AN ESL LEARNING CENTER: A CRITICAL CASE STUDY

DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO

THE DWIGHT SCHAR COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ASHLAND UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for

The Degree

Doctor of Education in Leadership Studies

Ku-Yun, Chen, (B.A., English; M.Ed., Curriculum & Instruction)

ASHLAND UNIVERSITY

ASHLAND, OH

2013
A Dissertation

entitled

An ESL Learning Center: A Critical Case Study

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

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This study explored a triangular relationship among teachers, students, and administrators at an English as Second Language (ESL) learning center in a mid-sized, private, non-profit university in the Midwest in the United States. Through the use of critical theory, this study simultaneously gave the three groups of stakeholders voices, interwove their comments, and emerged a system thinking: a whole picture of an ESL learning center. The result from this study revealed two administrators’ pressure and policies, five teachers’ frustration, and nine students’ learning agonies. In terms of the findings, this study grounded a leadership theory of an ESL learning center management.
Dedication

To my parents,

I would not have completed this terminal degree without your love and support.

Thank you very much.
Acknowledgments

Dr. James Olive

Dr. Harold Wilson

Dr. James Rycik

Dr. Carla Abreu-Ellis

Dr. Barbara Schmidt-Rinehart

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Dr. Constance Savage

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Dr. Howard Walters

Dr. Roxana Christopher

Cohort 13

All my participants
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of a triangular relationship among teachers, students, and administrators at an English language learning center in a mid-sized, private, non-profit university in the Midwest in the United States. Theoretical framework of the study is critical theory, which serves to give oppressed people voices, especially their inner voices. With increasing understanding of the three main characters’ true voices, this dissertation is a report of a study on a macro level of the English as Second Language (ESL) learning center. This chapter consists of seven parts: (a) the study background, (b) the problem statement, (c) the research questions, (d) the study significance, (e) methodological overview, (f) the researcher’s lens, and (g) the study limitations.

Background of Study

The background of this study consists of two main themes: three challenges that most colleges and universities in the United States are facing at present and an explanation of why international students are one of the solutions for these challenges. First, some of the current challenges in higher education are (a) the commercialization of higher education, (b) students who are academically adrift, and (c) the proliferation of online education for everyone. Second, most colleges and
universities are facing at least one out of the three challenges; therefore, most of them are transforming themselves in order to adapt to changing university dynamics. Those who do not transform well could be diminished through the competitive environment in higher education. The main reason is that students, as customers, are not satisfied with the products, which is the education or the learning environment provided by colleges and universities (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2003, 2006).

Three Challenges for Higher Education

**Commercialization of higher education.** The first challenge for universities is the commercialization of higher education. Bok (2003), the former President of Harvard University and a leading educator, pointed out that everything in a university is for sale if the price is right. An “ivory tower” needs money to build. Universities seem to have never-ending needs for money, even Harvard University. Universities always seem to need more money and more equipment because faculty and students are always working on new interests and ambitions. Bok (2003) stated, “The prices of books and journals rise relentlessly. Better and more costly technology and scientific apparatus constantly appear and must be acquired to stay at the cutting edge” (p. 9). Hanushek and Lindseth (2009) discussed the two common errors that have been made repeatedly in estimating what an “adequate” education should cost. First, the determination of true “cost” cannot be separated...
from the efficient use of funds. Second, determining the funds that would be required to obtain some achievement goals depends upon accurately assessing the impact on achievement that each input or policy might have. This explains why the university has the unsatisfied need for funds.

International students are perfect targets for universities in the United States because these students must pay full tuition if they do not have scholarship sponsorship. However, this looks like a market trade, in which international students, like customers, try to pick a university, which they think is worthy. Once they find that the university is not as valuable as the money they are paying, they transfer to other schools and suggest to their country compatriots that another university may be more suitable. As a result, universities eventually suffer from financial difficulties and begin laying off faculty and increasing staff workloads. Put differently, those education organizations that fail to meet students’ expectations must be alert to the reason for these decreasing student numbers. This is a sign. Being overconfident and ignorant will lead these schools to a difficult financial abyss (Lyons, 2012, p. 13; Taleb, 2010, p. 138).

**Academically adrift.** The second challenge for universities is academic adrift, which causes college students to drop out from universities. Being academically adrift means that colleges and universities fail to equip their students
with adequate knowledge (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2003, 2006). Students may drop out from the university or transfer to another university and look for a better learning environment once they become academically adrift. Schneider and Stevenson (2000) stated that some students are drifting dreamers. In spite of having high ambitions, they do not know how to accomplish their dreams. After these students enter colleges and universities, most of them are academically adrift because of weak academic preparation. Arum and Roksa (2011) reported that many college students are not improving their skills in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing. Arum and Roksa (2011) stated, “With a large sample of more than 2,300 students, we observe no statistically significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills for at least 45 percent of the students in our study” (p. 36).

When international students are academically adrift, they think that a university is not helping them improve their knowledge and skills. They look for another university to complete their studies. Furthermore, these students are more likely to bad-mouth the previous university. Word-of-mouth is one of most effective strategies to sabotage the reputation of a university (Bok, 2003, 2006).

**Proliferation of online higher education.** The third challenge for universities is free, online education. According to the National Center for Public
Policy and Higher Education, higher education costs have skyrocketed 450 percent in the past 25 years (Lyons, 2012, p. 13). For students facing financial difficulty and no desire for receiving college degrees, online education is available to build knowledge. Three examples of open online courses are Coursera, Udacity, and edX. Additionally, the Khan Academy offers free online courses for college preparation.

According to Ripley (2012), more and more Ivy League universities offer Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), such as Coursera, Udacity, and edX. Of the three MOOCs, Coursera has most numbers of students: 1.4 million (p. 35). Two computer science professors from Stanford University, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng, launched Coursera. This system offers free online classes to millions of people who can receive a top-tier university education. “Coursera will offer 35 courses in subjects ranging from math and computer science to world history and contemporary American poetry. These aren’t just videotaped lectures; they’re full courses, with homework assignments, examinations, and grades” (Lyons, 2012, p. 13). So far, Coursera has signed up volunteer professors from several prestigious universities including: University of California (Berkeley), California Institute of Technology, Duke University, University of Edinburgh, Johns Hopkins University, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Stanford, Princeton, and the University of Michigan.
In spite of college preparation for high school students, the Khan Academy advocates for a flipped classroom. Salman Khan, the founder of the Khan Academy, uses YouTube to teach students. It is free and people can learn a variety of subjects online any time at any place they want. People can even ask questions and receive the answers online. Students are able to learn at their own pace. Several entrepreneurs gave Salman grants: Ann Doerr, wife of Silicon Valley venture capitalist John Doerr, donated $10,000; Bill Gates donated $1.5 million; Google donated $2 million; Netflix CEO Reed Hastings granted $3 million; and Irish entrepreneur Sean O'Sullivan donated $5 million. According to Webley (2012), Khan Academy has 3,250 videos. 15,000 classrooms in which Khan Academy is used in some form, 5 million unique users per month, 160 million videos watched since 2006, and 234 countries and territories where Khan Academy is used. The practice of education is evolving toward an online format (p. 41). An implication of this for international students is that they are not required to come to the U.S. in order to take classes from prestigious universities. However, they might not be able to obtain their visas to travel to the U.S. if the courses are being taken online.

**A Solution: International Students**

Colleges and universities are in the marketplace now because they need money for more resources. If colleges and universities fail to meet students’ learning
expectations or fail to equip students with adequate knowledge, students become academically adrift. What is worse, they will drop out from the current universities and transfer to other universities, which can meet their needs. Additionally, universities may face the reducing enrollment rate of American students because of expensive tuition and free online classes. They need to recruit more international students to balance school finances. No matter which of these elements occurs, it will have a huge impact on student recruitment and retention in higher education.

**Market model / school choice.** Some researcher and scholars (Fowler, 2009; Stein, Goldring & Cravens, 2011) used two terms, the market model and school choice, to calculate the three impacts. The market model is between buyers and sellers. Putting into an education term, the market model is between parents or students and schools. Schools provide service to let parents and students make institutional choices. Fowler (2009) stated, “In a market that functions well, the presence of competing providers leads to efficient operations and high-quality products because businesses that cannot please customers lose them” (p. 336). Stein, Goldring and Cravens (2011) used the term school choice to depict the market metaphor. By illustrating school choices, they used charter schooling as an example. “Charter schooling operates on the notion that parents and students will be active consumers of education, and, as such, they will make school choices that best fit
academic and social needs” (p. 106).

**Universities need international students.** Three reasons explain why universities need more international students: student number, full tuition, and student diversity. First, in terms of the three challenges and market model, more and more American students may seek other routes to a college degree. Because of higher dropout rates and transfer rates, universities in the United States are recruiting more international students to fill in the dropout numbers and transfer numbers (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2003, 2006). That is, universities still need adequate numbers of new students to enroll every year based on financial need. As Bok (2003), the former president of Harvard University, stated, a university even like Harvard still needs money, not to mention other universities. International students seem to be one of the solutions because they can fill in the inadequate student numbers. Second, international students must pay the full tuition while studying in the United States, unless they receive scholarships. International students are not U.S. citizens and residents; therefore, international students generally pay more tuition compared with the locals. Third, with more international students, universities embrace diversity. Diversity makes universities more international and competitive.
**ESL programs are lucrative.** According to Fox (2003), the ESL students are the students “who speak a non-English language at home and who are learning to speak English in school” (p. 235). The ESL program is based upon *conditional admission*. When international students are unable to meet the admission standards and requirements, they fail to achieve Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores or International English language Testing System (IELTS) grades and universities deny their admission applications. However, universities, in most cases, usually offer conditional admission for the international students without adequate TOEFL or IELTS scores. Conditional admission suggests that the international students should enroll in ESL programs of universities. Once their English proficiency achieves an academic level, they are directly admitted to the academic studies. For example, in the ESL learning center of this study, each international student pays 3,500 USD for a seven-week term to develop their English proficiency. They spent four hours a day and five days a week at the center. Once instructors and the center director approve the students’ English language proficiency, the students can begin their academic studies.

Why are students willing to pay so much money to study English in the United States instead of in their own countries? It is because of an environment of total English immersion (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010, p. 310; LeLoup, Heller, 2010, p.
15). International students can drastically improve their English proficiency by studying in an English language environment. However, the reality is that some students are incapable of achieving TOFEL or IELTS required grades. Those who have tried several tests and are still unable to achieve required grades or scores may accept conditional admission as an alternative. Furthermore, ESL programs have lower bars for international students. As long as the students finish required ESL levels and courses at ESL centers, they pass and can start their academic life (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

**Statement of the Problem**

After stating the importance of international students, I wanted to understand organizational dynamics of an ESL center and how it functions. I chose an ESL learning center in this mid-sized, private, non-profit university in the Midwest. After a pilot study, I found this center had three main problems: (a) low international student recruitment and retention rates, (b) a high instructor turnover rate, and (c) a high administrator turnover rate. This section explains the three problems in details.

**Low International Student Rate**

Last summer, student numbers in this center dropped dramatically from a yearly average of fifty-one to twenty-seven. These twenty-seven students could potentially be in an academic program at this university once their English
proficiencies improved; however, some might transfer to other colleges and universities to study majors that this university does not provide. Unfortunately, the number of international student enrollment kept decreasing. This low number not only impacted the university’s diversity, but also might foreshadow a university’s financial crisis.

**High Instructor Turnover Rate**

In March of this year, the ESL learning center administration decided to terminate the employment of three full-time instructors because they did not possess Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or linguistics degrees. In order to meet the requirement of accreditation, all teaching staff must have TESOL degrees. However, a high and fast teacher turnover rate creates instability at this center because students must accept new teachers and accommodate themselves to changed academic learning dynamics.

**High Administrator Turnover Rate**

This center has had five center directors in the past five years. The center policies changed because new directors had different perspectives and visions. From 2008 to the present, English proficiency levels have been modified several times. For example, one director changed the program format from four levels to eight levels. The next year, another director changed from eight levels to six levels. With
the unstable learning situation increasing, teachers and students have felt frustrated. Eventually, the high turnover rate of administrators created a high teacher turnover rate and a high student transfer rate.

**Research Questions**

This case study pursed the answers to these research questions:

1. For administrators, what frustrations do they encounter while implementing tasks in the ESL learning center?
   
   (a) Do they feel empowered or powerless?
   
   (b) Do they have non-participating members at the center?
   
   (c) What is the organization culture and leadership at the center?
   
   (d) Do they have any issues related to fairness, trust, conflicts, etc.?

2. For teachers, what do they encounter while working in the ESL learning center?

   (a) Do they feel empowered or powerless?
   
   (b) What supports do they want (from students or administrators)?
   
   (c) Do they apply knowledge both educational psychology and the second language acquisition theories in their classrooms?

3. For students, what do they struggle with while learning in the ESL learning center?

   (a) Do they feel empowered or powerless?
(b) How do they feel while studying at this center?

(c) What are their opinions and comments about teachers’ teaching methods?

(d) How do they feel about the center policies?

(e) What do they need and want while studying at this center?

**Significance of the Study**

This study has two significant contributions to make to the current body of research. This study is a pioneer investigation and contributes to a literature on system thinking I have explained below. No literature was found that has given the three characters voices (teachers, students, and administrators) based on critical theory. After this study, I mapped out the three groups of stakeholders’ inner voices, and the conflicts and paradoxes of an English-learning center system clearly emerged.

