenges in authentic (not simulated) problems or questions and where there is more than one solution

(Thomas 2000). PBL is a key strategy for creating independent thinkers and learners where children solve real-world problems (Bell, 2010).

According to research on “situated cognition,” done by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1998):

Learning is maximized if the context for learning resembles the real-life context in which the to-be-learned material will be used; learning is maximized if the context in which learning occurs is dissimilar to the context in which learning will be used (as cited in Thomas 2000, p. 7).

Real-world learning should be taught with an authentic approach. Students at the traditional school were unable to use their knowledge to solve problems, but according to Boaler (1998) “Students taught with a more traditional, formal, didactic model developed an inert knowledge that they claimed was no use to them in the real world” (Thomas, 2000, p.15). In contrast, “students taught with a more progressive, open, project based model developed more flexible and useful forms of knowledge and were able to use this knowledge in a range of settings.” (Boaler, 1998a)(as cited in Thomas, 2000, p.15). Students who are taught using a PBL approach are inclined to develop skills that are not measurable through standardized tests and PBL has the potential to assist ELLs in becoming productive members of a global society (Bell, 2010). These views go along with Thomas (2000) who states that “projects should be related to the students’ real world which permits students to think, focus on a topic, participate actively in their learning, and increase their motivation toward learning once they are investigating a project that is meaningful to them”. Students can also become better professionals if they can experience real life situations related to their career while they are still in college (Adderley et al., 1975).

## **Critical Thinking**

Learning is the main goal in an academic setting and ELLs' learning is similar to any other student's. Learning seems to be more successful and easier when students have background content knowledge to integrate new knowledge (Brown et al.; Greene, 1995). The ability to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge can help students to build connections and reduce fragmentation of understanding (Mayer, 1989). This new knowledge is closely related to the connection to existing knowledge (Alexander & Judy, 1988). Children are constructing knowledge and building on their background knowledge (Bell, 2010). Bell (2010) also stated that children retain more information by doing which is in line with John Dewey. Dewey (1938) proposed that learning by doing has great benefit in shaping students' learning. "When immersed in PBL that cultivate learning by doing, learners are required to access and apply related prior experiences and alter approaches to accommodate inconsistencies or failed expectations" (Land & Greene, 2000, p.46). "The academic use of language as well as the meaning of individual words needs to be explicitly taught for students to fulfill the genre or discourse requirements privileged in academic settings and to understand the material they encounter" (Janzen, 2008, p. 1030). Deeper understanding could be reached by language playing a critical role in aiding students' comprehension in several other ways (Janzen, 2008).

"PBL facilitates a greater understanding of a topic, deeper learning, higher-level reading, and increased motivation to learn" (Bell, 2010, p. 39). Gultekin (2005) had the idea that through PBL, students become better researchers, problem solvers, and higher-order thinkers. Tretten and Zachariou (1995) conducted an assessment of project based learning in four elementary schools (Thomas, 2000). They also stated that "students, working both individually and cooperatively, feel empowered when they use effective work habits and apply critical thinking to

solve problems by finding or creating solutions in relevant projects. “In this productive work students learn and/or strengthen their work habits, their critical thinking skills, and their productivity. Throughout this process, students are learning new knowledge, skills and positive attitudes.” (Tretten & Zachariou, 1995)(as cited in Thomas, 2000, p.18).

“As the students engage in scientific inquiry, they gradually learn to generate explanations or models for observed patterns with natural phenomena based on evidence and logic, not based on the authority of teachers or other adults” (as cited in Lee & Avalos, 2002, p. 4). This example shows that the students were learning to think for themselves. Horan, Lavaroni, and Belton (1996) observed project based learning classrooms to explore critical thinking behaviors. “They found that lower ability students demonstrated the greatest gain in critical thinking and social participation behaviors, an increase of 446% between the fall and spring observation, compared to an increase of 76% for the high ability students” (Thomas, 2000, p. 21). If critical thinking has been shown to be effective with the K-12 population, there is a chance that it will be with adult ELLs as well.

### **Literacy Development**

Literacy development is very important especially for adult ELLs. Lee and Avalos (2002) stressed that students with limited educational experiences in their home countries need to develop general literacy. Literacy development includes but is not limited to being able to speak, listen, and read (Lee & Avalos, 2002). It also involves learning to think and reason. There are several levels to literacy development from preliterate, with little or no exposure to text, to the age and grade appropriate development necessary for academic achievement (Lee & Avalos, 2002). Although science is important for all students, it is particularly beneficial for ELLs not only in science learning, but also in literacy development, English proficiency, mathematics,

communication, and habits of mind (e.g. critical thinking, empirical verification) (Lee & Avalos, 2002, p. 3).

### **Assessment**

In the K-12 setting there are many high-stakes tests. Among the most important are the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT). Once the student gets to college, if they would like to go further they have to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). There is no exception for ELLs. The most important test for ELLs is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), especially if they want to go to college. High-stakes tests only measure certain areas and assessment in the PBL approach is more flexible and authentic so teachers will be able to see the bigger picture with the hopes of helping the student the best way they can.

Assessment is one of the most important aspects of PBL given that passing certain tests is integral to academic success and matriculation for K-12 and adult ELLs. “In measuring basic academic subject proficiency, standardized testing shows that students, in the K-12 setting, engaged in PBL outscored their traditionally educated peers” (Geier et al., 2008) (as cited in Bell, 2010, p. 39). Students who were taught using a PBL approach performed better on standardized and project test than their traditionally educated counterparts; not only did the PBL students learn real-world application of skills but analytic thinking as well (Boaler, 1999). Boaler (1997) discussed that standardized test results showed no significant difference between students who were taught in traditional schools and those who attended PBL schools. Boaler (1997) went on to state that during the three year period, students at the project based learning school performed as well as or better than students in the traditional school on items that required rote knowledge of mathematical concepts, and three times as many students at the project based

school as those in the traditional school attained the highest possible score on the national examination (Boaler, 1997 as cited in Thomas 2000, p. 39).

High-stakes standardized assessments tend to force teachers to “teach to the test in order to cover everything that will be on the test with the hope that their students get a better score. “This kind teaching removes the creativity of good teaching” (DelliCarpini, 2009, p. 116). DelliCarpini (2009) also stated that many states allowed students who had been in the United States for less than three years or who had not achieved a level of proficiency in English to be exempt from standardized testing. However after No Child Left Behind (NCLB), some states exempted ELLs from content area assessments for one cycle at most and those students are then included in a district’s Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) report (DelliCarpini, 2009).

One thing English “teachers could focus on is performance-based measures of ELLs on authentic tasks that offer a variety of ways that ELLs can show they are mastering the content because it matches their current linguistic development in English” (DelliCarpini, 2009, p. 118). Performance based assessments can provide teachers with information about both language and content mastery (Gotlieb, 2006). Gotlieb (2006) stated that performance based assessment is like a bridge that connects classroom activities with real-world activities which could provide teachers with a variety of sources to obtain information from the ELLs. Examples of performance based assessment, include but are not limited to reflective writing, discussion, projects and other authentic activities (DelliCarpini, 2009).

Challenges with assessments needs to be addressed because there is a lot of weight placed on assessments in the United States (US). According to the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (1996) “complex issues abound in high-stakes assessments and accountability, such as who counts in accountability systems, how to make

assessment accommodations, and how to assess content knowledge separate from English proficiency or general literacy” (p. 2). The goal for most schools, including those serving ELLs and students in inner-city schools is to help students to receive basic achievement in literacy and mathematics due to pressure from the district via standardized testing (Lee & Avalos, 2002). English language learners are faced with the task of second-language acquisition and content-knowledge development (DelliCarpini, 2009). Other challenges ELLs faced on assessments (high-stakes and classroom), according to DelliCarpini, (2009) were unfamiliar vocabulary, difference in background knowledge and past experiences.

### **Teacher’s Role in Utilizing Project Based Learning**

Most of the review thus far focused on the student, but teachers have an important role as well. As John Dewey (1933) believed, a teacher’s role is to provide an opportunity for the children to find the wider meaning of things. Others share Dewey’s idea that teachers can offer multiple supports to students by being available for the students, working as facilitators (Freeman & Freeman, 1998; Hansan & Stephen, 2000; Nunan, 1998). Students need joint activities that have genuine problems that they can solve by themselves, with teachers, and with peers. In order to do that, teachers should be properly prepared. Teachers should be confident in their ability to teach their students. A report from the Academy for Educational Development (AED) stated that “the teachers who participated in expeditionary learning had increased beliefs that they could teach any student regardless of the students’ different ability levels. They also conducted assessments and used parents and outside experts in the classroom” (ELOB, 1999a, 199b)(as cited in Thomas, 2000, p. 10).

The role’s of ELL teachers is difficult given that they must teach English language acquisition as well as academic content. It is imperative to mention some of the difficulties so

that they may be addressed later. Dellicarpini (2009) stressed that the most valid and accurate information comes from assessments that are prepared by the teachers; however, a large number of teachers felt that they were unprepared to assess ELLs. Some secondary science teachers resent having ELLs placed in their classes, believing that these students should master English first (Lee & Avalos, 2002). Rumberger and Gandara (2000) argue that ESL or ESOL teachers may not be able to provide the best content knowledge for the students given their lack of knowledge in areas, for example science which could result in the lack meaningful input or opportunities to learn science (as cited in Lee & Avalos 2002). National Center for Education Statistics (NRC) (2001) and Shaw (1997) state that unfortunately, teachers often lack knowledge in multiple areas (as cited in Lee & Avalos, 2002).

One critical issue, however, is teachers who are not prepared to work with non-native English speakers (Janzen, 2008). National Center for Education Statistics (2002) also found that 41% of teachers in a national survey had ELLs in their classes and only 12.5% of those teachers had had 8 hours or more of training in the previous 3 years (as cited in Jazen, 2008). In a study done by Menken, Antunez, Dilworth and Yasin (2001), results showed a national survey of institutions of higher learning, a small portion required mainstream teachers to get some training to work with ELLs (Janzen, 2008). Janzen (2008) also noted that as of 2004 only 24 states had legal requirements that teachers in K-12 ESL classrooms must be specifically certified to work with ELLs (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition FAQ, August, 2006a). It was interesting to find research regarding teacher preparation for K-12 teachers but there was no research found on the preparation of teachers working with ELLs, who are not ESL teachers, in content classes.



Teachers not only have to be well prepared and believe in their abilities, they have to understand the dualities of their students being English language learners. August and Hakuta (1997) stressed that to work with ELLs, regular teachers need to understand the students' languages and cultures in social and academic context as well as understand how to use the information while teaching academic content (Lee & Fradd, 1998) (as cited in Lee & Avalos, 2002). When targeting ELLs, the teacher and the researcher, in the case, need to be aware of the content and language goals (Campbell, 2012). Some students are able to connect content information to their daily lives and could be very productive. This lack of direct instruction for ELLs could lead to confusion, not only with the language, but also with the directions of the assignment and the content information (Campbell, 2012). Educational theorists suggest that language and interaction with language is essential to learning. Campbell (2012) also stated that the teachers were all proficient and used their teacher resources. There were also at least four adults (two teachers, a behavior or ESL specialist, and the researcher) in the class during the study (Campbell, 2012).

There are some strategies that teachers can do like collaborating with other instructors, integrating subjects, and having meaningful conversations, to make the ELL learning environment more productive. ESL or ESOL teachers have the opportunity to work with content area teachers to encourage academic language in science, while increasing English language proficiency and general literacy concurrently (Lee & Avalos, 2002). "Collaborating and planning instruction will increase learning opportunities for ELLs as their content area objectives are presented in multiple ways (e.g. thematic units), specifically with the support that ESL or ESOL teachers are trained to provide" (Lee & Avalos, 2002, p. 12). The integration of academic content across subjects has the potential to assist students in seeing meaningful connections and

relevance between various subjects. In fact, some evidence supports the use of extensive teacher-student conversation in complex learning situations to facilitate gradual changes in understanding (Brown & Palinscar) (as cited in Land & Greene, 2000; Roth, 1995).

### **Challenges Teachers Face with Project Based Learning**

It will not always be easy, there are some challenges that teachers of ELLs may face. The challenge for many instructors when they adopt a PBL approach is the shift in paradigm from teacher as knowledge provider to being a facilitator of learning (Ertmer & Simons, 2006 as cited in Savery, 2006). When teaching ELLs, or any students, the teacher should thoroughly understand how the languages of their disciplines construe meaning and they should also use academic language in clear and consistent ways in the classroom (Janzen, 2008, p. 1030).

Researchers have suggested that:

Teachers need extended time for professional development so that they can achieve a variety of objectives: (a) learn about the language of their discipline in depth, (b) become accustomed to integrating language and content instruction, (c) understand their attitudes toward cultural diversity and their assumptions about ELLs, and (d) successfully adapt the knowledge base they acquired in training to actual teaching (Janzen, 2008, p. 1030).

In the school settings, mechanisms may not exist for content-area teachers to receive training and, even when training occurs, teachers may not implement the accommodations they learned about (Brown & Bentley, 2004). Ladewski, Krajic and Harvey (1991) described one middle school teacher's attempt to understand and enact PBL. There may not always be teacher buy-in for new approaches and even when there is, it may not go along with the teacher's philosophy which could lead to conflict that can take a lot of time to resolve (Thomas, 2000).

Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik and Soloway (1997) describe the common problems faced by teachers as they attempt to enact PBL.

According to Thomas (2000):

The common problems they found the teachers faced were: a) effective collaboration among student required more than involvement, it required exchanging ideas and negotiating meaning; b) effective use of technology requires that technology be used as a cognitive tool, not merely as an instructional aide; and c) effective PBL requires not that all concepts and facts of the curriculum are covered, but that students construct their own understanding by pursuing a driving question (p. 24).

Rosenfeld et al. (1998) noted that teachers who participated in the in-house training experience high “cognitive load” and uncertainty which led them to overemphasize PBL skill development over curriculum content. The teachers ended with superficial projects that lacked curriculum standards. Sage (1996) identified several design challenges associated with teachers’ use of PBL that may well be generalizable to non-problem-focused projects.

Thomas (2000) stated that:

The tendency for problem scenarios to be structured so that they limit students’ inquiry, the difficulty of aligning problem scenarios with curriculum guidelines, the time consuming nature of developing problem scenarios, and the dilemma associated with using authentic problems (p. 26).

The more authentic the problem, the more limited the students’ power and authority to impact a solution.

In learner centered academic environments people tend to forget about the teacher. In PBL the teacher has a special role in facilitating and scaffolding the information so maximum

learning could possibly take place. It is not always easy for teachers, so the challenges and struggles they face needs to be addressed. Most of the research contains K-12 studies but it is assumed that the information could be transferred to adult ELLs.

