

Synopsis of Research on Church-Sponsored ESL

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Overarching Research Focus

To reach a deeper understanding of the purposes, practices and function of church-sponsored ESL programs from the perspective of stakeholders, including program providers and students.

Secondary Research Focus

To gain insight into the needs of stakeholders involved in church-sponsored ESL programs.

Studies to Date

- 1) Longitudinal study of large, multi-level church-sponsored program in Metro Vancouver:
 - 200 hours on site, 50 hours of video recordings from classes at 5 proficiency levels
 - Interviews with 2 pastors, the ESL program director, the ESL administrative assistant, 7 volunteer teachers, and 41 students

- 2) Three-phase study of church programs from multiple denominations in Metro Vancouver
 - Phase 1: Phone survey with 34 program directors from 14 denominations
 - Phase 2: Follow-up interviews with self-selected participation by directors of 23 programs from 11 denominations
 - Phase 3: 4-week site-based case study with 3 self-selected programs from 3 denominations, including classroom observations, interviews with directors, teachers and students, and a student survey

Some Key Insights

- **Perceptions of Program Providers:**
 - View newcomers as part of *our community, our neighbours*, potential and actual *friends*.
 - View themselves as responsible for helping newcomers integrate.
 - View ESL program provision as a spiritual practice, the enactment of spiritual values—opportunity to embody love and care as well as proclaim/explain beliefs.
 - View students in holistic terms with an emphasis on caring interpersonal relationships rather than seeing students in transactional terms as language client only.
 - View caring relationships with students to be the foundation for language learning and community building as well as for the sharing of Christian faith.

- **Program Parameters (from three-phase study):**
 - 50% of programs do not include an explicit Christian focus in the planned ESL curriculum; program providers invite students to other events with an explicit faith-based focus (e.g., ESL Bible study)
 - 50% of programs include some degree of explicit Christian focus in the planned curriculum – in most cases for approximately ¼ of class time; in rarer cases a Bible focus only (e.g., the ESL program is ESL Bible study)

- **Program Practices**
 - Non-formal, i.e., no required standards determined by an external ESL regulatory body, no formal criteria/testing for entrance or progression, no formal grading, etc.; placement can be partially based on social needs (students placed with friends) and progression to higher classes, where available, may be partially self-determined by students.
 - Classes are typically taught by volunteers; some may be retired educators; some may have or be earning a degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages); many have attended one or more workshops for volunteer church ESL teachers or received in-house mentoring by more experienced volunteers
 - Teaching and learning are generally represented by program providers and students as facilitating social connections and community membership, including within the learning community and in the community beyond.
 - Teaching and language learning is typically connected to places, activities, things and relationships that are of importance to learners and validate their sense of self in the Canadian milieu.
 - Most classroom curriculum focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on conversation and culture, including language and insights for “daily life”; may include emphases related to Christian faith (planned or spontaneous components).
 - Coffee breaks and extracurricular activities are significant components of the curriculum, broadly defined, and provide opportunity for networking and engagement between members of the learning community and beyond.
 - Practices outside of class can encompass practical assistance with non-language needs.
 - Learning outcomes extend beyond acquisition of language as knowledge/code; include various expressions of increased participation in the learning community and beyond.

- **Student Perspectives (from 3 case study programs)**
 - Find church-sponsored programs to be places where they feel welcomed and comfortable, can improve their English, and can develop friendships with other learners and program providers.
 - Describe programs as being helpful in achieving language goals for life in Canada and influencing sense of wellbeing in the Canadian context.
 - Indicate awareness of spiritual values that inform program practices; in some cases have chosen to attend for that reason.
 - Experience Christian faith emphasis as non-coercive.