**A Pioneer**

This study is a pioneer investigation in examining the triangular relationship based on critical theory. This study provides a brand-new research framework for future ESL researchers because it examines a triangular relationship among teachers, students, and administrators (see Figure 1). No previous literature gave ESL teachers, ESL students, and ESL administrators voices at the same time, the triangular relationship among teachers, students, and administrators has remained unaddressed.
and unanswered. However, with each stakeholder’s shared opinions, future researchers may better understand each stakeholder’s needs and difficulties. For example, teachers would like to guide students well, but they have difficulty in applying Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory in their classroom (Didi-Ogren & Goebel, 2008; Whitley, 1993). Students would like to acquire the English proficiency, but they generate low learning outcomes owing to teachers’ lack of educational psychology and SLA concepts (Chang, 2004; Didi-Ogren & Goebel, 2008, p. 439; Slavin, 2003; Whitley, 1993). Administrators would like to implement plans and build a good learning environment for students; however, they face some teachers’ reluctance to change (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 182; Evans, 2001, p. 102). Rhee (2010) asserted that “the hardest thing [in the education system] would be changing the culture” (p. 38). Fullan pointed out that “the fundamentals of professional learning and change must first include 2 ideas: everybody is engaged (whole-system reform) and on each and every child” (as cited in Crow, 2009, p. 12). In the words of Evans (2001), “School improvement faces a fierce paradox: its essential agents of change-teachers-are also its targets and, sometimes, its foes” (p. xii).
System Thinking

In 1990, Senge, Director of the Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning Program at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, called system thinking “the fifth discipline” (p. 12), which includes the other four disciplines of a learning organization: “personal mastery” (p. 7), “mental models” (p. 8), “building shared vision” (p. 9), and “team learning” (p. 9). According to Senge (1990), system thinking integrates all disciplines into a consistent body of theory and practice. “By enhancing each of the other disciplines, it [system thinking] continually reminds us that the whole can exceed the sum of its parts” (p. 12).

The use of system thinking in an ESL program can be a useful tool in the study of an English-language learning center because system thinking looks at the whole picture, understands the organizational development, and diagnoses the organizational problems. Schein (2010) argued that learning leaders should think systemically and investigate field of forces and “understand their joint causal effects
on each other” (p. 371) instead of simple linear causal logic. System thinking can be another useful tool for learning leaders to see the whole picture and all connections (Luthans, 1995; Malloch & Porter-O’Grady, 2005; Schein, 2010; Stokes & Carr-Chellman, 2007; Wright, 1999; Ziegenfuss, 1992). Too often, people only use simple linear causal logic, most especially top-down methods. Teachers instruct students to do homework. Supervisors ask teachers to teach effectively. However, where are the students’ voices? Where are the teachers’ feelings?

A system thinking process involves combining these three key sections and examining the correlation among them. Stokes and Carr-Chellman (2007) claimed that systems cannot be operated in segregation because they are interdependent and connected. Luthans (1995) summarized system thinking as an “ability to see connections between issues, events, and data as a whole rather than a series of unconnected parts” (p. 44). Malloch and Porter-O’Grady (2005) defined the system thinking requisites as (a) seeing the whole, not just one piece; (b) recognizing flow in all events; (c) building larger systems from small ones; (d) integrating everything; (e) looking for “fit;” (f) creating a common vision; and (g) building relatedness (p. 26). As a result, this whole system thinking can provide the future researchers with a clear map when they study this field.
Methodology Overview

This study is a qualitative single case study and uses critical theory as its theoretical framework. Data collection consisted of one-on-one interviews with two center directors (director A was a female, former center director; director B was a male, current director) and focus group interviews with five teachers and nine students. After collecting data, the data analysis process used a grounded theory approach. Participants’ opinions and voices produced several categories and themes. Eventually, these categories and themes formed a theory of system thinking in one English-language learning center.

Qualitative Single Case Study

Based on the nature of this topic, this study used a qualitative single case study as the methodology. Qualitative research can help further understanding of participants’ experiences, perceive their contents, and explore the stories behind collected data (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hedrick, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; House, 1994; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Reichardt & Rallis, 1994; Valsiner, 2000; Willis, 2007; Yin, 2008, 2012). In addition, Merriam (2009) reasoned that “qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (p. 43). First, “particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (p. 43).
Second, “descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 43). Third, “heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 44).

**Critical Theory**

Critical theory consists of two main themes: power dynamics and emancipation. First, Merriam (2009) provided four questions to examine power dynamics at the ESL center:

1. Whose interests are being served by the way the educational system is organized?
2. Who really has access to particular programs?
3. Who has the power to make changes?
4. What are the outcomes of the way in which education is structured?

(p. 35)

These four questions aid in determining “how power relations advance the interests of one group while oppressing those of other groups” (p. 35). Second, critical theory emancipates people from “arbitrary power” (Bronner, 2002, p. 10). According to Bronner (2002), “Critical theory once projected an emancipatory promise and a new
interdisciplinary perspective seeking to inform the struggles of the oppressed” (p. 9).

More information regarding critical theory is provided in the next chapter.

**Data Collection: One-on-one and Focus Group Interviews**

The advantages in using one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews are (a) to create a low anxiety comfort zone for interviewees, (b) to interweave a meaningful story (concept mapping) with the group effect, and (c) to have time-efficient interviews.

First, one-on-one and focus group interviews can provide a low anxiety environment. As Dodson, Piatelli, and Schmalzbauer (2007) pointed out, interviews offer people “safer space” (p. 821) to talk about their own stories, experiences, and inner voices.

Second, both interviews can interweave a meaningful story based on “synergy” (Morgan, 1996, p. 139). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stated that interviews “can be used to gain needed exploratory data” (p. 164) based on an individual's thoughts and the group effect. In terms of Morgan (1966), the group effect of focus group interviews is “that the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other . . . [S]uch interaction offers valuable data on the extent of consensus and diversity among participants” (p. 139). The term “the group effect” (Carey, 1994; Carey & Smith, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 167;
Mogan, 1996, p. 139; Morgan & Krueger, 1993) exists with a group. Researchers Frey and Fontana (1991) offered a compelling argument for the group effect of focus group interview: Focus group is able to generate data from various voices and collaboratively craft a sequence of events (p. 167).

Third, focus group interviews are a time-efficient method. Instead of interviewing one individual at a time, “focus groups are a valuable and time-efficient method for gathering qualitative interview data from multiple participants at one time” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 189).

**Data Analysis: Grounded Theory**

The data analysis process used a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). Because of a variety of collected data, it has relatively thick qualitative data based upon “all as data” (Glaser, 2002, p. 66; 2004, p. 2, Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 5). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), a theory can be grounded in the key participants’ data. The collected data can be coded and categorized to some of the basic or fundamental themes with a “totally inductive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 184) method. As Charmaz (2006) contended, “Some qualitative researchers, especially those employing a grounded theory perspective, stick close to their data and are constantly testing out their ideas as their data is being collected” (as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 35).
Through this process, I can understand how the participants interpret their needs and wants. As Creswell (2012) reported, “Grounded theory designs are systematic, qualitative procedures that researchers use to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, action, or interaction about a substantive topic” (p. 621). Patton (2002) argued that “grounded theory begins with basic description, moves to conceptual ordering, and then theorizing” (p. 490).

Using a grounded theory for data analysis, I expect to unveil students’ authentic needs, teachers’ teaching dilemmas, and supervisors’ leadership difficulties. Moreover, this dissertation will hopefully provide an opportunity for these three main characters to understand one another’s struggles and produce a system thinking of an English-language learning center.

**Researcher’s Lens**

The notion of a researcher's lens consists of the way a researcher views his or her world. From an organizational development aspect, it means a person's idea, “values, assumptions, and beliefs” (French & Bell, 1999, p. 62). From a philosophical aspect, it represents a person's “epistemology” (Merriam, 2009, p. 8) or the knowledge as understood by a researcher. Epistemology “guides how we produce knowledge and decisions” (Hesse-Biber, 2011, p. 38). From a researcher's aspect, it means to perceive a researcher's own research position, which “guides their
In other words, the researcher's lens encompasses a researcher's point of view or bias. Thus, I reflected upon my stereotypes and biases and used two main techniques to alleviate these subjective judgments: (a) keeping critical theory in mind, and (b) using four trustworthiness strategies, such as member checks, triangulation, reflectivity, and peer review.

**Awareness of Preferences, Stereotypes, and Biases**

I am an international student at the same university of this study and I was an adjunct instructor in the same center for two years. While teaching English grammar, English reading, and graduate writing courses, I witnessed too many changes in this center. I saw director A’s tears, the instructors’ anxiety, and students’ agonies. Director A cried because she faced enormous mental pressure from the leadership style of her supervisor, the executive director. The instructors were worried about whether or not their contracts would be renewed because it all depended on the new director’s preferences. Students were extremely frustrated because the center policies and the English proficiency levels kept changing. I understood that my previous working experiences at this center had established certain preferences, stereotypes, and biases. Instead of avoiding admitting my preferences, stereotypes, and biases, I chose to confront them and tried to alleviate them by two main
techniques: (a) to remain cognizant of critical theory's central tenants to remind
myself of respecting each participant's voice, and (b) to implement four
trustworthiness strategies.

Tools to Alleviate Biases

This study used two techniques to lessen my own preferences, stereotypes
and biases. First, I kept critical theory in mind. Critical theory mainly focuses on the
oppression of a system, not specific persons. Howard Walters (personal
communication; November 15, 2012) explained:

The oppression of the students is nearly always systemic. I cannot assign
personality to the oppressor, most usually. A counter-example: Stalin was
clearly the person and personality behind much oppression in Russia. This is
not the norm. The norm is that oppression emerges culturally out of systems.

No individual person is guilty of oppression, only of a lack of reflection so as
to observe the oppression. Most typically in the modern age, the oppression
is the result of systems of production, not persons.

Second, I adopted four trustworthiness strategies such as member checks,
triangulation, reflexivity, and peer review. Additional information regarding these
processes is provided in Chapter III.


Limitations of the Study

Three limitations exist in this study: (a) participants’ self-defense mechanism, (b) institutional and personal documents, and (c) lack of other international students', the executive director's, and the provost's voice and input. First, participants’ self-defense mechanisms may appear because of lacking trust in me. Participants may fear that their truthful answers would jeopardize their careers or their learning. Even though I guaranteed confidentiality, some participants may still worry about their own career safety (contracts being terminated by their supervisors) or learning safety (student visa being terminated by the international student office). Second, it may be difficult to gain access to institutional and personal documents that are not open to others because administrators and teachers may be unwilling to provide a document for fear of harming themselves, the reputation of a department, or the university. Third, the findings cannot be applied to all international students because all nationalities were not represented in this study. I invited twenty international students who had studied at this center for a year by emails. Only nine students responded to the email and participated in the focus group interviews. Ten Saudi students made no response to the interview participation. One Japanese student was unable to attend a focus group interview because of her class schedule. Therefore, applicability of findings is not applicable to all international students. It is applicable
only to Asian students (Taiwanese and Chinese) because they were the only participants. Additionally, it is important to note that the voices of the executive director and provost are not represented in this study. Due to the scope of my inquiry, the individuals did not take part in the interviews and focus groups. Further discussion on these limitations is provided in *Questions to be Pursued* in Chapter V.

**Summary**

This chapter consisted of seven parts: (a) the study background, (b) the problem statement, (c) the study questions, (d) the study significance, (e) methodological overview, (f) researcher’s lens, and (g) the study limitations. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature pertinent to this study.
CHAPTER II

Introduction

A thorough review of literature produced no examples of studies focused on the English as Second Language (ESL) roles: teachers, students, and administrators. For this literature review, I explored four major strands of literature (see Figure 2):

(a) teachers’ educational psychology, which discusses the teaching concepts for ESL teachers;
(b) students’ second-language acquisition (SLA) theory, which identifies key learning concepts for ESL students;
(c) supervisors’ organization culture and leadership, which discusses the management concepts for administration supervisors;
and (d) critical theory, which includes freedom, cultural pressure, emancipation, humanity, injustice, exploitation, oppression, domination, and the critique of ideology (Bronner, 2002, p. 5; Kaplan, 2003, p. 153; Sim & Van Loon, 2009). All components of the review of literature are demonstrated in Figure 3.

Without effective teaching strategies, ESL teachers are not going to improve students’ English achievement. Without understanding SLA, teachers are unable to help students acquire English proficiency “rapidly, accurately, and effortlessly” (Fox, 2003, p. 2). Without efficient and supportive administration, an English learning center is not going to function well, and without emancipating stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators) from oppression and domination, they are not going to
embrace humanity and freedom (Freire, 2000). Categories of literature were drawn from a preliminary scan of the literature available.

Figure 2. Four major strands explored

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Psychology</th>
<th>SLA Theory</th>
<th>Organization Culture</th>
<th>Critical Theory</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. motivation</td>
<td>2. Merrill Swain</td>
<td>2. trust</td>
<td>2. Paulo Freire</td>
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<td>3. Pygmalion effect</td>
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<td>4. study skills</td>
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<td>5. assessments</td>
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Figure 3. Components of the review of literature
Teachers’ Educational Psychology

Educational psychology is a required course for most teachers, including English teachers. However, in my working experiences, some teachers took the class, passed the test, and forgot how to apply the concepts of educational psychology in their English classrooms (Chang, 2004). Therefore, in this section I focus on some common and fundamental concepts of educational psychology: (a) prior knowledge commencement, (b) motivation to learn, (c) the Pygmalion effect, (d) study skills, and (e) assessment. Each category, followed by several subcategories, plays important roles in an effective learning center (Chang, 2004).

Prior Knowledge Commencement

The concept of prior knowledge consists two parts: (a) Jean Piaget’s schema theory, and (b) Lev S. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and scaffolding theory.

Jean Piaget’s schema theory. First, prior knowledge or background knowledge is closely related to “schema” because both represent past acquired experiences and preexisting knowledge (Bach, 2009; Chang, 2004; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Fowler, 2009; Herrell & Jordan, 2004; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Slavin, 2003). In 1896, Jean Piaget, an influential Swiss developmental psychologist, observed his own three children and developed his schema theory. The schema
theory is based on concepts expounded by Piaget (Chang, 2004) and may be applied to explain how children and adults use their past acquired experiences or preexisting knowledge to acquire new knowledge and learning. Children or students need schema and prior knowledge, and teachers and administrators need to recall their importance in the learning process. For example, Slavin (2003) explained it as “young children demonstrate patterns of behavior or thinking, called schemes, that older children and adults also use in dealing with objects in the world” (p. 30). Furthermore, Fowler (2009) pointed out that when “teachers and administrators encounter a new approach to education—perhaps a new way to teach reading—they naturally seek to understand it in terms of their past experiences” (p. 279). Bach (2009) defined schema as “the things we know aren’t a pile of independent facts, scattered like rice grains around our heads. Instead they are arranged in meaningful associations called a schema. A schema directs our attention, helps us think, helps us remember” (p. 39). Bach provided the following car example to illustrate how schema works:

For instance, if a driver gets into a car that he’s never driven before, it takes him just a moment to figure out where the controls are and how to drive it. This is because all cars have a similar design. Learn about one car, and the resulting “car schema” will teach you about the next car. (p. 40)
Slavin (2003) further explained how the assimilation process described in schema theory helped people to learn new things. “Assimilation is the process of understanding a new object or event in terms of an existing scheme . . . In other words, they will try to use existing schemes to learn about these unknown things” (p. 30). Therefore, in order to teach new content effectively, teachers must hook students’ prior knowledge or schema and create a spiral learning situation. A spiral learning means building new knowledge based on preexisting knowledge (Chang, 2004).