### **Adult English Language Learners**

Studies that addressed adult ELLs were very difficult to find. The studies found for this review of literature were mostly studies that addressed adult ELLs and PBL but were grounded in studies that involved young children. The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) in Virginia studied parents who were in the family literacy program and were instructed to create a coloring book with their elementary-school-age children. After the parents and the students created the books they created in the program, the families shared them at a “meet the authors” day at their local library. The parents and students kept their work in portfolios and completed assessment questionnaires. The teacher was then able to evaluate the parents on language skills, team participation and successful completion of the task (Moss & Van Duzer, 1998). This example takes into account elements, like authentic learning, that are fundamental when working with adult ELLs.

The studies thus far have given an overview of PBL; some have even addressed how PBL relates to adult learners. However, little research has investigated the specific uses of PBL for English Language Learners. Researchers focus primarily on ELL’s linguistic challenges, leaving unexplored broader issues of ELL’s college access and there is still very little research available on ELL’s college attendance and performance (Kanno & Cromley, 2012). Currently, educating immigrant youth focuses mainly on language acquisition. “Students are placed on the English Development (ELD) track, often with watered-down curriculum and low academic expectations which are short-sighted and inadequate” (Perez, 2007, p. 2). High academic expectations should

be implemented or once those ELL students get to college they may be less prepared than their native English-speaking counterparts. The academic achievement of ELLs in the United States reflects repercussions of a long history of educational inequity for students and may result in low teacher expectation and unfavorable biases toward lower income students and racial/ethnic minorities (Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2012). To be successful, international students, like their mainstream counterparts, must learn to master discursive norms implicit in lecture style activity settings (Parks & Raymond, 2004), which may get better once a PBL approach is utilized.

As students are introduced to disciplinary concepts, they need both language for engaging with core ideas or concepts and language for interacting about ideas and concepts with others (Koelsch, Chu, & Banuelos, 2013). Expert teaching creates coherent instructional experiences that allow students to participate in disciplinary practices that more fluently integrate disciplinary concepts, analytic tasks, and language (Valdes, Kibler, & Walqui, 2014). This is important for adult ELLs because they may be immersed in a program that only teaches in English and is outside their expertise. They will need to know how to learn academic content and language at the same time in order to be successful in their programs.

Even though the research is limited there are some issues that stand out regarding adult learners. Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1973) found that the adult results agreed with those of Dulay and Burt (1973), which state that the experiences of 5-8 year old children learning English as a second language are similar to that of adult ELLs, indicating that children and adults use common strategies and process linguistic data in fundamentally different ways. Dulay and Burt (1973) also suggested that there does seem to be a common order of acquisition for certain structures in second language (L2) acquisition. Adults are more similar to 5 to 8 year olds with respect to cognitive maturity, the adult order should be closer to that of an older child learning

English as a second language (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1973). This could mean that the project based learning methods could be successfully used with both populations.

Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1973) go further to explain that the majority of errors made by children in ESL are “developmental” rather than “interference” which is similar to errors made by children learning English for the first time. This means that first and second language learning in children involves similar kinds of processing of linguistic data (Dulay & Burt, 1973). The process of learning English, when the native language is one other than English, must involve the “creative construction” about the target language (Dulay & Burt, 1973).

Most of the research that involved adult learners and PBL focused on real situations. Kobayashi and University (2006) said that their study allowed students to interact with their peers in a real-world situation by collaborating on a group presentation. The application of grammar skills as well as sentences which best conveyed their message helped make the connection to real-life (Tims, 2010). Turnbull’s (1999) study allowed language form and communicative language learning to be integrated. ELLs learn more when they are exposed to “meaningful content” as opposed to language forms (Turnbull, 1999). By incorporating real-life experiences as these researchers did, the project based learning framework could allow the students to “see how language, content, and skills could be learned simultaneously” (Beckett & Slater, 2005). The children in the study had the ability to gain knowledge and language about their chosen topics and were able to showcase their gains. Students, especially ELLs, who are not properly taught, may have a lot of stress due to a failing grade. Stress can have a negative impact on a person’s capacity to learn; anything that reduces stress is essential. Burns (1991) found that compared to local students, students from different countries who study in the United States displayed higher stress levels. That stress might be detrimental to the learning experience

of students is most often ignored by the teaching staff, if not by student counselors (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000). Research indicates that perceiving one's environment as supportive can reduce the psychological impact of stressful events (Thoits, 1986) (as cited in Ramsey, Jones, & Barker, 2007).

The adult ELL is important and should be studied more. This research aims to add to the current body of research regarding ELLs and project based learning.

### **Challenges Associated with Project Based Learning**

Even though PBL could be seen as an effective approach to address ELL's learning, there are some challenges associated with it. "The diversity of defining features coupled with the lack of a universally accepted model or theory of project based learning has resulted in a great variety of PBL research and development activities" (Thomas, 2000, p. 2). Tretten and Zachariah (1997) report that there are so many components of PBL that assessing what is and what is not PBL is difficult (as cited in Thomas, 2000). It is also difficult to make generalizations between PBL model because there are more differences than (Thomas, 2000). There are similarities between models referred to as PBL and models referred to with other labels, for example, "intentional learning" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991), "design experiments" (Brown 1992) and "problem-based learning" (Gallagher, Stepien & Rosenthal, 1992) which also lead to the confusion about the approach.

Campbell (2012) points out weaknesses in the PBL approach which include: large class sizes or high numbers of ELL students, limited direct instruction times, lack of follow through and explicit instructions, attendance, high mobility, wasted time, no differentiated instruction for ELL students and major distractions produced by the laptop computers (Campbell, 2012). Fleischman and Hoptock, 1993; Thomas and Collier, 2001 stated that "although states require

that all elementary students, both English proficient and ELLs, have equivalent content instruction, ELLs may be removed from their classrooms during time periods allocated for content learning to receive instruction for English language development” (as cited in Lee & Avalos, 2002, p. 8). There is sometimes a push for students to attain English language proficiency, ESL or ESOL programs tend to focus on literacy which leaves less time for content knowledge (Lee & Avalos, 2002). Fraud and Lee (1995) argued that there is such a push in the promotion of English language development that teachers are sometimes prohibited from using languages other than English in the classroom regardless of the fact that they may speak the same language as the student ( as cited in Lee & Avalos, 2002).

There may be a poor fit between day to day activities that form projects and the subject matter concepts that inspired the project (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). The solution, according to Blumenfeld (1991) and Barron (1998) is to “find ways for projects to center on “learning appropriate goals” and an appropriate strategy is to help teachers develop “driving questions,” questions that will ensure that students encounter and struggle with complex concepts and principles” (Thomas, 2000, p. 27).

### **Conclusion**

As stated earlier, the number of immigrants coming to the United States is continuing to climb. Some of these immigrants speak little to no English and will be placed in an (ELL), (ESL), or (ESOL) classroom. While in this program they will learn English as well as other academic or professional content. Success in these programs could be central to the success or failure of the student. A number of the students may have trouble in the classes so an approach that addresses those issues is vital.



With the variety of students in these programs, there should be an approach that is flexible. Project-based learning is an approach that could potentially address this phenomenon. One of the major components of PBL is authentic learning and Fried and Booth (1997) explain how PBL functions as a bridge that connects classroom English to real life situations. It also encourages the learner to learn by doing (Dewey, 1938) which could enhance more authentic learning (Stoller, 2006).

PBL learning could be hard to understand because of its extensive nature. Listed below are components that may assist in the understanding of PBL. Components of the definition includes that it organizes learning around projects (Thomas, 2000). Another component seen in PBL is the idea that students work on real-life issues/problems (Moursund, 1999a). Students have the opportunity to work on real life issues which tend to contain driving questions that drive inquiry (Krackjick, Blumfeld, Marx & Soloway, 1994). Lastly, PBL is learner centered (Savery, 2006). We needed this extensive review since Stoller (2006) stated a single definition would not do justice to the many ways PBL could be used.

There are many supports that enhance the PBL approach. The first of the supports is scaffolding which are interventions to assist students in a PBL learning environment (Guzdial, 1998). Another support is differentiated instruction that uses multiple representation formats (Lee & Avalos, 2002) and takes students learning styles into account (Bell, 2010). Call and Sotillo (1995) found that students were more successful when they participated in conversation with native English speakers instead of only doing drills. Team work is essential to be successful in the world and is another support to PBL. In PBL the student is no longer the passive listener but they work together on projects (Vangeneugden, 1997).

Along with the stated supports above, motivation is an aspect that is integral to the success of PBL. Since project based learning is learner centered, it is no surprise that students are highly motivated when they are interested in their topic of inquiry (Bell, 2010). It was also stated that motivation increases when they figure out the solution to their own problem (Savery & Duffy, 1995). Technology is another big part of The PBL approach. A lot of the project utilized aspects of technology to augment the projects. Kracjic et al. (1994) displayed how technology makes the learning environment more authentic. This could potentially lead to better understanding.

Real-world projects deepen the learning for students which is fundamental for the success of PBL and is supported by Maria Montessori (Bell, 2010). PBL is a key strategy for creating independent thinkers and learners where children solve real-world problems and will aid them in becoming productive members of the global society (Bell, 2010). Knowledge is a goal of PBL and Bell (2010) stated that children retain more information by doing which is in line with Dewey. In the end students will become better researchers, problem solvers and higher-order thinkers (Gultekin, 2005).

Assessment happens at all levels of a student's academic career and is an immense part of PBL. The goal is to get students to do their best on any assessment and PBL may be effective enough to do so. Standardized testing shows that students in PBL outscore their traditionally educated peers (Geier et al. 2008). PBL includes several styles of assessing students. Performance based assessments for example, is like a bridge that connects classroom activities with real-world activities which could provide teachers with a variety of sources of information from ELLs (Gotlieb, 2006). With the different types of assessments, teachers need to take into account the student's vocabulary proficiency, background knowledge and past experiences (Dellicarpini, 2009).

The adult population was the focus of this study and finding studies related to it was very difficult. This population is very similar to young school-aged students. A study completed by Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1973), explained how the mistakes adults made with learning English were similar to a child learning English. One of the biggest components of the adult population and PBL is the connection to real-life. The experience of an adult learner could be maximized if PBL functions as a bridge that connects the classroom to real-life (Fried & Booth, 1997). After reviewing the immense amount of research on the topic of PBL and adult learners, it is possible that PBL could strengthen the language skills of adult ELLs. This approach could be the right one if the student's learning style matches one that would be successful using a project based learning approach.

## **Chapter III: Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the research methods and data analysis that were used to address the research questions guiding this study. There are a variety of ways one could investigate phenomena for scholarly research but this study used many techniques and recommendations set forth by Creswell (2013). The components of this chapter are design, population, instrumentation, procedures, study variables and data analysis.

### **Design**

There are many types of research that can be utilized for scholarly investigations but I chose to employ a qualitative method. I chose to use a qualitative approach because all researchers bring value to their study, but qualitative research makes their value known in the study, by being the instrument, which is the axiological assumption that characterizes qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The idea of the researcher as the instrument was witnessed blatantly during the interview process as the researcher was important in the gathering of data. I used qualitative research because quantitative measures and statistical analysis simply did not fit the problem (Creswell, 2013). I would like to include that the participants of the study, even though they were on a high level, were all English language learners. By using a qualitative method I was able to have a dialog with the participants during the interview. This gave me the opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings as well as get clarification when I needed to.

I used an interpretive framework based on social constructivism. I also sought an understanding of the world in which the participants live and work (Creswell, 2013). One of the

research questions of this study asked about the self perceived learning style of the learner so I felt it would be the best idea to utilize an approach that allows for thick rich descriptions of accounts directly from the participants. The participants developed subject meaning and the meanings were varied which led me to look for the complexity of meaning rather than narrow meaning into a few categories (Creswell, 2013). I relied on the participants' views of a situation rather than starting with a theory (Creswell, 2013).

I have had experience working with English language learners. I started working directly working with ELLs while working as a crisis intervention teacher in Maryland. I tutored and counseled several students learning English in middle school. I then began working with college level students at a southern university. In the position at the southern university I worked as a tutor as well as a volunteer as an international buddy. I was able to successfully interview the students because of my prior experience working with international students. It should also be noted that three of the participants of the study were prior tutees of mine.

In regards to this the research, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding about PBL which could be used to assist ELLs in an academic setting. Qualitative methodology was used because there needs to be a complex, detailed understanding of the issue, that was established by talking directly with people (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) gave the cycle of events that should happen while doing a qualitative study, and that is what helped to guide this study. The cycle included locating a site, gaining access/making rapport, sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and sorting data (Creswell, 2013). This in-depth understanding was gained from the qualitative study using the following characteristics of good qualitative study set forth by (Creswell, 2013, pp.53-55):

- The researcher employs rigorous data collection procedures

- The researcher frames the study within the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach to research
- The researcher uses an approach to qualitative inquiry such as one of the five approaches or others addressed in this book.
- The researcher begins with a single focus or concept being explored.
- The study includes detailed methods, a rigorous approach to data collection.
- The researcher analyzes data using multiple levels of abstraction.
- The researcher writes persuasively so that the reader experiences “being there”
- The study reflects the history, culture, and personal experience of the researcher.
- The qualitative research in a good study is ethical

The steps taken to plan this study closely match the steps suggested by Creswell (2013):

Step 1. “Acknowledge the broad assumptions that bring me to do qualitative inquiry, and the interpretive lens that I will use”. I wanted to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study (Creswell, 2013, p.48). I wanted to hear a first person account as well as have the opportunity for dialog to gain full understanding.

Step 2. “Bring a topic or substantive area of investigation, and have reviewed literature about the topic and can confidently say that a problem exist that needs to be studied” (Creswell, 2013, p.51). A review of literature was done using Auburn University library’s online journals data base, books, and Google scholar. To explore the topic I used search terms like, but not limited to, project based learning, project based learning and ELL, project based learning and adult ELL, etc. After reviewing the text, a summary was created of the existing research which makes up chapter 2 of this study (Creswell, 2013).

Step 3. I used open-ended research questions, listened to the participants interviewed and shaped the questions as needed for more information as well as collected a variety of

sources of data including information in the form of words or images (Creswell, 2013).

There was semi-structured interview done to gather data needed to further gain knowledge about ELLs.

Step 4. I “analyzed the qualitative data by working inductively from particulars to more general perspectives, whether these perspectives are called codes, categories, themes or dimensions” (Creswell, 2013, p. 51). The data gathered from the open-ended interview were coded and analyzed. Themes were exposed after coding and analyzing the data.

Step 5. I discussed the findings by comparing what I learned from the interviews to my personal views, existent literature, and emerging models that seem to adequately convey the essence of the findings (Creswell, 2013). The findings were based on the data obtained and will be discussed in chapter 5.

There are many types of qualitative research that could be used to explore this topic of this study but to address the question of this research; a multiple case study was utilized. “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Based on that description, I felt a case study was the best approach to use. Using a case study was important because I wanted to see the difference and similarities between the participants. The case studies also helped with obtaining in-depth understanding because an in-depth understanding of the case will be obtained by collecting qualitative data, via semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013).