- **Key Needs of Stakeholders (from their perspective)**
 - Students: English and cultural knowledge for life in Canada, friendship and support
 - Program providers: Enhanced understanding of how to facilitate age and context appropriate language learning

Selected Findings at a Glance

Phase 1: Selected Program Characteristics (N=34)

Length of Operation	
8 years or more (20+ years)	50%
7 years or less	50%

Program Size ^Δ	
1-20 students	27%
21-60 students	60%
120-180 students	12%

Classes by Proficiency Level ^Δ	
1-2 classes	26%
3-4 classes	56%
5-7 classes	15%

Curricular Emphases*	
Conversation	80%
Christian content (1/4 of class time)	50% 38%
Canadian culture	21%

Cost ^Δ	
\$0-2/hr.	80%
\$3-6/hr.	9%
Textbook	3%

Advertisement*	
Word of mouth	77%
Media (often Ss' initiative)	21%
Web (often Ss' initiative)	15%

^ΔCategory totals do not add up to 100% due to the unavailability of information from one or more programs.

*Categories represent the top three areas identified by program providers. Numbers represent the proportion of program providers that mentioned each category.

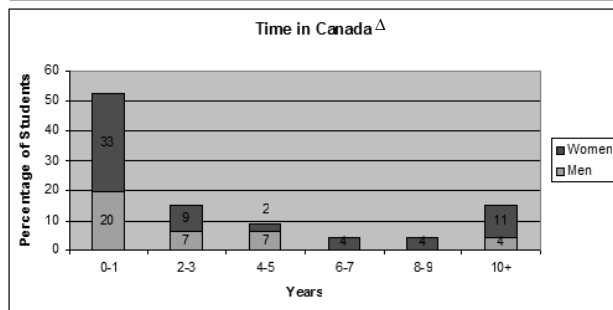
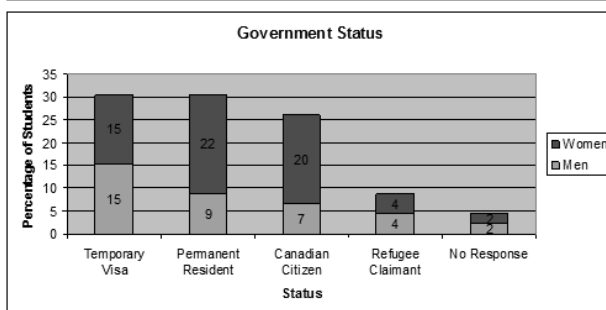
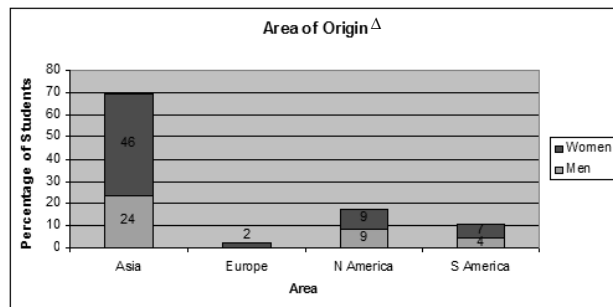
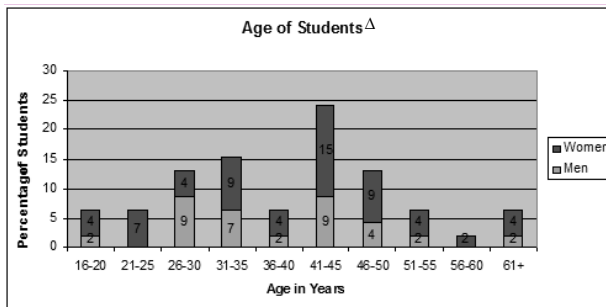
Phase 2: Selected Program Provider Demographics (N=23)

Ethnic Sponsorship	
Immigrant directors	45% of programs
Ethnic church	
Immigrant minister	

Program Directors: Cross-cultural Background	
Immigrants	30%
Lived abroad	26%

Program Directors: Gender	
Female	79%
Male	21%

Phase 3: Selected Student Demographics (N=46 survey responses)



^ΔCategory totals do not add up to 100% due to the rounding of decimals to whole numbers.

Overview of Program Practices as Expressions of Christian Faith Values – in Deed (“Embodied Faith”) and Word (“Declared Faith”)