**Lev Vygotsky’ ZPD and scaffolding.** Second, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding theories sustain Piaget’s schema theory as well as illustrate prior knowledge concepts. Effective teachers teach students by activating students’ prior knowledge (Heffernan, 2003; McKenna & Robinson, 2006; McKenzie & Danielson, 2003, Walsh, 2003). This process is called exploring the zone of proximal development. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, was born in 1896 and died in 1934 and is credited with developing ZPD and scaffolding theory. It has taken decades for the West to finally read some of his translated works and not all of his work has ever been translated. The field of education became very enthused about his work and of course it is a major part of education psychology literature as well as taught in many psychology classes.
According to his two translated books, Vygotsky (1978) defined learners’ ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In addition, Vygotsky (1997) explained the importance of the ZDP as follows:

The child must himself be made to walk and to fall, to suffer pain from injuries, and to decide what direction to follow. What is true as regards walking, that it can be learned only on one’s own two feet, and only by one’s own tumbles, is equally applicable to all aspects of education. (p. 342)

When students are learning new knowledge or new content, prior knowledge (background knowledge) is students’ actual development level and new knowledge for students to learn is students’ potential development level. Therefore, every student can learn as long as the teacher knows how to guide students from their actual developmental level (prior knowledge) to their potential development level (new knowledge). Vygotsky called this appropriate guidance, movement, or assistance “scaffolding.” Scaffolding involves collaborative learning. The teacher guides, moves, and assist students. Learning is not unidirectional, but reciprocal (McLeod, 2010; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Slavin, 2003). In the words of Shrum and
Glisan (2010), “By working in the ZPD, this teacher and his or her learners provide mutual assistance and co-construct cultural knowledge that is available for present and future learning events” (p. 27).

It is very difficult for teachers to teach when students lack prior knowledge of the target content. For example, ESL beginners lack alphabetical order concept. When teachers expect them to look up a vocabulary from a dictionary, many students feel lost and encounter frustrations and difficulties. Students suffer from confusion because they do not have background knowledge as a foundation. Additionally, it is not easy for students to learn when teachers do not provide appropriate scaffoldings for them. Therefore, teachers need to identify students’ prior knowledge levels before they can walk them through to the new knowledge by scaffoldings. That is, teachers must identify the starting points (students’ prior knowledge) and the final destinations (new knowledge). Then teachers use professional judgment to choose the appropriate scaffolding to help students walk to their destinations. Glasser (1993) argued that those who fail in identifying students’ prior knowledge and building suitable scaffolds are irresponsible and unqualified. “Because new content is learned in association with existing knowledge, it is important for the teacher to achieve, or ‘switch on,’ relevant prior knowledge” (McKenna & Robinson, 2006, p. 110). Once teachers hook students’ interests or
Motivation to Learn

Motivation is a key to learning (Brown, 2000, p. 160; Yeh, 2010, p. 252); in addition, teachers and researchers argued that motivation and anxiety have great impact on learning (Gardner, 1985; Yeh, 2010). Fundamentally, scholars divide motivation into two kinds: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (Gardner, 1985; Pink, 2011; Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012; Thompson, 2008; Yeh, 2010).

Extrinsic motivation. First, extrinsic motivation is about physical rewards (such as promotion, higher income, good working condition, and high job security) or punishment (such as demotion). To put it simply, extrinsic motivation is based on positive and negative reinforcers; in other words, carrot and stick. According to behavioral learning theory and behaviorism from Ivan P. Pavlov, John Broadus Watson, Edward Thorndike, to Burrhus Frederick Skinner, negative reinforcers can condition behavior, but such conditioning can only shape people’s behavior, not their minds.

Intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is about a sense of self-achievement such as work enjoyment, genuine achievement, and personal growth. Compared to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is more
helpful and has higher drive. Pink (2011) provided several examples of intrinsic motivation to prove this point: (a) Wikipedia, the largest and most popular encyclopedia in the world; (b) Firefox, a free open-source Web Browser, (c) Linux, software devised by an army of unpaid programmers and available for free; and (d) Apache, free open-source Web server Software created and maintained by a far-flung global group of volunteers. Therefore, Pink (2011) called extrinsic motivation “type x” or “motivation 2.0,” which is old-business thinking. Intrinsic motivation is “type i” or motivation 3.0, which presents higher drive and fits current society well. Why do people want to do something without physical rewards? Pink provided three key answers: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

**Human beings are irrational.** Both Hong (2010) and Pink (2011) pointed out that human beings are irrational with Camerer’s *Behavioral Economics* example. Camerer (1999) found the following:

Most applications of economic theory assume individuals care only about their own wealth and won't sacrifice to help or hurt others. Of course, such sacrifices are common in the form of altruism and vengeance. Laboratory experiments help uncover these “social utilities.” For example, in “ultimatum games,” one player offers a portion of $10 to another player and keeps the rest for herself. The responding player can either accept the offer or reject it
and leave them both with nothing. Wealth-maximizing players will accept anything; thus, the first player should offer very little. Surprisingly to economists, in many studies in several countries, some with very high stakes, players routinely offer about $4 of $10, and low offers of less than $2 are rejected half the time. (p. 10576)

Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher, once declared, “It has been said that man is a rational animal. All my life I have been searching for evidence which could support this” (as cited in Hong, 2010, p. 181). Therefore, it is very important to take care of an individual’s feelings and to trigger his or her intrinsic drive because intrinsic motivation can last longer than extrinsic motivation. The upshot of all this is that effective English teachers engage students’ interest with prior knowledge. Once students’ intrinsic drive arises, teachers should be aware of the importance of the Pygmalion effect. Teachers should provide positive expectation on students, which sustains students’ intrinsic motivation.

**Pygmalion Effect**

Murphy, Campbell, and Garavan (1999) explained Pygmalion’s story as follows:

Pygmalion was an ancient King who hailed from Cyprus and it is said that he carved a statue in the image of his ideal woman. So perfect was his creation,
that he could not help but fall in love with it and so strong was the love he bore his creation that with his will and a little help from the Gods he brought the statue to life and they were married. (p. 238)

The “Pygmalion effect” is related to the concept of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Chang, 2004; Chang, 2011; Murphy, Campbell, and Garavan, 1999). In 1968, Rosenthal and Jacobson first firmly addressed teachers’ expectations as a significant factor to predict student performance (Chang, 2011; Fries, Horz, & Harimerl, 2006; Murphy, Campbell, & Garavan, 1999; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rumain, 2010; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). In 1997, Albert Bandura, a famous social learning theorist, clearly stated that students' self-efficacy is the concept of determination of success. If students hold a strong belief that they will be successful in the learning tasks, they will succeed (Bandura, 1997; Rumain, 2010).

Nowadays, the “Pygmalion effect” means that people are capable of succeeding because they live up to others’ positive expectation (Chang, 2011). “Success breeds success. Having been successful once, the child starts to develop confidence that he can successfully have the correct place again and will try harder to be on the correct place again” (Rumain, 2010, p. 316). Meanwhile, several researchers identified that teachers’ expectations have significant impact on success
in English as foreign language (EFL) or ESL learning because of self-fulfilling prophesies (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010; Zabel & Zabel, 1996).

**Study Skills**

Once English language learners (ELLs) are driven to study the English language, teachers ought to introduce some study skills in order to help students organize the main concepts or ideas. Some teachers fail to teach students how to use study skills because these teachers assume that their students do not need these basic skills. Therefore, students suffer from having no clues of how to organize their academic content (Brozo & Simpson, 1999; McKenna & Robinson, 2006; Richardson & Morgan, 2003). Among the many study skills, graphic organizers and note taking are two of the most commonly used skills in the classroom.

**Graphic organizers.** A graphic organizer is a very important cognitive tool for students. McKenna and Robinson (2006) defined a graphic organizer as “a diagram showing how key concepts are related” (p. 121). Thus, a picture is worth a thousand words. Put differently, a graphic organizer is like a concept map. Maxwell (2005) explained a concept map or a graphic organizer is a tool for developing the conceptual framework that shows concepts and the relationships among them. Research shows that graphic organizers are significantly effective tools for assisting students perceive the relationships among concepts (Baxendell, 2003; Brunn, 2002;
McKenna & Robinson, 2006; Merkley & Jefferies, 2001). In the book, *Teaching through Text*, McKenna and Richard (2006) offered three steps to construct graphic organizers: (a) make a list of key terms, (b) identify clusters of highly related terms, and (c) choose a diagram type that reflects how the clustered terms are related (pp. 136-137). They also shared several useful graphic organizers for helping students map out the concept relationships such as tree diagrams, Venn diagrams, time lines and other continua, labeled pictures, sociograms, hybrid types, and semantic maps.

To sum up, a graphic organizer helps students draw a picture from what they have learned to what they have understood. If students are unable to draw simple pictures to illustrate the concept, they maybe have not completely acquired the concept. At this point, teachers can introduce effective note-taking skills to students.

**Note-taking.** McKenna and Robinson (2006) defined study skills as “the ability (1) to take notes during lectures, (2) to read certain assignments without benefit of an introduction, (3) to review for tests, and (4) to take tests with an awareness of how they are typically designed” (p. 285). Although some people question whether or not teachers should teach study skills, it is true that some students do not know how to jot down notes. The most effective note taking system is the Cornell system (Anderson & Armbruster, 1991; Jacobsen, 1991; McKenna & Robinson, 2006; Pauk, 2004). English teachers fail to equip students with
note-taking skills and other study skills. Researchers Brozo and Simpson (1999) and Richardson and Morgan (2003), however, emphasized, “It is probably natural for teachers, who tend to be good students and who have rarely received instruction in how to study, to assume that their students do not need direct instruction in study skill” (as cited in McKenna & Robinson, 2006, p. 287). According to McKenna and Robinson (2006), “these abilities receive little attention from teachers, who often assume that students will develop them naturally” (p. 303). It is common for teachers to neglect these skills, “particularly as they relate to the effective study of textbook material” (p. 287).

**Assessment**

According to Curtain and Dahlburg (2010), the purpose of assessment is to gather information, not to raise students’ anxiety levels and not to lower students’ motivation. To gather information means “(1) to recognize and celebrate progress, (2) to identify areas for more intense effort, (3) to describe levels of proficiency for the benefit of planning and articulation” (p. 188). Therefore, “effective assessment is a complex and ongoing process” (p. 188). In order to clarify some misunderstandings, researchers have defined these four key terms: “Assessment” means “gathering of data or information about what has been learned during a class” (Curtain & Dahlburg, 2010, p. 188) or “measuring a learner's level of knowledge or skills”
(Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 394). “Evaluation” means “interpreting the data or information that has been gathered” (Curtain & Dahlburg, 2010, p. 188) or “assigning a value to information about a learner” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 394).

“Grading” means “transforming assessment data or information into a symbol that communicates the results of an evaluation” (Curtain & Dahlburg, 2010, p. 189) or “converting assessment information about a learner into a form that is understandable to the learner, such as a letter grade, points on a rubric, numerical score, or written feedback” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 395). “Test” is “a vehicle for determining a learner's level of knowledge of skills” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 394). Therefore, assessment includes evaluation, grades and tests. Furthermore, assessment consists of three main key concepts: the backward design (a need assessment), formative assessment, and summative assessment.

**Backward design.** Backward design is a flip, which is completely different from traditional bottom-up teaching methods because it puts language standards and assessment at the starting point. This is “a process of working from final student products and performances back to content and activities” (Curtain & Dahlburg, 2010, p. 186). Therefore, teachers should decide what outcome students should acquire. Once teachers set up the learning achievement and formulate goals, they design teaching and assessment strategies to meet the desired achievement and goals.
Brown (2007) used an alternative term, “a needs assessment” (p. 152), to explain backward design. “It [A needs assessment] is an important precursor to designing the goals for a course in that it can identify the overall purposes of the course, ‘gaps’ that the course is intended to fill, and the opinions of both course designers and learners about their reasons for designing/taking the course” (p. 152).

**Formative assessment.** Formative assessment is used “to help form or shape learners’ ongoing understanding or skills while teacher and learners still have opportunities to interact for the purposes of repair and improvement within the instructional setting” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 401). The most common formative assessment is a pop quiz. Shohamy (1990) suggested that a formative quiz should have 5 to 15 minutes duration in the classroom and class interaction activities without penalty.

**Summative assessment.** Summative assessment is used “to determine what the learner can do with the language at that point” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 401). It usually takes place at the end of a course. The most common summative assessment is a final exam. Summative assessment focuses on achievement of units, course objectives, standards-based goals, and students’ development of oral proficiency and progress. Donato and Todhunter (2001) recommended that a good summative assessment should reflect the types of formative tasks based on students’
practice experiences and teachers’ instructional experience.

**Students’ SLA Theory**

**A History of Language Teaching**

For the second part, a history of students’ second language acquisition (SLA) could be tracked back to language-teaching methodology. Prior to the twentieth century, people learned both the classical Greek and medieval Latin as foreign languages. At that time, people broadly used both languages in philosophy, religion, politics, and business. The teaching method of both languages was called “the Classical Method” because it mainly focused on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, translations of text, and written exercises. In the nineteen century, the Classical Method developed into “the Grammar Translation Method” (Brown, 2007, p. 18; Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 3, Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 47). After the Grammar Translation Method (1800s), language teaching methods and theories were developed as follows: the Direct Method by Francois Gouin (1880s), Audiolinguism/the Audiolinguial Method/the “Army Method” by Fries (1945), the Cognitive Code Learning by Chomsky (1965), the Interlanguage Theory by Larry Selinker (1970s) and the Affective-Humanistic Approach: the Silent Way by Caleb Gattegno (1976), Community Language Learning by Charles Curran (1976), Total Physical Response by James Asher (1977), Suggestopedia/Suggestology by Georgi
Lozanov (1978), the Natural Approach, the Input Hypothesis, and Affective Filter Hypothesis by Stephen Krashen (1980s), and the Output hypotheses by Merrill Swain (1990s) (Brown, 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2001).