I ensured that the case study began with the identification of a case which in this study was the individuals (Creswell, 2013). The population for this study was international students who attend a southern university and are learning to speak English. One of the goals of the study was to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern using a case or cases selected, to best understand the problem is called instrumental case (Stake, 1995). In order to get the best understanding, more than one case was observed. In a collective case study (or multiple case studies) the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selected multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) suggests that the multiple case study design uses logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case. The stated above gave support to why a case study was utilized. Having the opportunity to utilize multiple cases allowed me the possibility to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of ELLs.

### **Population**

To address the questions posed in this study, I used international students that attend a southern university. The population of students consisted of students from various departments, students who were in or have recently completed an Intensive English Program (IEP) run by an International Student English Center (ISEC) at a southern university. The participants were from countries including Korea, Brazil, Italy, and Turkey and were all over 19 years of age. The participants had different levels of English language skills and were from different socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Sampling**

This study addressed English language learners but there were criteria required to participate in the study to insure that the correct population was chosen to explore ELLs and PBL. To qualify to be a participant, the person needed to have a first language other than



English, be learning English, attend a southern university (visiting students and/or scholars inclusive), and be at least 19 years of age. The study consisted of five participants, this number should provide ample opportunity to identify themes of the case as well as conduct cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013). I used criterion sampling to select participants which states that all cases meet some criterion; and convenience sampling which is sometimes referred to as an accidental or availability sample that uses subject who are close at hand or easily accessible (Babbie, 2007; Mutchnick & Berg, 1996).

### **Instrumentation**

The interview protocol was created by me to gather information from the participants. The participants of this study were from different educational backgrounds (undergraduate, graduate, and visiting scholars) and all had different majors.

These are the questions that were asked:

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age?
4. Please finish this statement, I learn best when:
5. What aspects of learning are the most important?
6. Describe your ideal learning environment and/or process?
7. Describe an instance where you did not learn something well, what contributed to the lack of learning?
8. What are the student's responsibilities in terms of learning?
9. What is the most important part of a teacher's job?
10. What were the qualities of your favorite teacher that you have had at any point in your educational career?

The above questions provided a framework for the interviews but the interview process was open-ended. The list does not include questions that were asked for clarification.

### **Procedures**

#### **Data Collection**

Before the participants were chosen there were some important steps that had to be taken. I worked at a southern university in a program where I tutored ELLs. That population was who I wanted to sample so I needed to get approval from my supervisor. To use the population in the current study I obtained verbal consent during the first interaction, via a verbal conversation. Upon receiving verbal approval from my supervisor, I had to get written approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study.

Once all the approvals were given, I chose the participants. Once the sample was determined I had brief meetings with the sample population. During the meeting the purpose of the study and what would be expected from the students were addressed. A letter explaining what was to be discussed in the meeting was given to the participants so that they could have time to think about being a part of the study. I then asked ten students and out of the ten students three agreed to be a part of the study. One of the three participants recommended two more students who she felt would add to the study. The new participants received the same consent process as the initial participants and were interviewed using the same protocol.

“Particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events, interviewing provides a useful means of access” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 115). Getting information from the participants about their experiences was determined to be best investigated via interview. I needed to design and use an interview protocol, or interview guide (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I decided to follow guidelines for conducting an interview set forth by Kvale and Brinkman (2009) seven stages of an interview. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stated that The first step was to decide on research questions. The questions should be open-ended, general, and focused on understanding the phenomenon in the study. When preparing an interview, it

may be useful to develop two interview guides, one with the project's thematic research questions and the other with interview questions to be posed, which takes both the thematic and the dynamic dimensions into account (p. 132). I chose to do open ended interviews because I wanted to be able to dialog with the participants. This was extremely important for this population because English is not their native language so they may need clarification, extra time, or may not have be able to read English well. The questions that were asked were easy to understand, short, and devoid of academic language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Identifying interviewees who could best answer these questions based on the purposeful sampling procedure were chosen (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) which is another step to conducting an interview. I chose to work with the students who are in an ISEC program because they are ELLs, they were competent enough to express themselves, and they were the best group to help me explore this phenomenon.

Another step for good interviewing was to determine what type of interview is practical and will get the most useful information to answer each question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I chose one on one interviews and I hoped to obtain participants who would not be hesitant to speak and share ideas (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I chose a one on one interview because the participants are ELLs and speaking in English may be a bit difficult for them. By conducting individual interviews, more attention could be given to them which could have made them feel more comfortable to share their experiences. The interview consisted of ten semi-structured questions that follow Berg and Lune's (2012) suggestion "to ask questions in a systematic and consistent order, but I was allowed freedom to digress; that is, I was permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 112).

It was important to remember that the students all came from different countries and there may be cultural differences between the interviewee and myself. In foreign culture, an interviewer should spend time getting to know the culture and learn some of the many verbal and non-verbal factors that may cause interviewers in a foreign culture to not go as well (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). With regards to rapport, a positive feeling that develops between the interviewer and the subject, it should be looked at with the views of Kvale (1996). Kvale (1996) states that the point of an interview is to get the most information from the participant, therefore, it will not be an equal dialog. This should not pose a problem for me because I have had years of experience working with diverse cultures and I tutored some of the participants so I already knew them.

The location of the interview was very important. The plan was to determine a location for conducting the interview that was quiet and free from distractions. The interviews took place in study room at the library at a southern university. Each participant had his/her interview on different days so that I could really focus on one participant at a time.

On the day of the interview there was a lot to keep in mind. The interviews started by briefing the participants. This gave me the opportunity to define the situation for the subject, briefly telling about the purpose of the interview. It was also important for me to use a sound recorder and to give the subjects the chance to ask any questions that they may have had and that it be on record (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Before the interview started I went over the study again to make sure that the participants fully understood what was going to happen during the process of the study. This was all recorded on tape for the record which also goes along with Creswell (2013) who states that one should obtain written consent at the interview location, fully disclose purpose, and give a copy of written consent to the participant. I followed consenting

guidelines from Creswell (2013) which tells the participants about the right to voluntarily withdraw, the central purpose, protection of the confidentiality of the respondents, known risks must be disclosed, benefits to the participant, and a signature of the participant as well as mine.

During the interview there were several kinds of questions asked which included introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, and indirect (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Other things that I did during the interview were as follows: I used good interview procedure by sticking to the questions, stayed within the agreed upon time specified, was respectful and courteous, and offered few questions and advice (Creswell, 2013). I was also a good listener and spoke very little (Creswell, 2013). Not only did the interviewer not speak too much, I also did not step on the interviewee's lines (Berg & Lune, 2012). The questions were created to be easy to understand, short, and devoid of academic language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The questions were asked in such a manner that motivated the respondents to answer as completely and honestly as possible (Berg & Lune, 2012). Since the analysis of data involved coding the answers, during the interview I continually clarified the meaning of the answers with respect to the categories that were later (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

I audio recorded all of the interviews. It was imperative that I used an adequate recording procedure so I used a microphone sensitive to the acoustics of the room for audio taping interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I followed procedures for using a recording device which are: use a header to record essential information, placed space between the questions in the protocol form, memorize the questions in order to minimize losing eye contact, and write out closing comments that thank the individuals for participating in the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview was rounded off with me mentioning some of the main points that I learned from the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The initial briefing was followed by a

debriefing after the interview to ensure no harm was done to the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Challenges could have the possibility to weaken some research, in terms of methodology, and like any other method this one could have challenges as well. For clarity, some of the potential challenges are mentioned below. Some of the potential challenges I could have faced were unexpected participant behavior and students' ability to create good instructions, phrasing and negotiating questions, dealing with sensitive issues, and developing transcriptions (Roulston, DeMarrais, & Lewis, 2003). Interviewing was taxing, which was expected for inexperienced researchers and especially those engaged in studies that require extensive interviewing (Creswell, 2013). There could also be audio-visual technical difficulties like data distance or the information lost during the process of recording it like voice tones, facial expressions, enthusiasm, etc. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). None of the above was experienced in this study. I did, however, run into audio issues during transcription. There were a couple times where I could not make out what the participant said. In order to not lose any data, I contacted the participants and had them listen to the recording. They were then able to clarify what they said.

### **Study Variables**

As a reminder, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine project based learning (PBL) as an approach to help adult English language learners (ELL) with English acquisition at the collegiate level. It shed light on the ELL student's self-perceived learning styles to investigate if project based learning would be a good approach to help with learning English as a Second Language. The questions that were used to guide the research are:

1. What are the benefits of using project based learning to assist English language learners with English as a second language acquisition in a university setting?

2. What ways do self-reported learning styles of the English language learner affect the potential effectiveness of a PBL approach in a university setting?
3. What are the challenges associated with PBL as an approach to aid English language learning in a university setting?

### **Data Analysis**

“Data analysis in qualitative research consist of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing data into themes through the process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figure, tables, or a discussion: (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). A hallmark of good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The stated above is in line with the current researcher ideas and was utilized as a guide during the data analysis process.

### **Data Collection**

Data that were collected were cared for in a secure manner. Data was collected via an interview protocol and was recorded with a recording device. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed the recordings were saved to my computer in folders that had names only I knew. There should be backup copies of computer files (Davidson, 1996). I used high-quality tapes for audio-recording (Creswell, 2013). There was also the protection of the participants’ confidentiality by masking their names in the data (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were titled with numbers instead of names so that only I knew who they were. All recordings were deleted after the data were transcribed to further safe-guard the participants.

### **Transcription**

Each recording was transcribed by hand by me. Transcribing interviews from oral to a written mode structures the interview conversation in a form amenable to closer analysis, and itself an initial analytic process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The transcribing was done by playing the recording, pausing and typing what the participant said verbatim. Other elements like laughing and changes in tone were added as well to try and capture the full experience of the interview. I chose to transcribe my own interviews because I wanted to be close to the data. Investigators who emphasize the modes of communication and linguistic style may choose to do their own transcribing in order to secure the many details relevant to their specific analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Agar (1980) suggests that researchers read their whole transcript several times.

### **Open Coding**

I reduced data and then coded data in hopes that the major themes could be easily understood and presented. “Qualitative data need to be reduced and transformed (coded) in order to make the more readily accessible, understandable, and draw out various themes and patterns” (Berg and Lune, 2012, p. 55). The reduction started by notes taking in the margins of the text. Then, codes were found and refined. After that, a codebook was created to help analyze the data. “The process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Guidelines for open coding according to (Strauss, 1987):

Ask data specific questions, analyze the data minutely, frequently interrupt coding to write theoretical notes or warranted assertions, never assume the analytical relevance of



any traditional variable such as age, sex, social class, and so on until the data show it to be relevant (pp. 365-366).

“Axial coding occurs after open coding is completed and consists of intensive coding around one category” (Strauss, 1987, p. 367). The codebook that was created was given to my advisor to help with inter-rater reliability (IRR). My advisor used the code book that I created and coded one of the interviews. We then met and discussed the codes to make sure my code book was working. “Using two or more independent coders ensures that naturally arising categories were used rather than those a particular researcher might hope to locate and the agreement among the coders is called inter-rater reliability” (IRR) (Creswell, 2013, p. 155).

I immersed myself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts. I also took notes and memos in the margins of the transcripts because it would be helpful in this initial process of exploring a database (Creswell, 2013). I also followed Huberman and Miles (1994) which suggests that:

That investigators make preliminary counts of data codes and determine how frequently codes appear in the database, this could also be called summative content analysis that begins from existing words or phrases in the text itself (the raw data), and counts these (as cited in Bernard and Ryan, 2010, p. 55).

I then extended my exploration to include latent meanings and themes that are apparent in the data (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consists of several codes aggregated to form a common idea. The themes also build detailed descriptions, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature; this is called coding (Creswell, 2013). Crabtree

and Miller (1992) discuss a continuum of coding strategies that range from “prefigured” or “*a priori*” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) categories to “emergent” categories and it is encouraged to be open to codes emerging during analysis. The themes in study were emergent given that I did not create the themes before I began coding.

The analysis started with the patterns discernable in the text, which was subsequently explained by the application or development of a theoretical framework (Berg & Lune, 2012). As I was reading the transcripts I began to take note of words that kept occurring, for instance, conversation. Themes tend to be more useful to count and can be found in most written documents (Berg & Lune, 2012). I also took note of ideas that were shared between the participants. Interpretation involved making sense of the data, the “lessons learned,” as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). It also involved abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data. I then took the themes and synthesized them. In-direct interpretation, the case study researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it without looking for multiple instances (Stake, 1995). I established patterns and looked for a correspondence between two or more categories (Stake, 1995)

Inductive reasoning is frequently used as a form of theory development in which the analyst seeks to discover the crucial patterns that can best explain the data (Berg & Lune, 2012). I also needed to represent or visualize the data. The qualitative researcher needed to “position” themselves in their writing (Berg & Lune, 2012). The concept of reflexivity is the idea that I am conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study (Berg & Lune, 2012).

### **Standards and Validations**

No matter what kind of research one is doing, people will hopefully read it. The study itself needs to be true and ethical. Lincoln and Guba (1985) used unique terms such as

credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as “naturalist’s equivalents” for internal validation, external validation, reliability and objectivity and all were taken into consideration while doing this research. Triangulation of data sources, methods and investigations to establish credibility (Creswell, 2013). Thick rich descriptions were needed to ensure the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2013). A well designed interview protocol and a great selection of participants helped to achieve thick rich descriptions. Look for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data which could be established through an auditing of the research process (Creswell, 2013). I followed guidelines for research set forth by professionals in the field, reviewed scholarly research and got help from professionals in the field.

Validation is a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece (Angen, 2000). Consensual validation seeks the opinion of others, and Eisner (1991, p. 112) refers to “an agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation and thematic of an educational situation are right”. I used triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking as well as stated biases to help validate the research. Triangulation was used to help me make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990). Peer review or debriefing provides an external check of the research process (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). I clarified biases from the start of the study which was important so that the reader understands my position and any biases or assumptions that could impact inquiry (Merriam, 1988). Member checking, I solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Objectivity and reliability were taken into consideration when accessing the quality of this study. Objectivity was looked at as my ability to articulate the procedure so well that others could repeat the research if they please (Berg & Lune, 2012). “Generalizability when case studies are properly undertaken, they should not only fit the specific individual, group or event studied but also generally provide understanding about similar individuals, groups and events” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 341). Reliability was shown by obtaining detailed field notes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape (Creswell, 2013). There were also other strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Blind coding which is having someone code data with no knowledge of the expectations and questions (Creswell, 2013). Inter-coder agreement which is the use of multiple coders to analyze transcript data will be used (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, developing a code book of codes that would be stable and represent the coding analysis of four independent coders will be used (Creswell, 2013).

### **Assumptions**

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The participants were truthful in all the responses they gave.
2. There will be enough data gathered from each participant.
3. Interviews were the best way to collect data.
4. Sampling was representative of the phenomenon being studied.

### **Limitations**

Like any other study this one had limitations. The first limitation of this study was that the population only included participants from select countries. While there was some similarities between the participants, it is not known how the general ideas would compare to cultures that were not represented. To address this issue more studies should be completed

containing students from other cultures which could give future researchers something to compare. While this is a limitation it is important to note that generalizing is not the goal of this qualitative study.

All of the participants were international students who came from different countries. This could be a limitation because there are some things about their culture that I may not fully understand. The participants' educational experience was also different so their views may be dissimilar to that of my own. This issue could result in the research not being as descriptive as possible. This was addressed by me getting to know the participants and learning about their culture.

Qualitative research calls for a lot of work and contains massive amounts of data. Each interview resulted in many pages of written text in the transcripts. The amount of data utilized could be a limitation to this study. Five participants were interviewed which resulted in a hefty amount of data. Analyzing that much data was easier said than done for a new researcher. It proved to be strenuous and took a lot of time. Themes could have been missed during the initial data reduction. One way this was addressed was by doing collaborative coding between me and my advisor. The collaborate coding also strengthened inter-coder agreement, by helping to determine if the codes are working and accurate. After the initial codes were created, my advisor coded the data as well. We then came together and discussed the findings and the common codes were kept and the less important ones were thrown out.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 described what I did to collect and analyze data. Many procedures were discussed but after careful review, I was confident that the procedures used were the best to address the research questions. Findings from these procedures are described in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter IV: Findings**

### **Introduction**

In chapter 4 findings from the research will be shared. It starts with a brief review of the data analysis, methodology, the purpose and the research questions. There is a chart of the coded data displayed as well an overview of the participants who participated in the interviews. Lastly, there is a discussion of findings as they relate to the literature review and the purpose of the research project itself.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine project based learning (PBL) as a possible approach to help adult ELLs with English acquisition at the collegiate level. It was also to shed light on the ELL student's self-perceived learning styles to investigate if project based learning would be a good approach to help with learning English as a Second Language.

In order to investigate this experience five participants were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. All but one of the participants were part of the Intensive English Program at a southern university and were on different academic levels. One had recently finished the program. The following are the questions that guided this study.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the benefits of using project based learning to assist English language learners with English as a second language acquisition in a university setting?
2. In what ways do self-reported learning styles of the English language learner relate to the potential effectiveness of a PBL approach in a university setting?

3. What are the challenges associated with PBL as an approach to aid English language learning in a university setting?

To investigate this topic I used a semi-structured interview protocol. Each interview lasted between 20-40 minutes and resulted in transcripts ranging in length from 5-9 pages. After data were collected via a voice recording device, they were transcribed and the recordings were erased. The analysis began after the transcription of the interviews. The initial review resulted in creating or taking notes/memos in the margins. From the memos, codes were created. None of the codes were *apriori*, they all emerged from the interview transcriptions. Those initial codes were then reduced into major themes that were occurring. Having a codebook makes the research process easier, so I created one. The codebook encompassed several sections that were created in a Microsoft Excel document. Categories included the code, definition, data exemplar, source, disconfirming evidence and a source. The codebook was given to my advisor to crosscheck the codes that were found. In order to verify the usefulness of the codebook, my advisor used the themes that I created and coded the transcript. The coded transcript from my advisor was then compared to my coded transcript to see if we coded the themes the same.

Upon the verification of the usefulness of the codebook the remaining interviews were then coded. To differentiate the codes different color highlighters were utilized to differentiate the themes. During the color coding I noticed that several of the themes overlapped which was not expected. After the highlighting was complete, I created another document in which all of the same themes from the different transcripts were put together. At this point, based on the data received in the collection, I organized chapters four and five.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age?
4. Please finish this statement, I learn English best when:
5. What aspects of learning English are the most important?
6. Describe your ideal English learning environment and/or process?
7. Describe an instance where you did not learn English well, what contributed to the lack of learning?
8. What are the student's responsibilities in terms of learning English?
9. What is the most important part of a teacher's job in teaching?
10. What were the qualities of your favorite English teacher that you have had at any point in your educational career?

#### **First Established Codes**

Pink -Barriers to learning English

Yellow -Learning English in the US

Orange -Real life application

Blue -Enhancing English learning

Purple -Elements of learning English

#### **Codes after Data Reduction**

Pink - Barriers to learning English

Pink/Orange - Barriers to learning English in real life application

Pink/Blue - Barriers to Enhancing English learning

Pink/Purple - Barriers to Elements of learning English

Yellow - Learning English in the US



Orange - Real life application

Blue - Enhancing English learning

Blue/Purple - Enhancing English learning with Elements of learning English

Blue/Orange - Enhancing English learning in Real life application

Purple/Orange - Elements of learning English in Real life application

Blue/Yellow - Enhancing English learning in the US

Yellow/Pink - Barriers to learning English in the US

Purple - Elements of learning English

Yellow/Orange - Real life application of Learning English in the US

Table 1.1

Table of Coded Data

Codes	Color	Participants
Barriers to learning English	Pink	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Learning English in the US	Yellow	1, 2, 3, 5
Real-life Application	Orange	1, 2, 3, 5
Enhancing English language learning	Blue	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Elements of learning English	Purple	1, 2, 4, 5
Barriers to learning English in real life application	Pink/Orange	4, 5
Barriers to Enhancing English learning	Pink/Blue	2, 3, 5

Barriers to Elements of learning English	Pink/Purple	3, 4, 5
Enhancing English learning with Elements of learning English	Blue/Purple	3, 4, 5
Enhancing English learning in Real life application	Blue/Orange	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Elements of learning English in Real life application	Purple/Orange	4
Enhancing English learning in the US	Blue/Yellow	1, 2, 4, 5
Barriers to learning English in the US	Pink/Yellow	4, 5
Real life application of Learning English in the US	Orange/Yellow	5

### **The participants**

There were five participants that participated in this study. Participants were chosen via convenience/deliberate sampling. Three of the participants were recruited by me and two were “snowballed” recommended from another participant. Four of the participants were a part of the International English Program at a southern University and one had recently finished the program. All of the participants were from different countries including Italy, Turkey, Korea, and Brazil. They were all over the age of 19

and all had attended college in their home countries. Of all the participants, there was one female and the rest were males. They all also began learning English in their home countries. Since English was not the participants' first language reading the quotes in the data may be a bit difficult. Despite that possibility, this was determined by me, to be the best population to employ for this research.

In order to better understand the quotes from the interview transcript a key was created.

Key

P=Participant

1-5=Number of the participant

I=Interviewer

### **Findings**

This research project was created to gather information about ELL students who are learning English at the college level. The focus was on their English language learning to see if PBL could be used to enhance their learning. Codes from the transcripts of the interview will be discussed in terms of some of the components of the literature review.

One of the first parts of the literature review discussed the methods, specifically scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and working collaboratively. The review of literature also mentions that project based learning can be a motivational, learner centered, teacher facilitated approach that can serve to foster self-regulated learning. There was mention of these components throughout the data gathered. Through these components of PBL, themes will be presented throughout chapter 4.

Several themes emerged while closely examining the data. Barriers to learning English was the first and most of the participants had similar views. Time, inadequate teachers, age, insufficient rigorous assignments, not being understood and not being able to understand native English speakers were some of the barriers that were experienced by the participants.

The next theme was learning English in the United States which included the participants' views in regards to being the best place to learn English, enjoying the learning environment as well as learning to speak by merely trying to do so. Four out of the five participants shared analogous views in this theme. Not only was there conversation about learning English in the United States but the participants went further to introduce ideas about enhancing English language learning.

Following learning English in the United States was enhancing English language learning which was evident in all five participants' data. Even though they all commented there was a difference in opinion in some of the subthemes. This theme, like barriers, also consisted of the idea of time affecting one's ability to learn English. This theme also included aspects such as motivation, qualities of the teacher, qualities of the learner, and support from friends and family.

Elements of learning English was another theme that surfaced during the data analysis. Standardized test in terms of enhancing careers in the future, grammar, conversation, freedom of speech, immersion into English language environments, and the structure of the English language were all components of this current theme. Participant three was the only one of the participants that did not comment in this section but the other participants contributed rich data to further investigate this research subject.

The last theme that will be discussed is real world application. This is important given that the goal of all the participants is to learn English with the intention of use at some point. Even with this common goal, participant four did not comment on this theme. This theme included topics like applying assignments to real world problems or situations, the use of media and technology, being job related and the everyday use of English.

### **Barriers to learning English**

The theme that was the most apparent was barriers to learning English. Most of the participants started off by giving an account of what learning was like in their home countries which ended up being barriers to their English language learning. What was experienced the most was the idea that in their home countries English Education was not very good due to not having enough time for learning, not having enough time to practice English, not having an English knowledgeable teacher, and solely focusing on grammar.

### **Time**

A couple of the participants felt that in order to learn a language that one must spend time practicing it. The participants shared that although they wanted to learn English, they were not aggressive about it. They did not spend time practicing English skills and to their beliefs contributed to their lack of acquisition.

P1 In my university we study normally a lot of theory..uhh we have not a lot of time to practice.

P2 In Turkey umm we don't have any umm..intense English programs and also I didn't attempt..maybe there are but uhh there's no opportunity to attempt this kind of program because..umm I still to complete my high school ehh my university my college and ehh

there's no time to uhh there's no extra time to learn English ehh...maybe..we spent..ehh just 2 hours in a week for learning English and its not so..too much.

P2 and I have to spend more time after class and it is the maybe maybe...most important thing because yes in the class we spend about ...5 hours a day in class but it is really not enough..hemp...really not enough and also..ehmm...

### **Inadequate Teachers**

The participants below experienced teachers who were not equipped to teach English language class. Even though they all gave examples of inadequate teachers, their accounts were different. Teachers not speaking English, not being enthusiastic about teaching and not being knowledgeable were among the components that demonstrate inadequate teachers based on the participants' accounts.

P3 uhhhmm...there there were native native teacher and...Korean teacher and all of all of the class uhhmmm....class was uhhh uhhh....all the class almost class is Korean teacher and just once a week native native teacher...but...mmm...almost them was the grammar grammar were sometimes listening not speaking.

P5 oh they do they do but ahhh my English experience in Brazil wasn't good at all I feel like I just learn the verb to be and certain colors and numbers and that was all ummm...I think that teachers are not intentional like okay my students have to learn I think they do umm they do teach English but just like as a duty ok I teach English

P2-so maybe it is...knowledge knowledge knowledge is the most important thing for...teachers and ...because if you know as a student teachers knows my questions and he or she can understand me and she can answer me easily..you feel eh..more comfortable

..and..for example one of my ehmm...one of my teacher...ehh..don't know all of my questions and you know its kind eh..ehmm eh..you don't trust..ehhh.. to teacher any more you know?

### **Age**

Another barrier to learning English was age and this topic was shown by more than one of the participants. Most of them felt as if age affected their English learning in some way. Participant two suggested that as a person ages their ability to learn English reduces while participant three suggested that since he is older in age that he should be doing something else at this point instead of learning English.

P2 my age..somehow..ehh..is a problem for learning English..you know its eh..umm..about uhh age and also..and my brain doesn't work uhh..(laughs) as much as before..as much as young..but uhh..it's still okay.

P3 uhmm (long pause)...uhhh....sometimes ..I feel...should I ..uhhh... I feel...hhmmm...is it right to learn English now because I'm...24 years old already so in my country all of my friends are...are already junior or graduating but in my case I served military service in my country I was just sophomore ...but I moved to America to learn English one year so sometimes uhhh...some people said to me waste wasting time cause you should you should do something like about your major ...its not time for learning English but I like I like it because I wanna come to America before when I was young and now.. it is really fun to make American friends and speaking English it is really fun.

### **Other Barriers to Learning English**

Other barriers that were experienced were assignments in the English classes not being rigorous, not having proper feedback, not being understood, no exposure to English speaking practice, and not having confidence.

P1 I feel stupid when I do exercise like “okay tell me it’s better it’s better to have a red apple or a green apple for breakfast (imitates teacher talking to a young student).. If I see this kind of exercise I think.. “for you I’m stupid or what?”

Participant one really felt passionate about not being treated like a child. He continued to discuss this issue by elaborating on his opinion.

P1 so don’t be pathetic and be humor especially..be smart..you are not speaking with a child..sometimes with this teacher she was like she was speaking with me like with a child.. I don’t understand your language..it doesn’t mean that I am not..that I am stupid..you are not to speak to me that polite way...you have to speak with me slowly maybe..but not not like I am a child...because I’m not a child...

P2 so...for example if I...yes I know..I know this question (chuckles)..umm... if I try to...uuhh.. say something and if I want to explain something and some person..ehh.. people can not understand me..it is the worst thing and..and....ehh...I don’t know why..yes it is the worst thing for me..and because you you have to say something you have to explain something but..ehh...you don’t have to use your body language you just..eehh...want to eehh...say the correct things but how?

### **Problems with Communication**

Participant one discussed how he was too lazy to find English speaking friends to practice with which could have helped him because most of the participants discussed not being able to understand English native speakers. This



barrier included not being able to understand native English speakers in the areas of idioms, slang, pace and pronunciation.

### **Slang**

It was evident from the data collected from the participants that high importance was placed on grammar and “proper or King’s English” and neglected factors like slang, idioms and conversation in general. Several of the participants shared how they had never even heard slang before coming to the United States.

P1 I was not able to start watch movies in English when I was in Italy. I was too lazy to find..ehh.. English guys in Italy. So to come here and speak everyday everyday everyday it improved my English...

P3 ummm...because I learned English for 10 years in my country but then I was came here...when I came here at first I uhmmm...I uhh I couldn't do...anything like ...I didn't know “whats up” even “what's up” because I didn't learn “what's up” in my country.

P4 yea...I never learned slang...slang English...but they they using so many slang or like some English but I don't know in Korea...it was interesting.

P2 (inaudible) if I if I really speak very well in English I feel....I don't feel I missing somethings but maybe I uhhh...miss some ehhe..some slang or some idioms especially idioms because of you know you don't learn some idioms or some uhh...some...this kind of thing in the class.

### **Pronunciation**

Not only did the participants experience not being able to understand slang but they also experienced not being able to be understood by people. They expressed how frustrating it could be to try to say something and the message not

be received and understood. Not being understood was not the only problem the participants encountered; they also had difficulties understanding accents, for example southern enunciation they have been exposed to being in school in the south. This also sheds light on the importance of conversation practice between ELLs and native English speakers which will be discussed later in this study.

P3 hmmm...uhmmm...as I said when I when I first came here I didn't understand "whats up"...in in America uhhh...it is important to to conversation to make conversation but in Korea it is only for test like TOEFL test and there is (inaudible) test in Korea.

P4 yea and listening like I can...now I can understand like my friend who is in is from another country because they speak like slowly and I can understand easily but if I listen like native native language people who live here.

P2 and uhhmmm...also...ah okay.. ehh...the worst thing for me in here ehhmmm...southern accent it is uhhmm...you know (laughs) its so difficult so difficult to understand.. first two months in here ...it was terrible because I came here worked for a company for 5 years and I I use my English...yes it is business English but okay it is different from daily English but I can still understand English but in here I couldn't understand anything and when I go to Walmart (laughs) people say something I really couldn't understand them still its okay its acceptable but ehh...you know some sometime I feel so uncomfortable to use my English because its so different and its exactly not English its its kind a Americanish or I don't know the name but its different.