After these language teaching transformations, many language experts and teachers agree that the best way to help students acquire target language is to use language to communicate with people. Therefore, the Communicative Approach is the most popular and current teaching method for foreign language acquisition now. In addition, more and more studies pointed out that the Communicative Approach has strong correlation with students’ SLA (Brown, 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Based on the realm of linguistics and SLA scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles, the two most discussed Communicative Approach are (a) *Stephen Krashen’s comprehensible input* (Chen & Oller, Jr, 2005; Crossley, Allen, & McNamara, 2012; Didi-Ogren & Goebel, 2008; Fang, 2008, 2009; Foster, 1998; Han, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ieong & Lau, 2011; Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1989, 2008; Laufer, 2005; Mackey, 2002; McCann, Hecht, & Ribeau, 1986; Moser, Harris, & Carle, 2012; Paesani, 2005; Payne, 2011; Qin, 2007; Rodrigo. Krashen, & Gribbons, 2004; Stewart, & Pertusa, 2004; Whitley, 1993; Xiao, 2008; Zeyuan, 2010; Zheng, 2008) and (b) *Merrill Swain’s comprehensible output* (Barik & Swain, 1974; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Gorsuch, 2006;
Stephen Krashen: Comprehensible Input and Affective Filter

In the 1980s, Stephen Krashen proposed that “we acquire language when we understand what we hear and what we read” (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985; Rodrigo, Krashen, & Gibbons, 2004, p. 54). Krashen reasoned five fundamental SLA hypotheses in terms of SLA theory: (a) the Acquisition/Learning hypotheses, (b) the Nature Order Hypothesis, (c) the Monitor Hypothesis, (d) the Affective Filter Hypothesis, and (e) the Input Hypothesis (Leong & Lau, 2011, p. 95; Krashen 1982, McCann, Hecht, & Ribeau, 1986, p. 34; Payne, 2011, p. 419; Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 15; Xiao, 2008, p. 15). Of Krashen’ five hypothesis, the Affective Filter Hypothesis and the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis are the most discussed and researched hypothesis at the realm of SLA.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen’ Affective Filter Hypothesis acquires a low-anxiety learning environment, “where learners are ‘off the defensive’” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 15). “Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis stresses that for the student to learn effectively the student’s motivation and self-esteem must be
supported while anxiety is diminished” (Herrell & Jordan, 2004, p. 4). Dulay and Burt (1977) proposed the Affective Hypothesis associated with one of affective factors to the SLA. Later, Krashen (1982) continued this perspective and stated that SLA only occur at the low level of nervousness because learners feel “motivated and self-confident” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 31). Shrum and Glisan (2010) argued that learners without anxiety can communicate better and learn the target language through trial-and-error methods (p. 33). The powerful teacher-centered environment and atmosphere produce an anxious feeling; anxiety kills students’ curiosity and creativity (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) explained further why anxiety jeopardizes SLA. They reasoned that learners who are under enormous pressure try to avoid making mistakes.

**The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis.** The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis means presenting the materials in an acceptable level; therefore, students are not overwhelmed with higher level materials. The concept is very similar to Vygosky's ZPD (Chen & Oller, Jr, 2005). Krashen (1981, 1982) used a term “i+1” (letter i plus one) to illustrate the input hypothesis. The i represents “input,” the current competence of the learner. The “1” refers to the next phase of competence that is a little beyond where the learner is now. The key point of “i+1” is to teach students a little beyond the current knowledge. ESL teachers, should not overwhelm
students with excessive knowledge. Still, many teachers teach the students with i+50 or i+100 instead of i+1. A researcher Whitley (1993) declared three problems between current SLA theory and the classroom teaching: (a) a lack of understanding of current SLA theories, (b) a lack of ESL teacher professional development occasions, and (c) a lack of textbooks in terms of current SLA theory (as cited in Didi-Ogren & Goebel, 2008, p. 439). With these three deficiencies, most ESL teachers do not perceive students’ level of prior knowledge or background knowledge. Therefore, they overwhelm the students with excessive concepts and ideas in a class; eventually, students suffer, become frustrated, and give up English language learning (Hurst, 2001; Krashen, 1981, 1982; Slavin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1997).

**Merrill Swain: Comprehensible Output**

In the 1990s, Merrill Swain proposed “the Comprehensible Output” after she argued that Krashen’ Comprehensible Input is inadequate. The Comprehensible Output Model proposes that “learners need to speak the language to achieve higher levels of language competence” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 22). According to Swain (1995), employing the Comprehensible Output Model facilitate ESL learners to realize the gap between what they know and what they are capable of doing. Learners only acquire (not learn) the English language proficiency by speaking the
language. It does sound more persuasive than Krashen’s Comprehensible Input Model. Shrum and Glisan (2010) further reasoned three methods based on the Comprehensible Output Approach: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. If learners have acquired the English proficiency, they are able to talk to native English speakers (interpersonal), depict incidences by English speaking and writing, and demonstrate whatever they want by using the English language. As long as teachers provide “meaningful, purposeful, and motivational” (p. 22) opportunities for students, students can output whatever they have acquired.

Supervisors' Organization Culture and Leadership

For the third part, organization culture and leadership is heavily based on stakeholders’ participation. Stakeholders are people who influence or can be influenced in an organization because all of these people are interwoven and connected. With lack of stakeholders’ participation, an organization is doomed to failure (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2008; Green & Van Buren III, 2010; Schilling, 2000; Stokes & Carr-Chellman, 2007). Therefore, the stakeholders in this study are: ESL teachers, ESL students, and ESL administrators. Each stakeholder should fully participant in the activities and engage in the “values, assumptions, and beliefs in organization development” (French & Bell, Jr., 1999, p. 62). Schein (2010) called this participation and engagement “espoused values” (p. 27). Argyris and Schon
(1978, 1996) noted that espoused values reflect the preferred behavior. The upshot of all this is that stakeholders’ mental and physical participation facilitates in the success, culture, and leadership of the organization in this study.

**A Non-participating Team Member**

A non-participating team member can sabotage the team dynamics and team project outcomes. Non-participating means not taking part or getting involved in a discussion, a meeting and an activity, such as being silent, being absent, not sharing and contributing on decision making. Such behaviors jeopardize a team’s harmony, create interpersonal conflicts, and completely destroy trust between the teammates. Based on psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, and organizational development, this section demonstrates how a non-participating group member gradually crumbles the dynamics of the organization. George Fox University professor Craig Johnson argued that “a group’s success or failure is highly dependent on the behaviors of its individual members. Destructive behavior by just one person can be enough to derail the group process” (2011, p. 277). Many studies suggest that we should consider the subject under the following headings: (a) fairness, (b) trust, (c) conflicts, and (d) macro system (Argyris, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2004; Arslan, 2009; Becerra & Gupta, 2003; Carr & Zanetti, 1999; Chory & Hubbell, 2008; Dunleavy, Chory, & Goodboy, 2010; Hart & Saunders, 1997; Inkpen &

**Fairness**

The first phase devastated by a non-participating member is fairness.

Harvard philosopher, John Rawls, defined fairness as justice (Johnson, 2011; Sashkin & Williams, 1990). “Over the years, research on organizational justice has clearly established that fairness perceptions can influence important work outcomes as well as employee behaviors and attitudes” (Hollensbe, Khazanchi, & Masterson, 2008, p. 1099). Employees are concerned about being treated fairly. Tyler, Dienhart, and Thomas (2008) pointed out that “our studies tell us that employee beliefs about whether their organizations are legitimate and moral and whether employees see managers making decisions using procedures that they believe are fair are the key factors that engage employee values” (p. 36). Conversely, “if organizations want to build a culture that encourages ethical conduct and a commitment to compliance, they should focus on fairness” (p. 33).

Fairness presents respect whereas unfairness means selfishness. Everyone in
the group assumes that he or she will contribute equally to the group or team.

However, if a team member does not participate in a discussion, a meeting or an activity, the other members will start to think why they need to work more to do the work of the non-participating member. That is, a non-participating member puts more weight on the other participating members work load because he or she has no contribution on sharing tasks, engaging in reasoning and critical thinking, generating creative ideas and thoughts, or making decisions (Cremer, Stinglhamber, & Eisenberger, 2005, p. 743; Hollensbe, Khazanchi, & Masterson, 2008; p. 1099; Johnson, Truxillo, Erdogan, Bauer, & Hammer, 2009, p. 432; Tyler, Dienhart, & Thomas, 2008, p. 33).

Johnson (2011) argued that a team member who does not participate in the activities “may feel that their efforts will have little impact on the final result” (p. 270). Therefore, the participating members retreat and stop dedicating their best to the group. “Those being victimized are less likely to cooperate and may slack off for fear of being seen as ‘suckers.’ The small-group advantage can be lost because members aren’t giving their best effort” (p. 279). Participating members are more likely to feel unfair and breed abundant resentment. Those treated unfairly have condemning emotions, such as anger, disgust, and contempt. Unlike a positive working environment where people are optimistic and motivated, the depression
caused by these condemning emotions makes people pessimistic and low-motivated. These condemning emotions are accompanied by jealousy, rage, and envy, which “contribute to lying, revenge, stealing, and other antisocial behaviors” (p. 245). “If neglected, perceptions of unfairness can result in negative consequences for organizations, such as workplace sabotage, theft, and workplace aggression” (Hollensbe, Khazanchi, & Masterson, 2008, p. 1099).

**A psychological contract.** Why do people have these negative feelings and actions? This answer is the violation of a psychological contract. A psychological contract is a mental agreement between an employee and an employer. Different from general written contracts, a psychological contract, as its name, engages people’s feelings and emotions. Thompson (2008) argued that “a psychological contract is an individual’s subjective belief in the reciprocal nature of the exchange relationship between himself or herself and a third party, based on the promises made or implied in their interactions” (p. 35). He also pointed out that there are four types of psychological contracts: relational contract, transactional contract, transitional contract, and balance contract. However, once someone (either an employee or an employer) violates the contract, it stirs others’ feelings and generates negative emotions.

Sashkin and Williams (1990) indicated out that people feel angry, hurt, or
even a sense of betrayal when a psychological contract is violated. “Our findings suggest that managers who violate relational obligations of the psychological contract also violate transactional obligations” (p. 68). They provided nine aspects of fairness: trust, consistency, truthfulness, integrity, expectations, equity, influence, justice, and respect. Therefore, a leader should keep a sense of equity and fairness in order to avoid unfairness caused by a non-participating member. “Managers should focus on transactional factors (such as involvement and job expectations) with their supervisors and on relational factors (such as trust, integrity, and justice) with nonmanagerial employees” (p. 69). Johnson (2011) used an ethical term, moral emotions, to depict the feelings when a psychological contract is violated. “Anger, disgust, and contempt are other-condemning emotions. They are elicited by unfairness, betrayal, immorality, cruelty, poor performance, and status differences” (p. 238). “Some choose to remain bitter, resentful, angry and even vengeful” (Reina & Reina, 2007, p. 38).

**Procedural fairness.** Tyler, Dienhart, and Thomas (2008) categorized fairness into two kinds: outcome fairness and procedural fairness. First, outcome fairness means “what people think they deserve” (p. 33). For instance, workers expect their salary to go up 5% if the cost of living goes up 5%. Second, procedural fairness is the processes to produce outcomes. The processes should be neutral,
transparent, and fact-based. People are treated politely and people’s rights are respected. Between these kinds of fairness, procedural fairness is more important.

Tyler, Dienhart, and Thomas (2008) also argued that procedural fairness is heavily related to organization dynamic. “The organizational feature most strongly associated with both the development of supportive values and the acceptance of rules is procedural justice” (p. 40). “The fairness of organizational outcomes is not the primary driver. However, how to engage employee values is our focus so that they will willingly comply, even when not monitored. It is in this area that procedural justice matters most” (p. 36).

Cremer, Stinglhamber, and Elsenberger (2005) showed that “the present findings make clear that managers and organizations should pay attention not only to whether managers treat their direct subordinates fairly but also how procedural justice is communicated to all group and organizational members” (p. 743).

“Employees determine the fairness of procedures using seven decision rules: consistency (across persons and over time), bias suppression, accuracy of information, correctability (of wrong decisions), ethicality, voice, and decision control” (Hollensbe, Khazanchi, & Masterson, 2008, p. 1099).

A leader should not play favorites. “Playing favorites was a factor mentioned especially often when we asked employees to describe unfair behavior on the part of
managers . . . Apparently the special treatment received by favored employees is highly visible, especially to those less favored” (Sashkin & Williams, 1990, p. 61).

“Also, the fairness experiences of others may influence the fairness experiences of direct subordinates” (Cremer, Stinglhamber, & Elsenberger, 2005, p. 743).

**Solution: Reward power and coercive power.** Ipso facto, we need to draw a clear boundary of a non-participating member and participating members by offering a carrot and a stick. “Rewards and sanctions must be not only equitable (applied in the same manner no matter who is involved) but also just. That is, the punishment must ‘fit the crime’ and the reward suits the achievement or they will not be considered fair” (Sashkin & Williams, 1990, p. 61). In other words, supervisors should reward participating members to enhance positive motivation. On the other hand, supervisors should discipline a non-participating member to eliminate bad influence poisoning the whole group dynamic. Fairness is “not only of events, but also of social entities” (Hollensbe, Khazanchi, & Masterson, 2008, p. 1099). Otherwise, unfairness causes the participating members’ negative emotions and resentment. Soon, these negative emotions and resentment are threatening the interpersonal trust in a group or organization. “Blame and resentment are toxic. They undermine morale, productivity, innovation, engagement, and erode trust” (Reina & Reina, 2007, p. 41).
Trust

The second phase devastated by a non-participating member is trust. A Chinese ethical philosopher, Lao Tzu, declared, “if you don't trust people, you make them untrustworthy” (Bashyakar & Menon, 2010, p. 27). Distrust goes along with unfairness. While people protect themselves from unfair incidences, their sense of distrust arise. Most people have this kind of experience. Johnson (2011) defined trust as confidence. “Members and outsiders have confidence in the character and truthfulness of the organization and its representatives” (p. 139). Bashyakar and Menon (2010) defined trust as expectation. “Based on the expectation, the trustee will perform an action important to the trustor, regardless of the trustor’s ability to monitor or control the trustee” (p. 29). Therefore, this mutual trust “is a shared belief that you can depend on each other to achieve a common purpose” (p. 29). In fact, trust is a very simple logic. “People need trust to do their jobs. It is at the heart of effective working relationships and employee engagement” (p. 30). Trust accelerates teamwork efficiency, enhances cooperation, encourages risk taking, shares a common vision, has higher job satisfaction, and creates a feeling of commitment to the group. Each member recognizes or acknowledges his or her sense of belonging, which means a sense of responsibility.