P2 mmm hmm..and...in here yes we take ehhh...grammar class but not as much as uhhh...in Turkey and also...in Turkey theres...no...eehhmm...its its so limited time to

...speak English and also you feel un comfortable ehhh.... With ehh...in front of the your classmates...in here I don't feel un comfortable because everybody in my class....like me and you know its....not so important and also nobody knows you...before...maybe it is the eehhhh...best way to learn English and you can say whatever you wants (laughs).

### **Learning English in the United States**

Learning English in the United States seemed to be the preferred location for learning among all of the participants. Regarding English language learning in the United States, participants addressed topics like learning styles, how English is learned, best atmosphere for learning and facilitation of learning.

I-okay so if you were design a English learning classroom what would that classroom look like what would the environment be like.

P5-well..umm...it has to look like uhh a place where you will actually uhh be immersed (said as if he wanted to check that he was using the right word and saying it correctly) into the language so I would say it has to have a lot of like maybe words written on the wall or flags with uhh phrases of motivation like uh "just do it" or "it's easier than you think" uhh"one step at a time" and I think it's good because it will constantly remind you that um its just one step at a time so you keep of being motivated even though when you know uhh obstacles come when for example a certain word that you have like difficulty to pronounce you just look at the phrase and you will get motivated and keep on trying.

### **Learning Style**

Most of the participants felt that if the English language learning classes were more enjoyable that it would be a better strategy to learning English. They also kept mentioning that the classes should not be boring.

P2-mmmm hmm (agreement) the knowledge for that reason it is.. the most important thing for me but... also....ehhh....the...enjyness in the class...maybe the important because we spend more than 45 minutes in the class without a break and uhh...it.... Can be soooo difficult for students to focus on the..just..ehhh..the class and sometimes some musics some...games or some data activities talking speech...and it is it is really good for students...also one more thing ehmm... if you go with class with your teacher..ehmm..for example in a lunch or other activities.. you feel more more friendly.

P3 uhmmm...not boring..yea be....mmm some sometimes sometimes students feel feel bored in class...then they....they give up learning English so but if the class is interesting they will the students will uhmm..be activated activate more learning English.

P1- I don't I don't have a lot of ...ummmm.....for me..be funny..because...you have to be very very humor..funny..because a lot of studies show that if you.. if you are if you are funny people learn better...sooo...if you....but..in everything..if I love if I find...if I if I love...I not boring... A lot of people think that you have to be serious every time to teach..this not the best way..its not true because the brain works smarter when is.. when.. you es funny..alright.. I-uhh hmm so maybe be funny with your job place joke..try to have humor always its tough to have humor with people that don't speak your language..but your English the English but...this is learning English another way ..this understanding joke.

### **How English is Learned**

Speaking English by just trying was another element of learning English shared by the participants.

P3 oh...they should...uhmmm just...they should at least try try speaking English because if they if they if they don't have the the will to speak English no purpose just hangout with Korean friends and just using Korean that's that's the worst thing so they should be responsible uhmmm uhmm...for uhmmmm...I don't know how to explain.

P5 umm..well I would say umm somebody who is willing to learn English has to umm actually dedicate time and try to find the best umm methods of learning and for me I think the meth the best methods of learning English is uhh try to have conversation with Americans Eng just English speakers in general I think it's more natural it takes less time to to learn and it's more dynamic and it's just I would say easier..and also more motivating.

### **Best Environment for Learning English**

Being in the United States allows for ELLs to be able to have more experience speaking English. They would be immersed and hear English for the majority of their day. Understanding English in terms of reading is okay but in the United States more practical skills may obtained which ties together content and practice.

hmm..I would say my..best..uhh the best environment I was at to learn English was actually when I go to theUnited States because I tried to uhh learn English on my own when I was in Brazil uhmm..and actually I thought I was doing well uhh as I took for mostly I was just reading so yea so my ability of speaking of listening uhhh were not that good uhh not were were not as good as my uhh reading abilities were but as soon as I got

here I actually tried to speak and have conversations my English just went better and better so the best environment for my learning process was here in America.

### **Facilitation of English Language Learning**

Learning tended to be enhanced by extrinsic motivation as well as other support from teachers, family, and friends. Participant five expressed how his class would look if he taught English as a second language. His example included several accounts of verbal and visual encouragement.

P5 into the language so I would say it has to have a lot of like maybe words written on the wall or flags with uhh phrases of motivation like uh “just do it” or “it’s easier than you think” uhh”one step at a time” and I think it’s good because it will constantly remind you that um its just one step at a time so you keep of being motivated even though when you know uhh obstacles come when for example a certain word that you have like difficulty to pronounce you just look at the phrase and you will get motivated and keep on trying.

### **Enhancing English Language Learning**

Enhancing English language learning was another theme that continued to appear throughout the transcription of data. This theme included elements of learning English. For example, qualities of the learner, qualities of the teacher, as well as support from the teacher, friends and family were also noted as elements that enhance English language learning.

### **Time**

Not spending enough time to learning or practicing English came up a lot during the interviews. This issue was experienced by not spending time

practicing due to their own motivation and lack of opportunities out of their control.

P5-oh they have to dedicate time to it uhh if they come to a foreigner a foreign country just to learn English they have to actually spent time reading they have to spend time listening the time they have to just got for it because it's not the uhh the rule of rule?

P2-most of the time but you.....should spend more time for watching movie or other tings and it is really missing for me...I really should pay attention to other things outside of the....class and yes I'm missing these kind of things.

P2 okay..firstly I came here ehmmmm...I just focused on my class and I I thought it was enough to learn English but it wasn't enough I I can realize right now and I have to spend more time after class and it is the maybe maybe...most important thing because yes in the class we spend about ...5 hours a day in class but it is really not enough..ehmmmm...really not enough.

### **Motivation**

Motivation was a component that kept occurring throughout the interviews. Students talked about being intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Participants shared their accounts about motivation and most of them, since being in the United States, had been more motivated than when they were in their home countries. Also, PBL may include the group aspect so before one joins a group they should have their own motivation.

### **Extrinsic Motivation**

The participants shared how important it was to be motivated by their teacher. This was discussed in terms of getting students excited about learning to keep them going when they are stressed and or depressed.

P5-umm..I would motivate I would motivate students to not try to imagine what they would do in their own native languages because it prevents students from...getting into English.

P5-uhhh it's really different because here people are just intentional to teach English and intentional that we would learn it so it make things...easier because...we get motivated to learn and you are in a environment that you just surrounded by English so everywhere English is there ...so it's just far easier to learn where English is like all the time present all the time.

P5-role of the teacher to speak English into their brain they have to move for it so I think teachers they are they do a excellent job to motivate students to speak English but uhh students have to be aware that almost everything depends on them so if they want to learn they will learn but they are just like passive okay eventually I will learn they will learn maybe yea they will learn increasingly more but not in a you fast pace so I would say motivation and perseverance (pronounced it wrong )?

P1-if you give me candies in the classroom I will be more attention I will give more attention I-you said candy? Candies and donuts..gimmie that..ayy..for example..for example my teacher of writing television and film Mrs. Sally (pseudonym) during one lesson to stimulate the guys to speak they give them candies when they speak and tell something of good...immediately it was like a stupid joke..right.. everybody everybody was thinking I want candies today so yes.. I want to speak I want try..and this was..there



was a good conversation..things are not so expensive..you can put in your..to stimulate because sometimes people are are ashamed but if they understand but if they think that they are playing..if you...bra...the same way we are speaking about this ..humor..okay..if I ask you your opinion but I am in the class...I am in my desk you are in your desk.. “Whats your opinion?”..you’re ashamed..you are ashamed..but your mates..your teacher...right..if I tell you I want your opinion if you have..if you give me your opinion...candy for everybody..so its different its like a play its like a game..in a different way..so this is.

### Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation was discussed in terms of taking learning into one’s own hands. They also talked about being aggressive in the pursuit of learning a new language. There was the idea that there is only so much others can do. The responsibility to get better at learning English rest on their willingness to practice as well as participate in other activities that will enhance their English language knowledge.

P5-um I think we actually learn more when your try to do what you are trying to learn.. P5-hmm..I would say my..best..uhh the best environment I was at to learn English was actually when I go to the United States because I tried to uhh learn English on my own when I was in Brazil uhmm..and actually I thought I was doing well uhh as I took for mostly I was just reading so yea so my ability of speaking of listening uhhh were not that good uhh not were were not as good as my uhh reading abilities were but as soon as I got here I actually tried to speak and have conversations my English just went better and better so the best environment for my learning process was here in America P5-okay..yea

for sure I'd say here is far better..actually I tried to learn English on my in my own country when I was there on my own so umm I was the one who give myself my own methods so I was just trying to watch videos and just try to read and I never got the chance to speak to somebody because ahh where I live in Brazil...there are not.. a lot of you know English speakers so yea..I...Spent...nearly 8 months studying English.

For example my girlfriend is in Italian class..they are..she knows some vocabulary like okay this is the table this is the chair this is..but speak a language is not only vocabulary vocabulary because I can learn vocabulary speaking. I have to understand how a language work..so for example in Italy they are good there is a good program to learn Italy if you are a foreign student and they give..its not like a class of ehh..its not a class from learn Italian..its a class to understand how Italian works and to use Italian immediately because if you come from other countries to work in Italy, to study in Italy immediately..you need to immediately speak the language I-Right..so the name of the program Is "Detal" I don't know how they work but its like a concentrate but not the vocabulary like okay...speak in a in a hospital..speak about your living room..its just SPEAK..This is the language, this is how it works..if you want the vocabulary..open a vocabulary book...okay..don't speak about... don't learn me what is green what is red I will learn with the time...I need just to know how this language works..so destroy all book exercise that you have and find some that's more practice, its more conversation because there's no sense to come back home and write "ahh yes the red is red the green is green" (imitates teacher speaking to a young child) because this is not speaking..this is writing and I can be good to write in English but if I am not good to communicate in the real world...I am done.

P5-ummm yea...well when I first got here.. I was totally willing to ahh learn English and I don't consider myself fluent at it but umm..yea...from yea here now where I am like from where I was I can see that my English improved a lot so ummm...yea I think in order that somebody will learn English this person have to like just keep on trying and trying and trying and not on wait people to come to him or to her to talk but this person should go for English actually just go and try to have as many conversations as he or she can and yea I think..yea that's it..if you don't have any more questions.

P1 if you have..if you have..if you have good motivation you can..ehh..watch some movies, find English people...ehhh...speak with them.

P2 if you feel uncomfortable and if you don't believe.. if I don't believe myself..I will okay everything goes worst and everything is very very bad... I just uhh...umm...feel...uh okay I can't learn English and.. you know its..its not its its little difficult to learn English if you think okay I can't learn I can't do anything about English you can just.. you focus on your can't you focus on.. your knowledge and your English and its really... lack of your English skills..and sometimes..ehmm..I feel on this way...okay..I can't...for example in here..ehh..I feel..eehh.. worst than last month..I don't know why but..ehh... sometimes I feel really unconfident about my English.

### **Qualities of the Teacher**

Qualities of the teacher was another theme that was reoccurring. A lot of the participants felt the same qualities were important but there were some who disagreed on at least one quality. The majority felt as if teachers should be nice, caring, encouraging. The participant who disagreed felt that the teacher should be honest, blunt, and not polite. He went further to stress

that teachers should not be your friend and should tell the truth no matter if it hurts one's feelings.

P5 umm..well I would say umm somebody who is willing to learn English has to umm actually dedicate time and try to find the best umm methods of learning.

P2-qualities..okay...knowledge and uhh...friendly and...uhhmmm...ah okay..I remember her and she is also ESL teacher and she is the most uhh..most uhh...important...English teacher for me..because ehh...she has know some other language for example Turkish Korean grammatically and...she can say okay this structure in English on this way but in your language that way and she can understand my problems and you know ...you can be in a trouble on this way and you should pay attention on that way.

P4-ummm...I will like teacher who...ummmm...respond and ..like they can teach well..like I can ask something easily I don't have to afraid.

P4-ummm....teacher need to correct them...about English grammar or pronunciation because when when I when I when I am taking ESL..I think they don't teach about pronunciation.

It was a trend that the participants wanted the teacher to give them feedback but the way in which the feedback should be delivered varied among the participants. Participant one was the outlier in this area urging teaching to be direct and give the right feedback with no regard to feelings.

P1 so...my favorite teacher for example..here in a Williams University (pseudonym)...ummmm...it could be um in my life (mumbles)? It could be Craig Johnson (name changed for privacy) so if you know this teacher but.. Mike and Will

(name changed for privacy) too..because when they have to teach and when a job is not good..they tell you “this job is not good” so they care if you are offending..if you are...this is.. the best quality is be direct..I don’t want to lose time so the job is not good for me..its not for this this this this this and this..after this sometimes they play in classroom they joke with you..this is after they told me the first thing so.. be direct..be good..a little of humor...you are you are my best..and prepared ..you are not to be scared to give me a hard job because I am Italian because when I will have to have a real job they don’t care if I will have a hard job or not..so don’t be too bastard please...don’t be too polite.

P1 because there is no sense to be polite..I don’t want you that you are polite for me..if I’m wrong I want that you correct me..I don’t want a polite guy..if I want a polite guy I speak with my momma..okay... I want a teacher that tell me “this is good this is not good”..so this this doesn’t mean that this is attacking me. She’s just correcting me.

Not only do they express the need for teachers to possess positive qualities but they also need to be knowledgeable and they need to know English. Several of the participants explained how they learned English from a Non-English speaking teacher.

P2 it is different because in eehhh...for example if you go to government school in college or in high school or also elementary school ehh.. the teacher... just speak Turkish and (laughs) so to teach English they speak Turkish its so ridiculous ...in here I have to know some English to learn something when we....were at....11 years old and its not enough I’m still learning English still and... yes I spent 17 years to learn English its so ridiculous but I still spent time spent time to learn..and ehmm...yes...in in in the

class teachers speak in Turkish it is most distinctive things and times distinctive in here..ehhmmm...

P3 uhhhhh...there there were native native teacher and...Korean teacher and all of all of the class uhhhhh...class was uhhh uhhh...all the class almost class is Korean teacher and just once a week native native teacher...but...mmm...almost them was the grammar grammar were sometimes listening not speaking.

### **Knowing English but not Being Able to Speak it**

Other participants also talk about studying English for years and not being able to actually speak English. With the focus on grammar and writing other elements tend to get overlooked. This could have contributed to the participants being well versed in English in areas like grammar and writing but not speaking and conversation.

P5 (long pause) umm....okay...well I think ...when we see somebody who loves... what.. he or she does uhh when you see they just like ...transmitting this idea okay I really love teaching uhh student will get more excited to learn it so I think umm....English teachers they should ummm transmit this idea of okay I real love teaching so I will just do my... my best so umm I also would recommend that teachers would umm try to notice umm try to perceive umm the best way uhh for their students to learn because umm there are some methods that work for some some people but that do not work for other people so I would say that teachers would be very....umm like they would pay attention to uhhh how students their students would learn so they could apply different methods for ahh to every one of them I don't know if it's clear.

P5 umm...I think to be in order to be a teacher somebody has to be very patient ...and....very intentional to teach and...very actually willing to teach not only to teach

but to see were his students actually learning so ummm I would say uhh that the teacher has to clearly show you know okay I want you guys to learn so patience umm is ahh great quality that teacher have to have because students are going to commit mistakes as they speak so teachers when they see the mistakes they shouldn't be like oh that is a mistake so they should like yea keep on going yea keep trying oh its jus a tiny mistake but yea that is good so I think encouraging encouraging people by encouraging students by just uhh giving compliments about what they are doing alright and just oh yea yea oh to be perfect you just needed to do that so but most of all most of that is just nice just keep on like that so I think to to promote motivation is the uhh best quality that a teacher have to have.

P4-umm...ummm....I have studied English in Korea for like almost 10 years but when I came here first time I couldn't speak English because in Korea I just learn how to write English how to read English.

P3-and they will almost all of them can't speak English very well but their vocabulary work is so good ..business vocabulary or mmmm not mmmm in America I'm using simple vocabularies now but when I was in Korea the vocabulary was so difficult but it is useless in here.

### **Support**

Support from friends and family was a theme that occurred throughout the interviews and each of the participants experienced "support" in different ways.

P2-Yea actually I can compare to uhmm...choose Williams University (pseudonym) or ehh...for example before I came here...I just focus on (inaudible) Boston or NY...for learning English but one of my professor ehmm...offered me here because ehh ....you

can find some friends American friends here and in campus and you can uhh...attend to some seminar or some class some other class except English class and eh...and also I already have a major and I can improve my skills this this this campus and also really it helps me to for example I use library for eh...searching something but if I go to if I went to eh...Boston eh...I will choose Kaplan uhhh...English schools and eh...one of my friends choose Kaplan and she's not happy and you know there are just focusing to eh...English grammar or other things and it is uhh...still unnecessary and in here I'm happy to be here because I can spend more time in library or recreation center and...you know its free for me and also I like to spend my time in this kind of uhh... Things....

P2- So..okay.. umm..ideal?...maybe...in here..ideal learning..in here...the best way to learn English taking class and also..uhh.. making friends.. and also.. eemm..maybe the boyfriend or girl friend is the best way to learn English..because you spent more time with English speaker and uh..you just focus on umm eh say in your feeling and maybe just for that reason boyfriend and girl friend is the most most important part of the English I think it is the best part of English learning..eh... but but..ehmm...maybe you should I should spend more time to listening for example watching movie ehmm...eh like socializing like for example go to cinema or other things..emm..also ehmm... make friends.

P1 they have not a lot of confidence with other guys they just..if you work with these guys..have a group project they have to give you confidence and maybe a friendship can born but if you no group project its very tough to have a friendship with your with your mates..ehh eh... because everybody arrives..the teacher arrives in time..so there is the



class..at the end of the class everybody has to leave the class immediately..so for this ..understand the teacher is the most important thing..I understand sometimes bureaucratic stuff is important too because if I see one man from the William's (pseudonym) office that they need something by me from me by me or from me? I don't remember.

### **Conversation Practice**

Even though support from family was deemed important, all participants agreed that having an American friend or conversation partner was beneficial for the English language learning process.

P4-ummmm... when...when I'm talking with my friend.. I think I want ..its very better than class I think ahh...because I can speak more comfortably.

P2- So..okay.. umm..ideal?..maybe...in here..ideal learning..in here...the best way to learn English taking class and also..uhh.. making friends.. and also.. eemm..maybe the boyfriend or girl friend is the best way to learn English..because you spent more time with English speaker and uh..you just focus on umm ehh say in your feeling and maybe just for that reason boyfriend and girl friend is the most most important part of the English I think. We have some opportunity to share umm..our times..um with other English speakers..it is the best way because umm we start to think about on English way not not in Turkish.

P3-I think ...ummm...conversation is is uhhh...most im the most important part in learning English like speaking..yea speaking is the most important.

P4-ummm...I think friend is the most important thing

I-so having native speaking friends?

P4-yea.

## **Elements of Learning English**

The next theme was elements of learning English which are components that make up the English language. Other parts that are related to English learning will also be discussed. Examples of the elements include grammar/vocabulary, listening and nonverbal cueing, as well as critical thinking and literacy.

### **Standardized Testing**

Most of the participants explained that they had been taught English in their home countries with hopes that they would get a good score on standardized tests. In their countries of origin this is important because the better they do on the test, the better chances they may have in their careers.

P5 I would say ummm some schools they just umm I think just prepare students to pass for example TOEFL the TOEFL test or which whichever English test my students need to pass umm but I think uuhhh passing the TOEFL or passing whatever test English test students have to pass it doesn't necessarily mean that they are fluent in English and it doesn't necessarily mean that they are able to face everyday life because test exams are really like formal and living everyday life is I would say totally different so I think schools uhh English schools they should actually prepare students to every single area where English will be used... not only to the formal one but also to everyday life that uhh in my opinion is the most important one.

P3-yea...because all of the companies in Korea needs best TOEIC score or TOEFL score..so students should should study English for the test.

P3-uhmmm some people some some of my friends ask me is it good for you to learn English in America and I said yes...yea...I recommended them to come here

...because... I think....just for study for just grammar or just test is not good...they should they should do more conversation with other people...and...they should experience American cultures...yea it is good experience for me all of them the things ...yea.

What the participants shared was how the importance is placed on testing which could have led to their lack of conversation, speaking, and listening abilities. Curriculum should be well rounded and cover multiple aspects of learning English, for example, listening speaking, grammar, comprehension, etc.

P3 almost all of them can speak English very well but their vocabulary work is so good ..business vocabulary or mmmm not mmmm in America I'm using simple vocabularies now but when I was in Korea the vocabulary was so difficult but it is useless in here.

P2 so...for example if I...yes I know..I know this question (chuckles)..umm... if I try to...uuhh.. say something and if I want to explain something and some person..ehh.. people cannot understand me..it is the worst thing and..and.....ehh...I don't know why..yes it is the worst thing for me..and because you you have to say something you have to explain something but..ehh...you don't have to use your body language you just..eehh...want to ehh...say the correct things but how? Okay okay okay...ehmm.. the second important things..for example..in here..ehmm..In Turkey we learn ehh..the water.. "water"(perfect pronunciation) like like British but here eh..when I say "water" nobody understand me water or something else (laughs).

P5 ummm,,just ummm whenever I remember my reading classes we were suppose to umm inter interpret the text we...read so umm whenever the teacher ask us about our opinion about the subject and you would say umm and you're you're were supposed to

...speak about it it was really good because we not only ummm speak it but we try we are actually trying to express our own opinion on a subject umm in English...so that is awesome.

### **Grammar and Vocabulary**

In the home countries of the participants grammar was said to be the main focus of English teaching curriculum, with the hopes of receiving a high score on high stakes tests. Since the test includes English or is an English test, that includes grammar, high importance is placed on that aspect. Which the focus on grammar other areas tend to be left out, for example, conversation. Some English teacher did not even speak English in some of their countries. Participant four however, was the outlier in this case. He felt the grammar is important and necessary. He felt that without grammar you could not speak or understand anything and vocabulary would be useless.

P4-uhmmmm....because if you don't know grammar...you cannot make sentence you cannot you cannot speak...at least you have to know basic grammar.

### **Conversation**

Earlier there was a discussion regarding conversation with American friends. It is taken a step further when conversation in general is expressed as significant to the participants.

P3-I think ...ummm...conversation is is uhhh...most im the most important part in learning English like speaking..yea speaking is the most important.

P3 I think....just for study for just grammar or just test is not good...they should they should do more conversation with other people...and...they should experience American cultures...yea it is good experience for me all of them the things ...yea.

P5-and to listen so as much speaking they have umm so the more speaking they have they the more they will be...get fluent umm in speaking so that's why I said initially the most we speak the the more we speak the more will will learn how to speak actually.

### **Freedom of Speech in Class**

Freedom to speak was also displayed in the data from participant three who felt that freedom to speak is necessary when learning English. Participant two gave an account of how one of her professors, not English class, said that if they did not at least have a master's degree that they could not even ask a question in class. This further illustrates the differences of how ELLs are educated in the United States and other countries.

P3-uuhhhhh...I I wanna give to my my students free free to speaking free to speak uhhhh.....uhh....as much as possible and not a lot of students just 5 5-10...so if I'm if I'm a teacher...mmmm...I will I will conversate conversate tion with each each students.

### **Immersion**

Participants two and five expressed how being immersed is the best way to learn English. They felt that only English should be utilized in an English language learning class. The idea was that if you think only in English it may be easier to remember the new language.

P2 totally we take..uh..more than 20 hours in a week and also..ehhmm..we have some opportunity to share umm..our times..um with other English speakers..it is the best way

because umm we start to think about on English way not not in Turkish I-umm hmm P2- after a while..we.. start on this way..now..right now umm I don't think uhh and ..for example when I make eh..when I set up the sentence..I don't think ehh..Firstly in Turkish meaning. I just focus on the English meaning and after that and I start to talk uhh..In English and it is the best way maybe to.. learn English in here in right now.

P5-actually so I would say okay uhh imagine that your brain is like a...empty container once you put things in it ehh if you try to put more things umm..it would be harder because there would be less and less room...in order to get more of a new thing you have to make your container empty from the previous thing you had before..so umm whenever you try to learn English or any other language lang English in this case umm I would say okay think just try to forget well like how Portuguese or Chinese the the structure looks like uhh just try to okay observe how English looks like and jus try to copy it doesn't need to make sense with your native language just try to learn English from the very beginning and I think this is what I would do if I were a grammar teacher .

### **Significance of Structure**

The significance of structure was expressed by participant five. He felt that one has to start with structure in order to learn a new language.

P5-yea uhh I think in.. every..learning process we can initiate better by reading uhh not necessarily I will understand for example if I'm just studying uhh I won't be able to maybe uhh recognize certain pronunciations but I getting used to the way the is uhh just how it you know the e es structure of everything I think it's the best way to be introduced to the language so I think it kinda a step a step at a time I think the best way to start learning English is ahh I would say for me was ummm just reading and then when I knew

uhh a couple of words I tried to form phrases and then communicate and actually try to speak it.

### **Real World Application**

The last theme was real world application. All of the participants stressed how important it was to align the assignments in class with real life practice. Contextual learning, job related learning, tools for improvement, and the use of media in English language learning.

### **Contextual Learning**

It was important to the participants that the content that the teachers are teaching be contextual and purposeful. They also appreciated when learning English happened in authentic situations. Participant two shared an experience where the teacher used lyrics of a song to teach grammar. This could be helpful for learners because not only are they learning grammar but they are also learning about culture and getting listening practice.

P2 uhhh hmmm actually the teacher give us uhh..some paper and lyrics paper we can uhh..read the paper the lyrics while we listen the music and also sometimes ehh... you know the ehh...songs include some slang or some ungrammatical things and teacher uhh ...already correct all of the items and of the sentence ehh..ok..ehh the singer have on this way but it is wrong you should say on this way and it is the best part you can realize the what is wrong what is the ehh correct and...its also useful.

### **Job Related Learning**

Adult or college level learner may experience issues that take away from their experiences for instance, time. So there should be a way to learn English and content for the

future simultaneously. Participant one shared how his assignments could be enhanced by relating the assignments to his major or career goal. This could enhance their academic and conversational abilities at the same time.

P1 ummm...first technical stuff for my job cause if I must import everything can be you can you can get later but when you go to work with somebody when you go to..in a class you have to know what your boss what your teacher is telling to you. If you don't know..its bad. With your teacher its bad because you don't see the assignment you are to work (inaudible) with your assignment. With your boss it bad because you can gi he can gi he can tell you.. so..I need a guy that understand me so you can hold you self and go away now...sorry. This is first technical stuff. After that the stuff to enjoy with friends but they are not so difficult.

### **Tools for Improvement**

Participant one was very passionate about his English language learning experiences from the responses in the interview. He felt as if his English ability would be better if certain tools were utilized. The professors should be flexible and try to make all assignments benefit the students in more ways than one. For example, the passage below exemplifies what teachers could do to help make the most out of the English learning experience.

P1-I need a good...question because...to find a funny..okay sure..now I can tell you what is boring for me..for me its boring to have us do a stupid assignment about something I don't need..for example if I know that...if I ..if I know dat in my class there are 3 engineers 2 communicaters 2 guys in math..so I don't need to give..to give me assignment about how many dies for the the because they don't have food I-Right...I



don't take I don't take care about how many people dies because they have no food in an English class I-right..I can take in a community center..maybe not in English class.. so if you know that you have this kind of students.. be ready maybe with a paper about their job so for example..ehh..a guy want to present his project to another guy and he speak in my in my situation a guy is speaking about a movie ..these are the terms put the terms in the correct position...this would be it because im learning the terms..the words that I need to work I-right...okay.. you have you have to...before you do that..you have to know who is who are your students so you can do this in a very simple way because you are umm..everything is online in Williams (pseudonym) so I see okay 3 students here study engineering 2 students are in the college of liberal arts 2 students do that so I can be ready with show up with different book..the problem is the problem is that sometimes you are not enough ready because there are no books about that maybe...but you can just..for example hold a page from a book of communication..use a mar use a black marker delete the word that you..delete the word..that you.. delete the word and put the words another paper..put the word in the correct place..so it not so tough for exercise like this..this could be a good exercise for because will learn..its something that's good in the real life..I don't need to take to speak about drugs, to speak about...ehhh... about..ehh food about...every stuff because I don't care about that. I need to know about my job about my major because I'm studying here I'm working here I have to speak with my teacher..I have to speak with the correct terminology if I'm wrong the terminology I can't tell him uhh..what I want..this could be a cool assignment...so assignment with my own terminology.

### **Technology**

Technology plays a huge role in the United States and the world as whole. It also aids with learning. Using technology with ELLs could promote more learning in terms of learning English. Participants expressed how they would use technology, especially media like movies, videos, and music to enhance their lessons if they were teaching an English language learning class.

P3 uhhmmmm...I will use media...media method like video movies music songs  
...hhhmmm...not just not just using books...I use that kind of medias.

P2 also the musics is the best part of my especially my grammar class.. I really learn so many things from music and songs and umm.. some kind of.. for example in her EEU class umm.. is uhmm.. helped helped me to uhmm..to learn uhmm.. American culture and also if I have ehh umm..if I have idea about American Culture culture I can communicate with American easily and maybe for that reason I like this way this way and umm..also..in class umm..I I pay attention to class situations class hobbies for example if the class include some..ehh. business men or other kind of market workers..ehh.. I pay attention to ehmm... like some business material and also in my reading and listening class right now we pay attention to money business and it is really attractive for me. Also you know I will use this kind of ehh..knowledge in future life in my future life I-Right P2-ehhh... and you don't feel emmm..in class time.. it is not waste of time for me because I will use all of the knowledge ehmm...in the future and its...good for me and also if you ehhh.. if you teach the emm..child or teenagers you can ehmm... you can touch the..some socializing or you know I-Uhh hmm.. P2- and...maybe it is the best way for teaching English.