Will people value an opinion from a non-participating member who is
always absent from the group? Of course not. The other group members may think
that while they came to every single meeting, the non-participating member did not
even show up to most meetings and participate in the previous discussions. What in
the world do the non-participating member really know about the issues and the
team? On the other hand, the other group members pay more attention to someone
who is always contributing his or her efforts, discussing issues and interacting with
other team members. Why? It is because they trust the person based on his or her
efforts in the previous meetings.

Distrust sabotages collaboration. Unfairness directly destroys integrity and
indirectly sabotages interpersonal trust. Morgan (1989) stated collaboration and
decision-making rely on trust. Bashyakar and Menon (2010) argued that trust is
“based on the trustor’s perception of the trustee ability, benevolence, and integrity”
(p. 29). People are not able to collaborate when they do not trust each other. “If the
level of trust is low, the credibility of the system may go down as a consequence. In
such a case, the system may become weak and cease to achieve the desired
objectives” (p. 28). Reina and Reina (2007) pointed out that lacking collaboration is
related to no trust. “When trust erodes, relationships are compromised and people
shut down, pull back, and hesitate to engage. Without trust, employees have little
interest in being creative, taking risks and collaborating” (p. 36). They also have a
significant finding on what makes trust erode. Although most people think that betrayals contribute most to eroding trust, Reina and Reina found a totally opposite assumption. They think “trust is broken in subtle ways every day. When people fail to deliver as promised, take credit for another’s work, look out only for themselves, neglect to collaborate in decisions and spin the truth, trust is broken” (2007, p. 38).

Once trust is broken, it seems to open Pandora’s Box. All the disappointment, frustration, doubt, confusion, and pain are flooding into the team dynamics.

**Social loafers and trust busters.** Johnson (2011) found that a cooperative climate and trust disappear “when group members fail to do their fair share of the work” (p. 278). He used the term, social loafers to depict those who “take advantage of others in the group and violate norms for fairness or justice” (p. 279). That is, once a leader does not cope with fairness properly, interpersonal trust is going to vanish in the group dynamic. He also used another term, trust buster, to depict the disaster of distrust caused by a non-participating member. “Trust is broken, and cynicism spreads. In an organizational setting, common ‘trust busters’ include inconsistent messages and behavior, inconsistent rules and procedures, blaming, dishonesty, secrecy, and unjust rewards” (p. 85).

Whether a non-participant is a social loafer or trust buster, distrust invisibly stirs the organizational system, jeopardizing cooperative working. “People usually
want to work collaboratively with others in the pursuit of common ends—but people tend to resist being pushed around, or put down, under whatever banner” (French & Bell, 1999, p. 256). As a result, not only does distrust bury numerous lethal interpersonal bombs, but also triggers some conflicts and fights in the organization.

**Solution: Gaining trust by listening.** Greenleaf (1991) found that listening is one of the crucial elements of a servant leader “because true listening builds strength in other people” (p. 17). Reina and Reina (2007) suggested that leaders or supervisors should rebuild trust by listening. They should help group members alter their blaming to focus on addressing individual needs. Listening is a sincere dedication. Leaders must listen and “consider what employees need to resolve issues, concerns, fears and pain. They must pay attention to conversations that need to occur and listen for what needs to be said” (p. 41). Tyler, Dienhart, and Thomas (2008) found that team members are very keen to have a trustworthy supervisor to guide them and take care of their needs and concerns by listening to them. “Even when people cannot be given what they want, their concerns can be acknowledged and the validity of their perspective recognized. It is sincere consideration of their concerns that is central to gaining trust” (p. 40). Bashyakar and Menon (2010) also agreed with gaining trust by listening. “Effective listening is the bottom line of trust. If you listen properly, people will trust you. A conversation is a relationship. Both speaker
and listener play a part, each influencing the other” (p. 29). Johnson (2011) pointed out the importance of empathetic listening. “Ethical leaders put aside their personal concerns to engage in empathetic listening. They seek to understand, not to evaluate, advise, or interpret. Empathetic listening is an excellent way to build a trusting relationship” (p. 101). Solomon and Flores (2003) argued that trust is an emotional skill. “It requires judgment. It requires vigilant attention. It requires conscientious action. It involves all of the intricate reciprocities of a human relationship” (p. 6).

Therefore, team leaders and supervisors should listen carefully to every team member’s (participating members’ and a non-participating member’s) inner voice. To prevent the whole group dynamic from a distrusting atmosphere, supervisors should immediately cope with the unfairness and distrust caused by a non-participating member. Without fairness and trust, the catastrophic interpersonal conflicts swiftly occur in the whole organization (Bashyakar & Menon, 2010, p. 28; Caldwell & Dixon, 2010, p. 94; Green & Van Buren, 2010, p. 425; Johnson, 2011, p. 391; Reina & Reina, 2007, p. 38).

Conflicts

The third phase created by a non-participating member is conflicts. With increasing unfairness and decreasing trust, conflicts occur. Disharmony in an organization slowly, but surely, eliminates team spirit and leads the whole
organization into an interminable risky impasse. “All social movements involve
conflicts, which are reflected intellectually in controversies” (Dewey, 1997, p. 5).
Therefore, conflicts are inevitable in every team or organization. “Interpersonal
skills and emotional intelligence are vital because personal relationships are a

**Conflicts can be fatal.** There are three reasons why conflicts can be fatal to
a team or an organization. First, conflicts damage team spirit. “It has been suggested
that spirituality in work movement allows a way to transform organizational cultures
at a more fundamental level” (Driscoll & Mckee, 2007, p. 207). Second, conflicts
affect personal mood and organizational management. Bolman and Deal (2008)
argued that interpersonal conflicts and “interpersonal strife can block progress and
waste time. Satisfaction and organizational effectiveness depend heavily on the
quality of interpersonal relationships” (p. 187). Third, people neglect or
underestimate conflicts’ lethality. “People silence themselves to avoid
embarrassment, confrontation, and other perceived dangers” (Perlow & Williams,
2003, p. 53). “Leaders and staff alike may try to ignore or paper over such frictions”
(Evans, 2001, p. 37). “Many change efforts fail not because managers’ intentions are
incorrect or insincere but because the managers are unable to handle the social
challenges of changing” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 176).
Solution: No panacea. Since conflicts can be fatal, Morgan (1989) suggested some methods to cope with conflicts, such as physical separation, limited interaction, using integrators, third-party consultants, negotiations without consultants, exchanging members and multilevel interaction. However, it is difficult to suggest the best solution because there is no panacea, a cure-all solution to assorted interpersonal conflicts. The only suggestion is confrontation. In terms of assorted conflicts, it is always better to prevent them than to solve them. As Morgan emphasized, “today’s solutions shape tomorrow’s problems” (p. 35).

Macro System

The fourth phase ruined by a non-participating member is Macro system. After a non-participating member gradually destroys fairness and trust and arouses interpersonal conflicts in a group or organization, the whole system starts to crumble. It is well-known that team cooperation is the one of essentially successful elements for the whole organization. “The absence of team building can be catastrophic” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 182). When a non-participating member exists in a team, he or she brings the issues of fairness, which directly affects the team’s harmony and teammates’ trust and indirectly causes interpersonal conflicts. These direct and indirect problems hinder team or organizational development. As French and Bell (1999) pointed out, “Organization development deals with the gamut of ‘people
problems’ and ‘work system problems’” (p. 2). “Organizational culture is both product and process, effect and cause” (Evans, 2001, p. 44). In brief, a non-participating team member is able to challenge or even to sabotage an entrenched organization development, including values, assumptions and beliefs.

**Summary**

If each group member only looks out for his or her own welfare, the whole group suffers (Johnson, 2011). Evans (2001) reminds education leaders of three levels of commitment to change in an organization. “First, make it happen. Second, help it happen. Third, let it happen” (p. 70). Although a non-participating team member, who represents third level and exists on our team or organization, he or she may create unfairness, accumulate distrust, ignite conflicts and eventually sabotage the whole team or organization system. Like Gresham’s law is commonly stated as: Bad money drives out good. Therefore, administrators and supervisors should bear in mind—never do we ignore the negative effects brought up by a non-participating team member. “Understanding how employees form fairness perceptions can help organizations to better manage employees’ perceptions of fairness as well as potential outcomes” (Hollensbe, Khazanchi, & Masterson, 2008, p. 1099).
Critical Theory

For the fourth part of this literature review, I discuss critical theory which is a macro culture system. Its main purpose is to emancipate people from cultural pressure, society criticism, injustice, exploitation, and oppression (Apple, 1999; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Bronner, 2002; Buber, 1958; Carnoy, 1997; Eisener, 2008; Freire, 1973, 1985, 1996, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gadotti, 1994; Held, 1980; Lin & Hong, 2012; Marchand, 2010; Marshall, 1993; McLaren, 2000; Phillips, 2000; Poster, 1989; Salazar, 2008; Shor & Freire, 1987; Van Gorder, 2007). Critical theory provides a valuable tool for this study because it provides the participants, interviewees, and stakeholders with voices. In some cases, these voices have not been heard by other people; critical theory can, therefore, help other people understand the truth of everyone’s inner voice. This part of the literature review includes: (a) the rudiments of critical theory, and (b) Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Rudiments of Critical Theory

Karl Marx’s theoretical principles provided the inspiration for critical theory (Held, 1980, p. 19; Poster, 1989, p. 1; Sim & Van Loon, 2009, p. 4). It is for this reason that some people have called critical theory “Western Marxism” (Held, 1980, p. 13). After World War I, a group of theorists and thinkers created an Institute of

Critical theory examines freedom, choices, cultural pressure, societal criticism, emancipation, humanity, injustice, exploitation, oppression, domination, as well as the critique of ideology (Bronner, 2002, p. 5; Kaplan, 2003, p. 153; Sim & Van Loon, 2009). Kaplan (2003) explained, “Critical theory challenges power and authority everywhere it resides” (p. 153). Patton (2002) further emphasized that critical research is “critical—in that it seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society” (p. 131). Similarly, Merriam (2009) argued that the goal of critical theory is “to critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (p. 10, & p. 34). As Merriam suggested that a researcher should always ask the questions about power: (a) Who has power? (b) How is power negotiated?, and (c) What structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power? (p. 10,
Asking such questions can shed light on the dynamics of power, especially the coercive power. Coercive power means that people at higher position overuse their power to penalize their subordinates (French & Raven, 1959, 1962). In the words of French and Bell (1999), coercive power is “based on the ability of the powerholder to punish another, that is, to give something negatively valued by the other” (p. 284). As Northouse (2007) noted, coercive power is “derived from having the capacity to penalize or punish others. A coach who sits players on the bench for being late to practice is using coercive power” (p. 8). In some cases teachers face administrators’ coercive power when their supervisors threaten their employment through the nonrenewal of contracts. Similarly, students may encounter teachers’ coercive power through the use of grading pressure.

**Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

A second seminal piece is Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, published this book in 1970. In this text, Freire discussed the justification between the oppressors and the oppressed, the contradiction between the teacher and students, and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. As Freire (2000) stated, education is “a mutual process” (p. 7). However, he also pointed out that some education systems fail to fulfill this mutual process. These failed education systems serve as a form of educational
oppression; therefore, no individual person is guilty of oppression—only of a lack of reflection so as to observe the oppression.

Most often in the modern age, oppression is the result of systems of production, not necessarily individual persons. Under these failed education systems, teachers have been the education colonizers and the students have been the colonized for a long time. Absent critical thinking skills, teachers may turn into dominating authoritarians and students become the oppressed sufferers. This was why Freire argued that the education system is the “essence of oppression” (p. 8).

**Banking education.** Freire provided one example of such oppression:

“banking education” (Freire, 2000, p. 73; Lin & Hong, 2012, p. 378). He did not believe that banking education could equip students with critical thinking skills. Banking education is considered to be teacher-centered and occurs when teachers feed excessive knowledge into students’ brains. This educational approach fails to develop students’ critical thinking skills; instead, it can further destroy students’ creativity and turn some students into obedient robots. According to Freire (2000), banking education “resists dialogue” (p. 83), “treats students as objects of assistance” (p. 83), and “inhibits creativity and domesticates the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 83-84).
**Problem-posing education.** On the other hand, “problem-posing education” (Freire, 2000, p. 79; Lin & Hong, 2012, p. 378) takes a different stance. Freire (2000) believed that problem-posing education was necessary in the classroom because it “embodies communication” (p. 79) and “epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness” (p. 79). Fundamentally, problem-posing education system occurs through a conversation between teachers and students: Both characters are co-investigators to explore education and knowledge (Apple, 1999; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Buber, 1958; Carnoy, 1997; Freire, 1973, 1985, 1996, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gadotti, 1994; Lin & Hong, 2012; McLaren, 2000; Shor & Freire, 1987). Problem-posing education could benefit students and teachers in the classrooms because “the students--no longer docile listeners--are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own” (Freire, 2000, p. 81). “Through dialogue, . . . . The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (Freire, 2000, p. 80). Therefore, problem-posing education “sets itself the task of demythologizing” (p. 83), “regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (p. 83), “makes them [students] critical thinkers” (p.
and “bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality” (p. 83).

This dissertation seeks to unveil the oppressor-oppressed dialectic and dialogues (Eisner, 2008, p. 22), helping teachers enact humanizing pedagogy based on students’ never-shared voices (Salazar, 2008, p. 342), empowering both oppressed groups and emancipating them from “cells of silence and submission” (Van Gorder, 2007, p. 24), and providing some suggestions for educators and professionals “to change the systems that reinforce suffering” (Marchand, 2010, p. 43).