P1 I need just to know how this language works..so destroy all book exercise that you have and find some that's more practice, its more conversation because there's no sense to come back home and write "ahh yes the red is red the green is green" (imitates teacher speaking to a young child) because this is not speaking..this is writing and I can be good to write in English but if I am not good to communicate in the real world...I am don't.

### **Conclusion**

As it was shown from the direct quotes and data analysis the participants had a lot to say about learning English. The main themes that were discussed included barriers to learning English, learning English in the United States, real life application, enhancing English learning and elements of learning English. The data that were displayed in chapter 4 is parallel to what was found in the literature and will be expounded in detail in chapter five.

## Chapter V: Discussion

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine project based learning (PBL) as an approach to help adult ELLs with English acquisition at the collegiate level as well as shed light on the ELL student's self-perceived learning styles to investigate if project based learning would be a good approach to help with learning English as a Second Language. Transcripts from the interviews of international students learning English in a southern college in the United States of America were used to answer the study's question. Themes that emerged during the interviews will be discussed as they relate to existing finding from the literature review. Finally, there will be an examination of the study's limitations, recommendations for further research, and then the implications of the findings are considered.

In order to investigate project based learning (PBL) as an approach to help adult ELLs with English acquisition at the collegiate level the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the benefits of using project based learning to assist English language learners with English as a second language acquisition in a university setting?
2. In what ways do self-reported learning styles of the English language learner relate to the potential effectiveness of a PBL approach in a university setting?
3. What are the challenges associated with PBL as an approach to aid English language learning in a university setting?

For this study, a qualitative method was used to explore the opinions of multiple cases of international students. The examination of international students involved collecting data via

interviews. The interviews were then transcribed for the data analysis. The intent of this design was to gather first-hand accounts of the experiences of the participants of this study. Interviews were the most efficient way to gather information from the participants because I was able to have a conversation with the participants in order to reach a full understanding. Also English is the second language of all of the participants so reading a questionnaire, although possible, would have been least effective for this study. An analysis of the data illustrates how international students felt about learning English in the United States and how that relates to the elements of project based learning.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Project based learning focuses on the students' learning needs, providing them with a more meaningful learning experience (Stoller, 2006). It could be beneficial for the students if the elements of the approach and the opinions of the participants matched. It was my belief that the best way to gather data was by interviews because I was able to get information straight from the person involved. Given the high ELL abilities of the participants, I felt that qualitative methods would be the best way to compare the data to the elements of PBL because I was able to get the information directly.

The data analysis was conducted by me and was done using a qualitative approach. Since interviews were conducted transcripts were used to analyze the data. During the first reading of the transcripts I took notes in the margins so I could remember things that stuck out to me. After that I began to place similar notes together and created themes. The themes were then put into a codebook that was used to ensure there was a great analysis of the data. Checking the codebook with a colleague also checked to make certain the codebook was working.. The crosscheck was done by the committee chair. It was after receiving the feedback from my chair that I realized

that I was on the right track and the themes that I found were the themes that he found as well. Not all the codes agreed across the board. There were times that we coded things differently but after conversing with my chair it was understood why he coded the data the way he did. I was able to make adjustments at that time and I also pled my case as to why I coded parts a certain way. We then came to a consensus and the data analysis continued. Upon finishing the codes the data were then read through several times and color coded. The codes were then placed together and analyzed.

During the color coding of the data it began to emerge that a lot of the themes were connected for example, English language learning in real world application which is a combination of two of the themes to be addressed later in the chapter. All five of the participants talked about learning English in a way that could actually be used on a daily basis. Not only was the mention of learning English in a way that could be used for daily use seen once, it was reoccurring theme throughout the transcripts. This is important because PBL allows for the use of projects to teach and has been successful thus far so this could be beneficial for students learning English. Another theme that emerged from the interview transcripts was barriers to learning English which was talked about heavily in reference to the quality of English Education received in their home countries. All participants shared that English education in their home countries lacked quality which made learning English difficult. The next theme was enhancing English language where they discussed factors that helped them learn English like support for friends. They tended to gain more English knowledge via conversation with American friends and native English speakers. The last theme was elements of learning English where grammar was the most talked about component. Most felt that grammar was important but should not be

the main and only focus of their English learning lesson. This section is where disconfirming evidence between the participants was shown more than in any other theme.

Themes

Barriers to learning English

Learning English in the US

Enhancing English learning

Elements of learning English

Real life application

### **Barriers to Learning English**

Barriers to learning English could be very detrimental to the English language learning process for ELL students. Project based learning could possibly aide this population given that it has been known to improve academic success, make learning enjoyable, meaningful and permanent as well as develops essential and important skills in students (Gultekin, 2005).

Project based learning is still fairly new and some teachers do not utilize it. Narrowing down what is considered PBL was harder than I expected given that it is compiled of multiple definitions. Knowing the components of PBL and how it works could benefit the students who are in the classes that use PBL. The lack of consistency of the definition of PBL could have also swayed the opinions of some potential practitioners to use it or not. Despite the definition one chooses to go by, the opinions of the participants went with the elements that make PBL a successful approach.

All of the students in the study were from different countries but surprisingly shared similar experiences in their home countries. Time seemed to be a huge barrier to learning English in the study. The participants expressed that they did not spend enough time in their

home countries learning English. This meant that they were not spending time inside or outside the classroom. This was interesting because all conveyed the extreme need to practice learning English. Time was also discussed in terms of time being important which goes along with Knowles (1973) who stated that students want the time they spend in the class to be as useful as possible. The students in the study were college students who were only in the United States to learn English. The program in which they were learning English only lasted a semester so they have to learn as much as they can before they go home.

Inadequate teachers in their home countries in the K-12 and collegiate level was also a barrier to learning English shared by the participants. They talked about how some of the teachers did not care about teaching English, did not include rigorous lessons and worst of all, according to some of the participants, some of the teachers did not even speak English. This was a shock to me because one of the first requirements to teaching a language should be the ability to speak the language. Teachers working with any type of students should be prepared to teach them. Having inadequate teachers does not only happen in other countries, it could happen in the United States as well. Sometimes in the schools teachers may not have access to training needed to help ELLs and even when they do there is no guarantee that they will use what they learned (Bently & Brown, 2004). Teachers at all levels, including college professors, should be encouraged to use any strategies implemented to help the ELLs.

The participants of the study stressed how frustrating it was not only living in another country but learning English in a foreign country at the same time. One of the biggest problems they face was not being understood. They talked about problems they experienced with pronunciation and knowing the words they wanted to use but not being able to say them in a way that was understandable to native English speakers as well as wanting to say something but not



using grammar correctly. Being able to be understood is essential in communication and is useful for being able to go through everyday life.

Not only was not being understood a problem, so was not understanding native English speakers. It was suggested that native English speakers speak very fast and they have accents that are sometime hard to comprehend. One of the participants even gave an example about a shopping experience in which she did not understand what the clerk was saying because the southern accent was very thick. Being able to understand is another part of communication and is crucial for English language learning. To address this issue PBL could be use because according to Campbell (2012) both ELL and non ELL students greatly enjoyed a project based learning environment and collaboration helped allowed the ELL student plenty of academic talk time. This made it more possible for the international college students to master English and academic content concurrently.

Standardized testing, like in the United States, is used as a marker of academic success. The participants of this study were international students who are or were in an English language learning program at a southern university. One of the goals of the participants was to get a high score on the TOEFL test. They also explained that in their home countries in order to secure certain jobs, they needed to obtain a high score on English competency tests. In the United States the tests they will need to take has different sections like speaking, reading and writing. In their home countries grammar was the main focus so many students know English grammar well but cannot speak well. With that being said, participants in the study expressed the high emphasis on grammar in their home countries. They felt it was a barrier to learning English because focusing on one component takes away from the others. Some of the participants had great knowledge of grammar but could not speak English when they first came to the United

States. The curriculum from teaching English should be balanced and encompass all elements of learning English.

### **Learning English in the United States**

Learning English in the United States was another theme and the United States was the place of preference to learn English according to the opinions of the participants. They all wanted an environment where they were able to get a lot of practice, have conversation with native speakers, receive feedback from their teachers, and be able to ask questions freely. Participant two also elaborated on how music lyrics were used in her grammar class and she really enjoyed it. She explained that she was able to learn grammar and culture simultaneously.

There was a consensus among the participants that America was the best place to learn English. English is spoken in the classrooms which forces students to be immersed into the new language. The idea of immersion was seen throughout the data and learning by doing was a suggestion made throughout the transcript. The immersion also creates an authentic learning environment which could be seen as a learning environment in which students are taken out of their comfort zones, become active and learn by doing.

English language learners, like any other learners, have different learning styles for example kinesthetic, visual, and auditory and those dissimilarities should be addressed. All of the participants in the study were very different in terms of majors, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds so a diverse approach to teaching them would be beneficial. Kotze, Astrid and Cooper (2014) states that since PBL is so flexible by addressing different learning needs at the same time. It has the potential to stimulate lateral thinking and creativity. Addressing the needs of the whole class should be one of every teacher's goals.

Participant one had an outgoing personality and placed a lot of emphasis on having fun while learning. While he was the most enthusiastic, other participants shared his view about the importance of enjoying class. They felt that if they enjoyed the class they would learn more. Learning with PBL was also found to be fun in a study done by Girgin-Balki (2003). Not only did they place an emphasis on being able to enjoy class, they made just as much emphasis on the teacher not being boring. It is essential to have the right amount of rigor and excitement.

Not only do ELLs learn when they are having fun but they also learn when they are interested in the topic. As it was with fun when the participants were interested in something they believed they learned better. According to Bell (2010) children do better in school when they are motivated and interested in their inquiry topic. Bell's study corroborates the thought that students learn more when they are interested because they are motivated by interest. Knoll (1997) also agreed with the idea of learning and motivation but took it a step further to suggest that this happens because they are engaged in the applied learning design. Taking a climate survey to see what the students are interested in could be a great way to plan lessons.

### **Enhancing English Language Learning**

Following the theme learning English in the United States is the next theme, enhancing English language learning which was evident in all five participants' experiences. Even though they all commented there was a difference in opinion in some of the subthemes. This theme like barriers to learning English also consisted of the idea of time affecting one's ability to learn English. This theme also included aspects such as motivation, qualities of the teacher, qualities of the learner, and support from friends and family.

Enhancing English language learning was another theme that continued to appear throughout the transcription. This theme included elements of learning

English. For example, qualities of the learner, qualities of the teacher, as well as support from the teacher, friends and family were also noted as elements that enhance English language learning.

Motivation was a topic that reoccurred throughout the data transcripts. The students talked about it in its extrinsic and intrinsic nature. One of participants talked about how he would motivate his students to learn by encouraging them verbally as well as visually by putting stimulating slogans on the walls. Another participant talked about being motivated by candy. The participants all also spoke about how they motivate themselves or their lack of motivation and how it affected their learning. Not only could the student be motivated by using a PBL approach to learning English but PBL itself can be seen as motivating. PBL can also help increase ESL students' motivation since it is focused on their learning styles and preferences by letting them use the ability and learning style that meets their needs (Blumenfield, Soloway, Marx, Krajick, Guzdial, & Palinscar, 1991).

Qualities of the teacher from the participants' point of view is important because it was seen throughout the data. Overall the participants felt that teachers should be smart, polite, passionate, and someone who gives great feedback. Participant number one agreed with the other participants on most topics but felt that teachers should not be polite but should be blunt. While being and doing all of the above, one of the most motivating things an English teacher could do for their students is to provide the opportunity for them to see the immediate

connections between their lives and the curriculum (Dellicarpini, 2009). Teachers in English teaching programs should be well rounded.

One of the barriers to learning English was not being able to be understood. This is related to not being able to speak English, which was caused by the lack of supports that enhance English language learning. Two of the participants expressed studying English for years in their home countries and not being able to speak it when they got to America.

P5-hmm..I would say my..best..uhh the best environment I was at to learn English was actually when I go to the United States because I tried to uhh learn English on my own when I was in Brazil uhmm..and actually I thought I was doing well uhh as I took for mostly I was just reading so yea so my ability of speaking of listening uhhh were not that good uhh not were were not as good as my uhh reading abilities were but as soon as I got here I actually tried to speak and have conversations my English just went better and better so the best environment for my learning process was here in America

Support came up several times during the interviews in several aspects. One way support was displayed was by being around friends and family. When talking about friends, they usually talked about them in the context of conversation and fun. Having an American friend seemed to help in the area of conversation practice which is central to learning English.

I-okay...okay..so so when you're learning English what are things that you like to do while you're learning English...how do you like to learn English?

P3-uhmmm. Like....watching drama watching American dramas watching....movies and just hanging out with American friend in here..yea

### **Elements of Learning English**

Grammar was among the elements of learning English that was expressed by the participants. Each of the students spoke explicitly about grammar. Four out of five of the participants felt that grammar was over taught in their home countries at the cost of the other elements. The outlier in this case felt that grammar was the most important because without it sentences could not be made. The reason why grammar was so important was because they were required to do well on the standardized test in their home counties. Getting a job in the future, for these participants, depends on their performance on standardized tests. Project learning could help the students learn so that they may be able to do well on the test because students using PBL tend to outscore their traditionally trained peers (Geier et al., 2008) (as cited in Bell, 2010).

Conversation was an element that was expressed throughout the study. The participants of the study spoke about conversation in several ways. Conversation in general was addressed, mainly just speaking and conversation with American friends were all seen. Not only did the participants feel conversation was important, so did Call and Sotillo (1995) who stated that ELL students were more successful when engaged in conversation with native English speaking students than when doing language learning drills. This is very important because ELL classes tend to encompass only ELLs until they go to mainstream classes if they ever get to go. Partnering ELL students with native English speaking students could be beneficial for all the students.

Immersion was also a big topic in this study. The students felt that immersion was the best way to learn English because by hearing it every day all day, one tends to focus on it. They

start to not think in their own language but in English and it becomes their new form of communication. The whole world thus becomes their classroom. Immersion is an authentic way of learning English and PBL has an authentic component to it so using PBL to teach English could be successful. It was also a great opportunity to practice the foreign language they were studying. In a foreign language environment the classroom may be the only place where the students can practice a foreign language (Beckett & Miller, 2006). Students learning another language should prepare to spend as much time as possible immersed into the language they are learning.

### **Real World Application**

The last theme was real world application. This theme should not be overlooked because the goal of learning any language is being able to use the language in the real world. The participants, especially number one, conveyed their opinion that the assignments done in an English learning classroom should be related to their career or major. Participants' thinking in regards to this idea is important because they know that if it is something they need to know or something they are already familiar with it could be easier for them to retain the information learned. Learning is maximized if the context for learning resembles real life context in which it will be used (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1998). Curriculum and assignments should mirror a real-life or a student centered agenda.

Technology was another topic that was seen throughout the study. The participants talked about how they would use technology to teach as well as how they use technology to help them. Participant two talked about using music for

teaching grammar which was great because they get the chance to learn about culture simultaneously. Watching movies was also another way in which technology was used. Something interesting that I found was that no one talked about using the internet or translators, despite the fact that they do utilize them. Campbell (2012) corroborates this finding. PBL and technology were used and improvements were seen. There should be a technological aspect added to the ELL curriculum to assist in English learning.

One of the major complaints of the participants was not being able to understand slang and idioms. In their countries they were taught grammar and the proper way English should be spoken. Once they came to America they began to hear a more relaxed manner of speaking that was hard for them to comprehend. Accents were also a problem because they were used to hearing the way someone from their home country speaks English and in the United States they are exposed to many other accents like Southern, Northern, Western, Midwestern, etc. One thing that PBL is good for is creating opportunities for all four language skills to be used in a way that mirrors real-world use (Fleming, 2000). ELL students should get the full opportunity to learn English in an authentic way.

P1 I need just to know how this language works..so destroy all book exercise that you have and find some that's more practice, its more conversation because there's no sense to come back home and write "ahh yes the red is red the green is green" (imitates teacher speaking to a young child) because this is not speaking..this is writing and I can be good to write in English but if I am not good to communicate in the real world...I am don't.

## **Research Questions Discussed**



As a reminder the research questions for the study are as follows. What are the benefits of using project based learning to assist English language learners with English as a second language acquisition in a university setting? In what ways do self-reported learning styles of the English language learner relate to the potential effectiveness of a PBL approach in a university setting? What are the challenges associated with PBL as an approach to aid English language learning in a university setting?

Using a project base learning approach has several benefits. It provides an environment that addresses multiple learning styles at the same time. This is extremely helpful when one has many different students with different learning styles. Students have the opportunity to work together with other students especially when it comes to conversation for ELLs. They also learn by doing with may help to remember what they are learning in a more efficient way.

The students' self report on how they liked to learn illustrated how project based learning could enhance English language learning. The participants explained how they did not like to do pointless bookwork and handouts. They wanted to have more conversation and more real world experiences. They also expressed how they learn better when they are enjoying what they are learning. Their self reports also helped to explain how they perform when they are motivated. In order for a teacher to successfully teach a class they need to know how their students learn and what motivates their students. With the diversity of learning styles PBL could enhance English language learning.

Like any approach there are some barriers to using a project based learning approach. The students have to buy into whatever project they choose so there may be some discontent between what the students want to do and what the teacher wants to do. The attitudes of the students also have to match because if they do not the project would not be successful. Students

in an ELL program are sometimes from different countries so communication may be difficult for new ELLs. The barriers mentioned can be seen as things to address while creating a PBL approach to help international students learn English.

### **Assertions**

The findings of this study will be discussed in terms of how ELLs learn English to see if PBL could assist them in English acquisition. After the data had been collected, transcribed and analyzed the following assertions arose. The first assertion is motivation is key for the success of ELLs learning English. Many of the participants talked about it intrinsically and extrinsically.

P1-Motivation..sometimes I know I'm not motivated so I don't study for this or I'm busy and lazy and tired everything at once but motivation..yes..the problem is that sometimes motivation depends by what assignment you have..so if you give me a boring assignment..my motivation is.. I want a good degree..my motivation is not learn..my motivation is do the assignment because I want A at the end of the semester..

P1-if you give me candies in the classroom I will be more attention I will give more attention

The next assertion is to make sure the curriculum is well rounded and should not solely focus on one aspect. The participants in the study all had experiences in their home counties in which there was a high focus on grammar. What tended to happen was the students did well on written test but could not speak English.

P3-I think....just for study for just grammar or just test is not good...they should they should do more conversation with other people...and...they should experience American cultures...yea it is good experience for me all of them the things ...yea

P1- if you just have grammar you have nothing but how to really speak really have a conversation with a teacher that tells you okay “this is not good”.. do that.. but not tell you “yea sorry I think that..”

Another assertion is conversation is essential for any ELL program. The participants stressed how important it was to have conversation while learning English.

P1 I need just to know how this language works..so destroy all book exercise that you have and find some that’s more practice, its more conversation because there’s no sense to come back home and write “ahh yes the red is red the green is green” (imitates teacher speaking to a young child) because this is not speaking..this is writing and I can be good to write in English but if I am not good to communicate in the real world...I am don’t.

The last assertion is project based learning is the best approach to help ELL learn English. Many of the participants conveyed the need for their assignments in class to be related to their job or major so that it may be used in real life. The experience of an ELL adult learner could be maximized given that PBL functions as a bridge between using English in class and using English in real life situations outside of the class (Fried-Booth, 1997).

P1-before you do that..you have to know who is who are your students so you can do this in a very simple way because you are umm..everything is online in Williams (pseudonym) so I see okay 3 students here study engineering 2 students are in the college of liberal arts 2 students do that so I can be ready with show up with different book..the problem is the problem is that sometimes you are not enough ready because there are no books about that maybe...but you can just..for example hold a page from a book of communication..use a mar use a black marker delete the word that you..delete the word..that you.. delete the word and put the words another paper..put the word in the correct place..so it not so tough for exercise

like this..this could be a good exercise for because will learn..its something that's good in the real life..i don't need to take to speak about drugs, to speak about...ehhh... about..ehh food about...every stuff because I don't care about that. I need to know about my job about my major because I'm studying here I'm working here I have to speak with my teacher..I have to speak with the correct terminology if I'm wrong the terminology I can't tell him uhh..what I want..this could be a cool assignment...so assignment with my own terminology.

### **Limitations**

In order to address the research questions and the purpose of this research I had to use international students who were currently learning English. English speaking ability was one of the limitations to the study. Even though high level speakers were chosen, it was still difficult at times to communicate. There were instances on both sides where something had to be repeated. There were also instances where they wanted to continue talking about something but they gave up because they could not find the words to express themselves. Had the interview been conducted in their native languages, more information could have possibly been retrieved.

Another limitation was the use of semi-structured interview. Using a semi-structured interview was great in that it allowed me the opportunity to ask follow up questions and to get clarification but was not uniform across all participants. Most of the follow up questions that were asked in the interviews of this study were to get the participants to keep talking or to get clarification on a certain answer that they gave. There were instances where I would ask one participant a follow up question that would have been great to ask them all. A more formal follow up should have been done but I felt I had enough information with the main questions that were asked. If one chooses to use semi-structured interview protocols then they should follow up with participants if they need more information.

The last limitation was that this study did not address all languages or represent all cultures. A small sample was used to investigate this phenomenon which means this group is not representing all college students learning English in a college or university in the United States. While generalizing is not my goal, it could be beneficial to compare experiences of larger amounts participants. The goal was to pick a sample population that would address the biggest portion of the population. A more random sample could be used in order to address this limitation.

### **Implications for Future Studies**

Several implications for future research were found in this study that could help ELL students learn English. One of the main reasons for conducting this research was to see how ELL students felt about learning English to see if project based learning could be useful. Given that PBL has components that could be helpful for ELLs and since ELLs like to learn in a way that aligns with PBL approaches, it could work. One way to find out would be to do a quantitative study using a pretest posttest approach to see how ELLs learn English using project based learning.

Most of the research regarding PBL is focused on younger children and the participants of the study were between the ages of 21-28. With the increase of adult international students entering United States' colleges and universities, more studies should be conducted. Since the research questions closely relate to method, the method should be kept in mind when determining the type of study that should be done. After determining if qualitative or quantitative is the best fit, questions could be posed to see the difference in learning English between students in each age group. For future research different age groups should be taken into account to see if there are any differences. Most of the time "college aged" is its own

category but it usually means, in my opinion, 16 and up so it should be broken down into more categories to be thoroughly studied.

## **Conclusions**

The United States is a place where people from all over the world live together and is known for its diversity. This continues to be true as the number of English language learners is expected to grow 25% by the year 2025 (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). With the influx of international students coming to the United States and the growth of international students in the United States, it is crucial they are properly educated. This is important because they will eventually be contributing factors to the United States. Not all English language learners stay in the United States after they finish their education. Some ELLs return to their countries of origin with hopes of becoming important pillars in their native communities. No matter their status it is their right to receive proper education.

English language learners are important and I have seen the mis-education of this population. The review of literature done for this study further exemplified the need for research regarding the ELL population being that there was little research on PBL and English language learners. This study utilized multiple cases of international students learning English in the United States to find out if PBL could help ELLs learn English more efficiently. The experiences of the participants provided thick rich descriptions that provided support for this research. There are many English language learning programs in the United States and most of which are in the K-12 setting. These types of programs are not as common in the college setting and have not been properly researched.

The curriculum in some of these programs are heavily saturated in the areas of grammar and reading and are not as conducive to the learning process as they could be and need to be

updated. Learning with a PBL approach allows for the opportunity to create projects alone or in groups and is usually related to the interest of the student. Project based learning because of its authentic learning qualities could be effective, given the problems that the participants of the study faced.

PBL also does the following:

It facilitates language learning in foreign or second language classes. Because it also provides opportunities for language learners to develop all four language skills in a contextualized way, it mirrors real-world language use where skills are rarely used in isolation. (Fleming, 2000, p. 33).

When using a PBL approach with English language learners it would be beneficial to utilize the students' linguistic and cultural experiences with academic content (Lee & Fradd, 1998). This could be done by ELL teachers planning and collaborating with mainstream teachers so that the mainstream teachers have to opportunity to improve their teaching abilities (Lee & Avalos, 2002). More research should be completed to see how ESL teachers who work closely with content area teachers affect the English speaking ability of ELLs.

Based on the data collected the following assertions were made. The first assertion addressed motivation and how important it was for ELLs. There has to be some kind of motivation to learn a second language. Rubin (1975) stated that "the good language learner seems to have a high motivation to communicate and the poorer learner did not" (as cited in Parks & Raymond, 2004, p. 375). This study addressed adult learners so there tends to be nobody telling them what to do. They need to have motivation the put in the time to improve. Projects are part of PBL and in order to finish one, one needs to be motivated, whether intrinsically or extrinsically.

The next assertion was to make sure the curriculum is well rounded and should not be solely focused on one aspect. Most of the participants shared how in their home countries grammar was the main focus. What tended to happen in the majority of cases was that the students were able to understand grammatical components of English language learning and fell short in the areas of listening and speaking (conversation). Benson (1989) stated that “international students, even those with high TOEFL scores, may have great difficulty speaking out in participatory style lecture classes” (as cited in Parks & Raymond, 2004). PBL takes into various learning styles and preferences into account (Bell, 2010); and will allow educators the ability to present the lessons in various ways. Bell (2010) also states that the skills that will be important for being a member of the global society are not measured through standardized test.

Another assertion was conversation being essential for any ELL program. ELLs are faced with the task of learning a new language and content simultaneously. PBL, through peer feedback, engages ELLs in discussion using the academic language essential to success in the English classroom (Dellicarpini, 2009). Campbell (2012) states that ELLs may get confused by PBL because of the lack of direct instruction but collaborating with native speakers may outweigh negative possibilities. It was also stressed that “language and interaction with language is essential to learning” (Campbell, 2012, p. 140). Call and Sotillo (1995) agree that “students were more successful when they participated in conversation with native English speakers” (p. 142).

The last assertion was project based learning being the best approach to help ELLs learn English. According to Bell (2010), “The outcome of PBL is greater understanding of a topic, deeper learning higher-level reading, and increased motivation to learn” (p. 39). PBL includes many elements that could be beneficial for ELLs. These elements have the potential to produce



responsible, independent, and disciplined learners (Bell, 2010); which could be helpful for adult ELLs. Social learning could also be supportive to ELLs being that “PBL promotes social learning as children practice and become proficient with the twenty-first-century skills of communication, negotiation and collaboration” (Bell, 2010, p. 40). As compared to students who were taught with more traditional methods, students who were taught with PBL tended to acquire skills that were flexible and useful in many settings (Boaler, 1998a).

Using project based learning with English language learners could be effective. Knowles (1973) wrote that adult students want their time in the classroom to be useful. The time that students spend in the class could be enhanced by utilizing PBL with ELLs. According to Perez (2007), “Children who learn the language and culture of their new country without losing those old have a much better understanding of their place in the new world” (p. 3). Adderley (1975) explains that if students have the opportunities to experience real life situations related to their career while they are still in college, they will become better professionals. PBL could help with the success an ELL has learning English because “when ELLs are exposed to meaningful content as opposed to language form alone” (Turnbull, p. 560).

The number of English language learners will continue to grow and they should be studied properly. Despite the number of ELLs in American colleges and Universities continuing to grow there is still little research about them. This study intended to shed light on English language learners and how their learning styles matched with project based learning. PBL would be a great match to use with ELLs but proper methods should be insured before using it. Not only is the method important but so is the learner. Despite any method utilized, the learner is an important piece. The learners in project based learning classes experience opportunities that places learning in their hands which could be very helpful for adult learners.

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## Appendix: A

### Interview Protocol

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age?
4. Please finish this statement, I learn best when:
5. What aspects of learning are the most important?
6. Describe your ideal learning environment and/or process?
7. Describe an instance where you did not learn something well, what contributed to the lack of learning?
8. What are the student's responsibilities in terms of learning?
9. What is the most important part of a teacher's job?
10. What were the qualities of your favorite teacher that you have had at any point in your educational career?

Appendix: B



Office of Research Compliance  
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Auburn University, AL 36849

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April 15, 2015

MEMORANDUM TO: Ms. Alexis Davis  
Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology

PROTOCOL TITLE: "PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL) AND THE LEARNING OF  
ENGLISH AMONGST ADULT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS"

IRB AUTHORIZATION NO: 15-129 EP 1504

APPROVAL DATE: April 4, 2015  
EXPIRATION DATE: April 3, 2016

The referenced protocol was approved as "Expedited" by the IRB under Sections 45 CFR 46.110 (6 and 7) of the Code of Federal Regulations (<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html>)

By accepting this approval, you agree to the following:

1. **Changes to your protocol** *must* be approved in advance by submitting a modification request to the IRB. The use of any unauthorized procedures may result in penalties.
2. **Unanticipated problems** involving risk to participants *must* be reported *immediately* to the IRB.
3. A **renewal request** *must* be submitted three weeks before your protocol expires.
4. A **final report** *must* be submitted when you complete your study, along with copies of any consents used.
5. **Expiration** – If you allow your protocol to expire without contacting the IRB, it will be administratively closed. The project will be suspended. You will then need to submit a new protocol to resume your research.
6. You must **use only the approved, stamped version** of your **information letter**. A copy must be given to participants.

All forms can be found at <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm>. Questions concerning this Board action may be directed to the Office of Research Compliance

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Research Compliance.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bernie Olin, Phar.D.  
Chair of the Institutional Review Board #2  
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research