Summary

This literature review explored four major strands of literature (see Figure 2): (a) teachers’ educational psychology, (b) students’ SLA theory, (c) supervisors’ organization culture and leadership, and (d) critical theory. The next chapter will provide methodological information pertinent to this study.
CHAPTER III

Introduction

This chapter contains an overview of the methodology used in this study and explanations of several themes: (a) qualitative research, (b) single case study, (c) theoretical framework, (d) the study questions, (e) background information on this center, (f) participants, (g) data collection, (h) trustworthiness strategies, and (i) data analysis. The primary methodology of this study was qualitative single case study.

The theoretical framework drew from the tenants of critical theory. In order to record stakeholders voices and data, I let all stakeholders choose their preferred recording methods (voice, video, or both). For focus groups, we started and recorded our interviews after each participant agreed with the recording method chosen by the whole group. As long as one participate disagreed with video record method, we chose voice record only. Furthermore, I hired a research assistant, who was an exchange student from Taiwan, to help me take notes when I asked questions and verified participants' answers.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can enable a researcher to understand participants’ experiences, perceive their contents, and explore the stories behind their experiences (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hedrick, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy,
Qualitative research consists of four traits: (a) to emphasize on no single truth, (b) to understand people’s experiences, (c) to respond to participants’ experiences and stories immediately, and (d) to perceive meaning.

Boeije (2010) asserted that the researchers using qualitative research consider that there is no single truth in society. Guba and Lincoln (2005) similarly argued that “there is no single ‘truth’—that all truths are but partial truths” (p. 212), and Patton (2002) has called it “socially constructed multiple realities” (p. 134). Merriam (2009) pointed out that qualitative research tries to perceive “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). She also argued that the human instrument is the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data because it can be immediately responsive and adaptive (p. 15). Qualitative research promotes meaning-making as Guba and Lincoln (2005) explained “the meaning-making activities themselves can be changed when they are found to be incomplete, faulty (e.g., discriminatory, oppressive, or non-liberatory), or malformed (created from data that can be shown to be false)” (p. 197).
Single Case Study

A single case study provides a holistic description and explanation of an organization; in this case, an English-language learning center (Turgut, 2012, p. 36; Yin, 2008, 2012). Creswell (2013) defined a single case study as an illustration of “an issue, and the researcher compiles a detailed description of the setting for the case” (p. 102). Yin (2008) suggested that for “how and why” (p. 13) questions the case study has a distinct advantage because “case studies can be done by using either qualitative or quantitative evidence. The evidence may come from fieldwork, archival records, verbal reports, observations, or any combination of these” (p. 58). After accessing a complex organization, researchers can have a better understanding by “[u]nit[ing] the diverse array of evidence into a coherent picture of a reform effort” (Yin & Davis, 2007, p. 77). Lincoln and Guba (2000) have also claimed that a case study can generate a whole picture of an organization, a process they termed “holographic generalization” (p. 40). Considering the primary goals of this study, a single case study was deemed the best methodological choice.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory

The theoretical framework of this study is based upon critical theory. As aforementioned in Chapter II, critical theory focuses on participants' freedom. Wearing the lens of critical theory, I expected to emancipate participants from
silence and to look for the constructed truth (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 212). Freire (2000) used the same term, emancipation, to describe “[t]he struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons would be meaningless” (p. 44).

Looking at the relationship between a teacher and his or her supervisor, it may be difficult to determine which one is the oppressor and which one is being oppressed. Freire (2000) clearly defined both characters, “The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves” (p. 44). Conversely, “the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom” (p. 47).

This study gave participants a chance to voice their struggles as a means of addressing their oppressions.

Freire (2000) and Martin (2008) have both given examples of totalitarianism and oppression. Freire gave an example—“banking education” (Freire, 2000, p. 72; Wang & Kania-Gosche, 2010, p. 138). In this scenario, the teacher treats students like robots “to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher. The more
completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is” (Freire, 2000, p. 72).

Freire (2000) presented the attitudes and practices of oppressive society as follows:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;

(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

(d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;

(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;

(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;

(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

(j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (p. 73)

Martin (2008) used Freirian teaching to examine the U.S. college setting. He expanded Freire’s concept of oppression in the classroom and added administrators’
roles in an organization. He found that education alienation may come in the following parallel forms:

(1) Students’ lack of meaningful connection to their studies.

(2) Students’ loss of their diverse potential range of talents, skills, and interests.

(3) Students’ loss of their ability to fulfill certain basic human needs.

(4) Students’ magnification of their desire for sensory stimulation.

(5) Students’ adoption of a wide range of “false” needs.

(6) Students’ disconnection from other students.

(7) Professors’ and administrators’ disconnection from students.

(8) Professors’ and administrators’ disconnection from themselves.

(p. 35-37)

Both Freire's (2000) and Martin's (2008) theories are applicable to this study because the main purpose of this study was to emancipate the students, the teachers, or even the supervisors from being silent and neglected. As a result, this study advocates that their voice to be heard, to understand the cause and effect of feeling oppressed. Students, teachers, and even supervisors can be victims and oppressed people because of education oppression. In other words, both Freire's and Martin's theories let this dissertation function as a tool “to overthrow totalitarianism and
oppression” (Freire, 2000, p.12) and to give the three characters voices simultaneously.

**Research Questions**

Three primary research questions framed this study. Each primary research question was followed by several initial questions used in one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews. I used three primary research questions and initial questions based upon “emergent design” (Patton, 1990, p.196). Emergent designed questions consist of “the degree of flexibility and openness” (Patton, 1990, p.196). Patton (1990) stated, “A qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry. Qualitative designs continue to be emergent even after data collection begins” (p.196).

1. For administrators, what frustrations do they encounter while implementing tasks in the ESL learning center?

   (a) Do they feel empowered or powerless?

   (b) Do they have non-participating members at the center?

   (c) What is the organization culture and leadership at the center?

   (d) Do they have any issues related to fairness, trust, conflicts, etc.?

2. For teachers, what do they encounter while working in the ESL learning center?
(a) Do they feel empowered or powerless?

(b) What supports do they want (from students or administrators)?

(c) Do they apply knowledge from both educational psychology and the second language acquisition theories in their classrooms?

3. For students, what do they struggle with while learning in the ESL learning center?

   (a) Do they feel empowered or powerless?

   (b) How do they feel while studying at this center?

   (c) What are their opinions and comments about teachers’ teaching methods?

   (d) How do they feel about the center policies?

   (e) What do they need and want while studying at this center?

**Background Information on the Center**

The ESL program at this mid-sized, private, non-profit university in the Midwest provides English language instruction to undergraduate and graduate international students to prepare them for academic work at the university level. Most students have already been accepted into programs at this university but need to refine their English skills before attending academic classes. The ESL classes are geared toward students who are serious about academic studies. This program has six levels and a foundations level if a student enters below the required proficiency
to study in level one. Each level has two classes, Reading and Writing and Listening and Speaking. Grammar is not a separate course but it is incorporated into all classes.

This ESL program considers the idea that learning originates from inside and the teacher is to show the way to proficiency. Five full time instructors create lessons both in and outside the classroom to test the students to investigate the language and culture. At the same time, students adjust themselves to a U.S. university setting.

Participants

Sixteen participants were involved in this study. These sixteen participants were categorized into three groups of stakeholders: two administrators, five teachers, and nine students. First, two center directors are identified as director A and director B. Director A was a female, former director. Director B was a male, current director. Second, five full-time teachers were identified as Jeremy, Jessica, Martin, Holly, and Abby [pseudonyms]. Jeremy, Jessica, and Abby are native English speakers whereas Martin and Holly are not. Third, five Chinese students were identified as Macar, Minerva, Achilles, Fantasia, and Leto [pseudonyms] while four Taiwanese students were identified as Troy, Themis, Yathartha, and Jupiter [pseudonyms].

Director A: Two One-on-one Interviews

Director A was the previous director of the language center. She had a great experience in the field as she worked as an ESL instructor at three community
colleges for fourteen years. So far, she has taught ESL programs for seventeen years. She possesses a master’s degree in English and she majored in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Her skills and expertise are higher education, curriculum design and development, adult education, and ESL teaching.

I completed two face-to-face interviews with her and explored her working experience at this center. Each face-to-face interview was one and a half hours. The first face-to-face interview took place at her house. The second face-to-face interview took place at a restaurant.

**Director B: One One-on-one Interview**

Director B was the current director and was implementing the accreditation of this center. He possesses a master’s degree in applied linguistics and, before coming to the center, he taught ESL in Korea, Taiwan, the United States, the UAE, Kuwait, and Japan. He believed that he developed a breadth of cross-cultural experience that gave him a clear understanding of the linguistic, academic, and cultural issues faced by international students in the United States. Additionally, he had been directing another intensive English program at a state university. As the program director at the previous organization, he was responsible for faculty recruitment and training.
Five Teachers: Two Focus Group Interviews

Five participants were full-time teachers. Three were native English speakers. Two were non-native English speakers. Jeremy, Jessica, and Abby [pseudonyms] were native English speakers. Martin and Holly [pseudonyms] were non-native English speakers.

I did two focus group interviews with five teachers and investigated their teaching experiences at this center. Three were native English speakers and two were non-native speakers. Each focus group interview was one hour. The first focus group interview took place at the center, their working environment, during their lunch break. All five teachers participated in the first focus group interview. The second focus group interview took place at a restaurant right after they finished teaching. Only Jeremy, Jessica, and Holly came to the restaurant.

Nine Students: Two Focus Group Interviews

Nine participants were students enrolled in the ESL program, four Taiwanese and five Chinese. I invited twenty international students who had studied at this center for a year by emails. Only nine students responded to the e-mail and participated in the focus group interviews. Ten Saudi students made no response to the interview participation whereas one Japanese student was unable to attend the students' focus group interviews because of her class schedule.
The first student focus group consisted of nine students (four were Taiwanese and five were Chinese). The second student focus group included eight students (three were Taiwanese and five were Chinese); one Taiwanese was absent. Both interviews took place at a room in the ESL learning center. I probed their learning experiences at this center. Each focus group interview with these students was one and a half hours. Both student focus group interviews took place at the center, their learning environment, after they finished their classes.

**Pseudonyms**

The five full-time teachers and some students were still teaching and studying at the center when the interviews took place. I chose not to provide a profile for each teacher' and student' participating in this study to protect their identities. In order to give people voices without oppression from career or academic study, all participants' confidentialities were protected by using pseudonyms.

**No Gatekeepers**

Gatekeepers are people “who can provide entrance to a research site” (Creswell, 1998, p. 60) or “[who can] restrict their 'access information'” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 384). Punch (1998) defined gatekeepers as, “The determination of some watchdogs to protect their institutions may ironically be almost inversely related to the willingness of members to accept research” (p. 163). I worked at this
research site, the ESL learning center, in 2011 and Director A was my supervisor. The five ESL teachers were my colleagues. The name list of student participants were recommended by some teachers. Therefore, there was no gatekeeper in this study. However, concerning “the ethical issues” (Creswell, 1994, p. 147) and courtesy, I still notified the executive director and the current center director (director B) at this center of my research focus by e-mailing them on April 1st.

**Data Collection: One-on-one and Focus Group Interviews**

**One-on-one and Focus Group Interviews: Three Advantages**

The advantages of using one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews are (a) to create a low anxiety comfort zone for interviewees, (b) to interweave a meaningful story (concept mapping) with the group effect, and (c) to have time-efficient interviews.

First, one-on-one and focus group interviews can provide a low anxiety environment. As Dodson, Piatelli, and Schmalzbauer (2007) pointed out interviews offer people “safer space” (p. 821) to talk about their own stories, experiences, and inner voices.

Second, both interviews can interweave a meaningful story based on “synergy” (Morgan, 1996, p. 139). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stated that interviews “can be used to gain needed exploratory data” (p. 164) based on a
individual's thoughts and the group effect. In terms of Morgan (1966), the group effect of focus group interviews is “that the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other . . . [S]uch interaction offers valuable data on the extent of consensus and diversity among participants” (p. 139). The term “the group effect” (Carey, 1994; Carey & Smith, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 167; Mogan, 1996, p. 139; Morgan & Krueger, 1993) exists with a group. Researchers Frey and Fontana (1991) offered a compelling argument for the group effect of focus group interview: Focus groups are able to generate data from various voices and collaboratively craft a sequence of events (p. 167).

Third, focus group interviews are a time-efficient method. Instead of interviewing one individual at a time, “focus groups are a valuable and time-efficient method for gathering qualitative interview data from multiple participants at one time” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 189).

**Interview Processes**

Data collection consisted of two one-on-one interviews with director A, one one-on-one interview with director B, two five-teacher focus group interviews, and two nine-student focus group interviews. I interviewed director A, the five teachers, and nine students twice at completely different dates whereas I interviewed director B once. I interviewed director A one-on-one at her house and an Italian restaurant
nearby the center. I interviewed director B at his office in the center in June of this year. I interviewed the five-teacher focus group at the ESL center and the Italian restaurant near the center. The reason to interview director A and the five teachers twice at different places and on different dates was based on multiple sources of data of triangulation (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). I interviewed the nine-student focus group twice at a classroom in the ESL center. Some students did not have cars; therefore, it was difficult to interview them off-campus. The door was closed and the window of the room was covered by a poster so that no one could watch the interview process.

Research Assistant

Additionally, I hired a female research assistant, an exchange Taiwanese student who majored in English. She helped me jot down the interview notes, set up all interviews, and coded the collected data. Besides these tasks, the main task for her was to play a key role to remind me of my reflexivity by remaining cognizant of critical theory's central tenants: oppression is the result of systems of production, not persons. That is, once I empathized with each group of stakeholders or certain participants, she pulled me back to look at the whole picture of this center. Merriam (2009) once warned, empathy is “a schizophrenic activity” (p. 126), “a byproduct of data collection” (p. 137), because some researchers “cannot help but affect and be affected by the setting” (p. 137). Nevertheless, with the research assistant's constant
reminding during data collection and analysis processes, I was able to “stay
sufficiently detached to observe and analyze” (p. 137).

**Three Groups of Stakeholders: First Interview**

During the first phase of one-on-one and focus group interviews, the participants were director A, director B, the five full-time teachers, and the nine students. I created a comfortable environment as Dodson, Piatelli, and Schmalzbauer (2007) called “safer space” (p. 821), which enables all interviewees to express their true thoughts and feelings. First, I provided a participation consent form to each participant. Second, the participants were able to choose the recording form of the interview: video recorder, voice recorder, or both recorders. I followed their choice of data recording. When any participant in the five-teacher focus group or nine-student focus group had rejected the video recorder, I gave up the video record and asked them whether or not the voice recorder was fine with them (all participants agreed voice record; director A and a teacher disagreed with video record). Third, I reminded all participants of their rights to withdraw and stop the process anytime. Fourth, the 60-minute to 90-minute focus group interview started when all participants had signed their consent forms. Fifth, I asked all participants when and where the second interview could take place at their convenience. Sixth,
the first-phase interview was completed after all participants, the research assistant, and I mutually decided the time, the date, and the location for our second interview.

**Three Groups of Stakeholders: Second Interview**

During the second phase of one-on-one and the focus group interviews, the participants were director A, the three full-time teachers, and the eight students. I did not interview director B during the second phase; however, I did member checking with him during our first time interview in June. I mainly did member checking with the three groups of stakeholders; however, the second meetings with three groups of stakeholders were still considered interviews because I asked them some follow-up questions after the process of member checking. That is, the first group data were checked and the second set of new data were not. However, no changes were made to the themes after member checks.

I interviewed director A at the Italian restaurant, interviewed three out of the five teachers (Martin and Abby were no show) at a local Italian restaurant, and interviewed eight out of nine students (Jupiter was no show) at the center. I repeated the same first three interview steps: providing a participation consent form to each participant, letting the participants choose the recording form of the interview, and reminding the participants of their rights to withdraw and stop the process anytime. With all the participants’ consents, I provided the coded data, categorized themes,
and typed “verbatim transcription of recorded interviews” (Merriam, 2009, p. 110) from the same group of stakeholders for a member check (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111; Merriam, 2009, p. 217); meanwhile, I presented the coded data, categorized themes, and typed verbatim transcripts from the other groups of stakeholders for triangulation (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). The interviewed participants were able to comment or respond to the other two groups of stakeholders’ data and themes.

The Manuscript

Two one-on-one interviews with director A, one one-on-one interview with director B, two focus group interviews with the five teachers, and two focus group interviews with nine international students were digitally audio-recorded and all data from this study was kept in a locked filing cabinet. The data collected was password protected and stored on a flash drive. The hard copies of interview transcripts and field notes were shredded after the analysis was completed.

Trustworthiness Strategies

According to Yin and Heald (1975), “The case study method is mainly concerned with the analysis of qualitative evidence in a reliable manner” (p. 372). Quantitative researchers investigate internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity whereas qualitative researchers choose different vocabulary to express the same concepts. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability is similar
to the notion of reliability, confirmability relates to replace objectivity, credibility is similar to internal validity, and transferability is more applicable in qualitative research than external validity. Based on the strategies from Merriam (2009), I used four strategies: member checks, triangulation, researcher’s reflexivity, and peer review/examination (p. 229) to enhance the credibility and confirmability of this study.

**Member Checks**

First, according to Merriam (2009), member checks rule out “the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do” (p. 217) by “take[ing] your preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether your interpretation 'rings true’” (p. 217). Member checks, also known as “respondent validation” (p. 217), were used to increase the study's credibility. Member checks are “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (p. 229). The participants in this study identified and confirmed the coded data, categorized themes, and transcribed documents. Moreover, Maxwell (2005) stated that member checks can lower “the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do . . . as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (p. 111).
**Triangulation**

Second, triangulation shores up “how research findings match reality” (p. 213) by “comparing and cross-checking data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 216).

Triangulation was used to enhance for the credibility of this study. Denzin (1978) proposed four types of triangulation: (a) multiple sources of data, (different times, places, and perspectives), (b) multiple investigators, (c) multiple methods (interviews, observations, and documents), and (d) multiple theories. Of these triangulation types, I adopted the first two. The first triangulation type was to interview the same group of stakeholders (director A, the teachers, and the students) twice at the completely different dates. Furthermore, I asked one group of stakeholders questions based on the other two groups of stakeholders’ coded data, categorized themes, and transcribed documents throughout the process.

The second triangulation type was to invite a research assistant to participate in the data collection and data analysis in order to verify the emerging findings. This female Taiwanese student came to this university for a one-year-exchange program. She was a senior English-major undergraduate student at Providence University. Because of her strong English proficiency, I hired her for taking notes from the one-on-one and focus group interviews and discussing collected data with me after these interviews.
Researcher’s Reflexivity

Third, researcher's reflexivity is “related to the integrity of the qualitative researcher” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) by explaining, articulating, and clarifying researcher's biases, dispositions, “assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study at hand” (p. 219). Reflexivity was used to increase confirmability, an important component in this investigation. According to Merriam (2009), “Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p. 229). Guba and Lincoln (2005) claimed, in lieu of the human as instrument, “reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher” (p. 210). Jasper (2005) reasoned that researcher’s reflectivity “contributes to the trustworthiness of a research study” (p. 248).

In this study, I relied on myself as an internal reflexivity (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) and my research assistant as an external reflexivity, a peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). First, I did self-reflection based on my own assumptions, biases, and theoretical orientation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210; Jasper, 2005, p. 247; Merriam, 2009, p. 219; Willis, 2007, p. 3). Second, my research assistant reminded me of my reflexivity by remaining cognizant of critical theory's central tenants and through critical dialogues with me. She served as my peer debriefer and “help[ed]
keep the inquirer 'honest'” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Both internal and external reflectivity reminders helped me remain objective while interviewing all participants in this study.

**Peer Review/Examination: Another off-campus ESL teacher**

Fourth, according to Merriam (2009), peer review/examination scrutinizes “the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations” (p. 229) by inviting another expert in the same field of study or a coworker who is “familiar with the research” (p. 220). Peer review/examination calls for “‘peers' knowledgeable about the topic and the methodology review the manuscript and recommend publication” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). In the case of this study, I invited another off-campus ESL teacher to review the collected data, to verify my data interpretation, and to give some critiques about my data analysis in a restaurant at Medina, Ohio. She read and examined the analysis of findings in Chapter IV of this study. All participants' confidentialities were protected and pseudonyms were assigned to comply with this vow. This off-campus ESL teacher was unable to identify the participants of the study. In the end, she asked me some questions about the dynamics of this ESL learning center, read my interpretation and discussion in Chapter V of this study, and verified whether or not I misinterpreted the collected data used in this study.
Data Analysis: Grounded Theory

After the first round of director A's one-on-one interview, the five-teacher focus group interview, and the nine-student focus group interview, I transcribed the recordings verbatim. As Merriam (2009) noted, in spite of its “tedious and time-consuming” (p. 110) process, “verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis” (p. 110). I transcribed the interview data, coded the data, and then categorized the data based upon the themes I identified.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the theory is grounded in the data as such, data are coded and categorized based upon some of the basic/fundamental themes identified. This method is “totally inductive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 184) as a theory is constructed solely from the data.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of: (a) qualitative research, (b) single case study, (c) theoretical framework, (d) the study questions, (e) background information on this center, (f) participants, (g) data collection, (h) trustworthiness strategies, and (i) data analysis. The next chapter will provide the findings of the study.
CHAPTER IV

Introduction

This case study explored the working and studying experiences of stakeholders associated with an English as Second Language (ESL) Learning center. Two ESL center directors, five ESL instructors, and nine ESL students shared their voices and commented on this English language learning center. This chapter presents the results of one-on-one interviews, the focus group interviews, and answers to the research questions. It consists of four parts: (a) director A’s pressure, (b) director B's policy, (c) five ESL teachers’ frustrations, and (d) nine ESL students’ negative learning experiences. Each part is categorized into several themes in order to explain the results explicitly. All of the interviewed participants granted me permission to record the interviews. All participants were told that their identities would be kept confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to comply with this vow. No interviewed person was compensated in any way for his or her participation in this investigation.

Director A's Pressure

The first research question for this study was designed to reveal what frustrations an administrator encountered while implementing tasks in the center. Director A shared six major problems she faced at the center and four reasons (or
“strikes”, a term she used) she chose to leave this center: (a) an unethical organization, (b) a short-sighted vision, (c) no respect, and (d) no management concepts. The interviews with director A took place at her house. I promised this interviewee that her identity would not be revealed in this study.

A Hell

Director A mentioned that there were six major problems with (a) having no mentor, (b) no faculty trust, (c) no policy being enforced for student absence, (d) no course outlines and syllabi, (e) her perceived aggression from some Saudi students, and (f) an illogical and impractical program for ESL students when she arrived to this center. It was noted that students’ disgruntlement, unhappiness, and discouragement were high. According to director A:

By the end of the first term, which was October, that was hell. The end of the first term was hell. It was the August to October term. Because at the end of the term, you may recall, we had all program meetings and students get their grades and whether or not they are going to advance. I had every Saudi [students from Saudi Arabia] in my office, arguing with me that they would not move up, that they had not been moved up to the next level.

She almost quit her career because of the Saudi students’ disgruntlement. In order to battle with what she perceived to be the students’ irrational attitude, she looked for
her male faculty member's support. She said:

But at the end of first term, it was horrible. I almost quit. Every one of them
[the Saudi students at this center] was in my office and in my face. And some of
them I sent to my male supervisor because they were not going to take this
from a woman. They needed a man to tell them that they were not advancing.
And I pulled on my male faculty to back me up.

While battling with these Saudi students, she was also facing several adversities.

**Having no mentor: Watch and listen.** Director A stated,

The person who hired me was fired . . . So they put me in the position to watch
and listen to find out what I had in front of me and what the program actually
was. I had to learn what it was.

I asked, “Do you mean that you didn’t have a mentor?” She answered, “Right.” Thus,
she relied on herself to find out the chaotic dynamics at the center by watching and
listening.

**No faculty trust: Rebuild trust.** Director A sensed that there was no trust from
her faculty at this English language learning center. She perceived that she needed to
rebuild trust with these traumatized faculty. She reasoned:

So I spent the first semester looking at the program, learning my faculty
because they had been so traumatized by the previous director that they really
kept me at a distance. They [faculty and staff] didn’t trust me. They were afraid of me before they even got to know me . . . So I spent the first semester trying to get by my faculty; that’s mostly what I did. I didn’t do anything to change the curriculum. I didn’t do anything to change the schedule.

**No policy being enforced for student absence: Dismiss students.** The director was shocked by the fact that no policy was being enforced for student absence. She explained:

There was a policy in place, but it wasn’t being enforced. It was not conveyed to the students. So, the Saudis [the Saudi students at this center] were not attending. They were missing too many classes. There was no policy for handing in work, for--I don’t how to put this--respect, I guess, to the faculty and the other students. There were just some real behavior problems.

In order to ameliorate student attendance rates, she needed to enforce the attendance policy. Furthermore, when students did not take the policy seriously, she put students on probation; if students on probation still missed their classes, she contacted International Students Service (ISS) to dismiss students by canceling their student visas. Director A explained:

So I waited and cultivated my relationships with my faculty and [I] let the Saudis know who was in charge. So I instituted the attendance policy. I put
students on probation for not attending. [Then] I dismissed students for not attending. . . . I gave them letters of warning and letters of dismissal. I put all of these in place because none of them was there.

Of course, the Saudi students were not the only group of students who were having behavior problems by not attending classes and neglecting to assignments. It is inappropriate to state that the Saudis were the only group of students taking advantage of the system. However, director A mainly addressed the Saudi students because they were the majority of the students in the center. Furthermore, this is partly because of a program issue and partly a cultural issue.

**No course outlines and syllabi: Generate the curriculum.** Director A was very surprised that there were of no course outlines and syllabi at the center. She stated, “And there was no curriculum. And that’s the thing shocked me the most--there was no curriculum.” What was worse, “they were not giving me any syllabi. There were no syllabi. All right, so I thought if I had to accredit this program, I've got to have a program.” She also pointed out that the teachers at the center were using so-called “the retrial plan.” She explained:

What the teachers were doing was teaching the classes. And at the end of the semester or the end of the term, they were writing an evaluation of the semester and saying they were writing in the retrial plan. They were rewriting [their
sylabai or] what they had done [in the end of the term because there were no
course outlines and syllabi]. But they didn’t go in there [classroom] with a goal
concerning what they needed to do.

I was not sure about what the retrial plan was. It appeared that teachers wrote their
syllabi after they finished teaching their courses at the end of the term. In order to
understand the idea of the retrial plan, I asked, “So it was a mess?” She answered:

It was a mess. Let's say a male teacher, just for an example, taught Grammar I.

At the end of the term, he wrote out this course description form. Here is what I
taught. Here is what we used. Here is how far we got.

When I probed, “So it was backwards?”, she answered, “Yeah. If you came in the
next term to teach Grammar I, I gave you another teacher's course outline. Well, not
really. . . . That is not a plan.” Furthermore, her main goal for being hired was to
have the curriculum accredited. She stated:

I was hired and that was what I was supposed to do because they had attempted
to be accredited. . . . I looked at the accreditation requirements and I saw there
was no program accredited. When you go for accreditation, you have to have
curriculum. You can’t just say what it is. You have to show what it is. You have
to follow to course outlines. You have to show how Grammar I is, Grammar II
is, Grammar III is.
Because this information was not in place, director A was forced to generate the curriculum. When I asked her about how the curriculum was. She stated:

So I knew a lot about writing curriculum. I knew a lot about what a curriculum outline should be and what criteria should be met. So I saw half-way through my first semester I was going to have to implement course outlines.

**Director A's perceived aggression from some Saudi students: I am the BOSS, not you!** According to director A, some of the Saudi students enrolled in this program believed that they were in charge and, thus, did not respect director A.

Director A recalled, “The Saudis were dominating the program.” She recalled that the Saudi students were aggressive to her. She explained, “I realized I was going to have to lower the boom on the Saudis because the Saudi students would just run the place.” She was overwhelmed by their aggression and threats. Saudi students were the largest international student group at the center. Once they did not move up to the next English-language proficiency level at the center, they went to the center director, argued the test results, and expected to be moved up to a higher level.

When the director rejected their irrational negotiation, the Saudis threatened her by saying that they all were going to transfer to another university.

Furthermore, the Saudi students did not respect director A’s female gender. She stated:
The Saudi students, because I am a woman, were very aggressive to me--very, very aggressive. The whole fall semester I need to teach them. “No, I am a director. I am going to decide. Let me see your grades. I am going to decide if you move up. I am going to decide if you leave. I am going to decide if you get released [from the program]. You don’t decide this.”

With her determination and persistence, the center was on the right track. The Saudi students whom director A experienced finally understood that she was intransigent and steadfast in her resolve. Their grades had to meet the grade requirements at the center.

**An illogical and impractical program: Reform the whole curriculum.**

Director A sensed that this intensive English learning program was illogical and impractical because every student had to study two terms at the same level in order to move to another higher level for their English proficiency. In students’ mentality, they did not see their improvement because they were still at the same level when the second term started. Thus, director A commented on the English as Second Language (ESL) program as “non-attainable program” because students needed to take the same level and same materials twice in order to move up to a higher level. She explained:

The program was set up in a way that, to me, was non-attainable. And the
policy was that every student spent two terms at one level. But if they came
in the second term of semester, they took \textit{that} curriculum and then they had
to go back and take the first term of semester.”

When students approached her and argued with her about this, she agreed with what
students were saying. She admitted, “Because it just didn’t make sense! It caused so
much disgruntlement and unhappiness among the students . . . . And they were
arguing with me about that and they were right about that.” Thus, she reformed the
whole curriculum and transformed four levels into eight levels so that each student
could see his or her English proficiency progression.

\textbf{Why Did She Quit?}

After solving so many problems, she chose to leave. She shared four reasons
why she resigned, and explained the four strikes she encountered at the center. She
pointed out that she could not work for an organization without ethics, without
long-term vision, and without respect for her. All in all, she could not work with an
organization that lacked basic management concepts. She was fine with faculty and
students' issues because they could be solved. However, dealing with an
organization without ethics, long term vision, and respect was too much to handle.

\textbf{Strike 1: An unethical organization.} Director A believed that it was unethical
and illegal not to renew the contract of a teacher suffering from cancer. She
explained:

Strike one was a teacher, if you remember teacher Anastasia [a pseudonym]. Anastasia was the best instructor on that staff, and that includes teacher Neil [a pseudonym]; he is damn good instructor . . . . Anastasia has a master degree of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and she has university experience. She got cancer at the end of my first semester and could not complete her semester. It was in December, the second term of the fall semester. I said, “Okay, you stay home and get better. We will cover your classes.” In January, she couldn’t come back, but she’s on the contract. From March, I am starting to hear we are not going to renew Anastasia’s contract. Well, that’s totally illegal. It’s illegal in this country. You cannot fire somebody because she’s ill.

Director A discussed this issue with the executive director and reminded him that it was unethical and illegal not to renew staff’s contract because of an illness. I asked, “Who makes the decision not to renew a contact? The Provost?” She answered:

Exactly. And he [the Provost] recruited the executive director. He wanted the person in that position as the executive director . . . because he knew that they had the same mind set. Get it done. It doesn’t matter who you hurt. Just go forward. I think the executive director is that way. I don’t think the executive
director would even understand that it was wrong for him to do, for them to do to Anastasia until I talked to him. I had to fight. I had to fight . . . And I said to the executive director, “This is a Christian university, a tower of Christianity. I asked, “Where is the mercy?” She answered, “Mission and values. Even from that perspective, it was wrong.”

**Strike 2: A short-sighted vision.** A short-sighted vision implied that the university only focused on student numbers, which represented money. More students mean more money coming to the university. To state this in director A's words, “[The] student number was translated into dollars.” She also talked about a short-sighted vision of the university. She argued that most universities were “impatient” because of “too much concern with the dollars.” She claimed, “Strike 2 was a shift of focus to butts in the seats. All they cared about was how many butts in those seats. All they care about was numbers.” Because director A dismissed some students, the enrollment decreased. The university did not truly understand the reason behind the decreased enrollment. The director explained, “A lot of stuff was going on, other than the changes I was making. I dismissed students because they were not performing.” According to director A, the provost did not truly understand what she did. She stated:

The provost got scared because he saw the numbers going down. They never
understood what I was trying to do. I went to the meeting monthly. Every month I talked about: “here is next step. Here is where we are. Here is enrollment. Here is our compares. Here is the next step. Here is what I project every month.” They didn’t get it. They just didn’t get it. They didn’t understand what I was trying to do.

I asked her, “It sounds like he [the provost] was more interested in numbers than quality. Am I correct?” She answered, “Yeah! That was not what I was hired to do.”

Furthermore, her boss, the executive director, was eager to recruit as many students as possible even though the program was not in place yet. She stated:

The executive director took most of our budget and went around the world…to recruit. He went to Taiwan, Japan, China, Thailand… around the world [the director A raised her voice.] The idea was good. It was good to see how we could market this university and bring students in. But the program was not in place yet. So we were doing the Skype interviews from all over the world every Monday, or Wednesday, or whatever with him . . . And he was telling us, “I am going to have this group of Taiwanese students coming, a group of Japanese students coming, [and] we are going to do a summer program.” Wait a minute! Wait a minute! [she shouted] I don’t have a program in place for this. The executive director said, “Write one! Write one. Create a six-week program.
Create a three-week program. Just create it [she snapped her fingers].”

Director A was doubting the crisis management capabilities of her boss, the executive director. She claimed, “So here is where I am starting to think I don’t know if I can work with this man.”

What made director A irritated was that the university started pulling money out of their department budget when the university was facing a big financial crisis in the fall. Unlike other departments, she explained:

Our center is money in and money out. We don’t go to the provost and say we need to ask for the money from this university budget. Here’s our budget and it is based on tuition. So it should not be raided by the university. It was a big chunk of my budget, like 40% [when the university pulled money out of her department]. And then I operated the program on what was left over. And they came in and took more. They did that twice.

She was very frustrated and stated, “They literally didn’t leave me enough money to buy paper. This was wrong. It’s frustrating and not ethical. But the actual strike 2 was raiding my budget. They raided my budget twice in the fall.” All in all, what the entire university cared about was numbers, to be more specific, student enrollment numbers. Changes take time. As director A said, “That takes time. Building a team and changing things gradually take time. I don’t think anyone wants to wait now. I
don’t think there’s patience.” She believed that the administrators strongly focused on dollars. Because of focusing on finance, administrators became impatient, expected high student enrollment rate, and wanted a quick fix.

**Strike 3: No respect.** Director A claimed that the executive director kept undermining her work by showing no respect. She recalled:

And the third strike was in December. He [the executive director] came over and sat me down and said, “The provost is nervous about numbers. We have to go back to six levels.” Because in January, we were going to launch my four-level program, four intakes. He said, “The provost is nervous because of the numbers, because of the income. I have to go back six intakes.” I was very calm. I looked at him and asked, “Why?” He answered, “Because of the numbers and the money.” So, I said, “this is basically all about numbers and money. This isn’t about accreditation. It’s not about students’ retention.” He said, “We have lost too many students at the end of December term. We lost 20.” I said, “But 14 of them were going to this university. It was the highest number ever going to this university. Doesn’t he [the provost] see that? I mean this university is retaining the money [She raised her voice]. Doesn’t he [the provost] see that?” He [the executive director] said, 'No, he [the provost] only looked at the center.'
I further asked her, “If you keep more and more students in the center, you are going to have very high transfer rate [because not many students can afford $3,500 the United States Dollar (USD) for a seven-week ESL term], right? This is why I don’t understand.” She answered:

Well, I didn’t understand that either. His mind [the provost] was very narrow, narrow. He would just want to look at the center numbers, and not see it as a feeder for this university. As I said to the executive director, “Does he [the provost] not see [that]? Did you tell him that out of these 20 students are leaving, 14 are staying at this university.”

While the executive director was trying to convince her to change the students' English as Second Language (ESL) levels again, she decided to leave. She stated:

I remember sitting there and thinking, 'I am out of here. This is the last straw.' This is strike 3 because it’s undoing everything I have been working on for a solid year. And just as I am ready to launch it, he wants to undo it. Not for the reason of pedagogy. Not for the good for students. Not for the good for the faculty, but because of dollar sign. And I don’t want to work at this place. That made me feel disrespected. For him to sit here and say, 'Let’s do 6 levels. Let’s do 5 [levels] and start to map it out.' Totally ignoring my expertise as an ESL instructor, I thought, 'Nope!'
She shared with me that the executive director did not respect her expertise. She explained:

He did not respect me. He didn’t respect what I do. And he didn’t respect my experience. And in the end, that’s why I left because I was not being respected.

And it was my knowledge and my experience he did not respect. And I also happened to think he did not respect to my gender, but that’s just my own opinion, or my age.

Strike 4: No management concepts. The executive director hired a young lady called Katrina [a pseudonym]. Katrina just graduated from this university. She did not have a degree in education K-12. The executive director made her teach a class called American Culture Class; eventually, both the inexperienced teacher and ESL students suffered. According to director A:

She was a kiddo! [She raised her voice.] He [the executive director] hired her to do activities and it was supposed to be part-time. But then he threw a class at her [raised her voice]. He hired her for part-time and she worked full-time that summer. She was in my office, crying every day. She was so overwhelmed and did not know what to do, did not know how to manage. It was a mess.

When I asked why her boss, the executive director, did not anticipate the aftermath or think of the solution in advance, she explained that her really did not comprehend
the situation:

He never understood what we were doing. He did not understand my job. He did not take the time to learn what I was doing. He did not understand what the international club adviser was doing. The adviser was working two jobs, maybe three [jobs]. The bottom line is he did not believe that the people in the department of International Student Services (ISS) work hard enough. He thought we were slackers. He didn’t think faculty were working enough. He did not want the faculty to be off on Fridays.

Director A pointed out that the executive director kept undoing her work. She stated:

He was talking out of two sides of his mouth is what I am saying. He wanted to add all this other stuff. But then when I went to divide the time differently in order to change the program in the direction that I wanted to go, he said no. He got picky. So that was a factor.

Director A attributed her boss’ lackluster management to his ignorance. She explained:

The instinct of the others in the international program on International Student Services (ISS) is that he didn’t have the proper background for this job actually was coming true. He didn’t really know enough about international education. That’s okay, but he did not take time to learn.
I asked director A, “Why doesn’t he humbly accept people’s suggestions? Like when you give people suggestions, sometime we would take some time to ponder it and to reflect.” She answered, “No, no, no, no. There is no reflection. There is yes or no.” She described her boss as a person who was “stubborn and too quick to decide.” She stated:

I am a ponderer. When we would have a faculty meeting and talk about things, I rarely made a quick decision. I would say, 'Okay. Let me think about this.' I also got input because I didn’t want to be responsible solely for these decisions. I got input from faculty and I listened to it. In the end, I had to make a decision. But I wanted to respect them, their knowledge and their experience, the way I wanted him to respect me.

The Other Two Groups of Stakeholders

Director A told me that she “got the students on board with her.” She gave me an example:

I was a little proud of that. Because a lot of students were Saudi students who I had turned around. They were in trouble when I came [knock on the table]. They were not attending, they were not doing their work. And I turned them around. There were four or five of them who got their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL) scores in the end.
This spoke to the lack of organization of the program. When I asked her whether or not there were any conflicts between her and teachers, she answered, “No.” She explained, “In terms of the staff, I protected them. I felt that was my job. I just feel a good director does it.”

However, director A stated that most of her pressure was from the executive director and the provost. She believed that her supervisor, the executive director, had no reflection, no international education background, no experience, and no management capabilities. In addition, he was unwilling to listen to people's suggestions. She also commented that the provost had a “narrow mind,” a short-sighted vision of the development of the university.

**Director B’s Policies**

The director B was a current director. When I interviewed director B, I mainly asked him about the accreditation of this program and his management of this center. His interview data was categorized into nine themes: (a) accreditation, (b) problems of this center, (c) curriculum, (d) students, (e) professional development, (f) trust and support, (g) administration, (h) grammar, and (i) students' self-learning.
Accreditation

I asked director B what his main task was. He told me that it was accreditation for this center. He explained accreditation to me and provided a very clear picture of accreditation. He stated:

When I came in June of last year, I was tasked by the provost with getting CEA accreditation for this ESL center. This is in part due to a recent legislation [signed] by President Obama that requires language institutions to be accredited through either one of two nationally recognized accrediting agencies CEA, the Commission on English Accreditation or another group called ACCASSET, I think. This center had been in the process of applying for CEA accreditation since 2007. So they were five years into the process. They had already reached the point where they should have done a site visit, done an extension, done another extension and there was some concern that that was going to be problematic for the program. One of the key priorities, as I came into this, was to prepare the program for this accreditation with CEA.

Problems of This Center

When director B was preparing this center for the CEA accreditation, he pointed out there were three main problems in this center: the curriculum, and
assessment, the professional credentials of the staff. These three problems were going to sabotage the CEA accreditation. He claimed:

Now, as I looked at the CEA that was available at that point, I saw a number of problems. There were problems with the way the program approached the curriculum, there were problems with assessment, and there were problems with the professional credentials of the staff. . . . In other words, the teachers did not have the appropriate professional qualifications for the position that they were doing.

**Curriculum**

Because director B mentioned the curriculum at this center, I asked him to provide more information and to help me understand the curriculum here. He believed that the curriculum was lacking accountability because some instructors did not make the decision of English proficiency for the students. He asserted:

Again, going back to the time that I started, there had been a transition I think in May that moved from a four level program in which each level was a semester long with a bridge to an academic bridge program and that system had been migrated to a six level program. And the issues that arose from that was that they did not take into account the academic bridge program. So the main problem with the curriculum at that point was lack of accountability. Lack of
accountability was endemic in the program at every level so there were no mechanisms in place for review and reflection of processes and there was no accountability and that the center instructors did not make the decision of English proficiency for the students, it was the transition classes. In other words, the instructors had no accountability. They would get to level four and then the students would take [academic] courses and if they passed those courses with a certain percentage then they met proficiency and if not they stayed in this center. So the actual decision for English proficiency rested with people who were not also necessarily trained in the field and qualified to make those decisions.

Students

Director B believed that this center was helping ESL students with their English proficiencies, academic success, and Western culture. He confirmed, “We have three tracks in our program. We prepare our students linguistically, academically, and culturally. So we address all of those.” Additionally, he thought that the students at this center felt comfortable with me. He declared:

I think that on all levels we’re pretty healthy so. I think we've gotten to a point where at least through the program evaluations and exit interviews, I think the students feel comfortable with me. If they’ve got issues they bring them to me
and I try to resolve them. Or sometimes an instructor will identify an issue and then alert me and we’ll deal with that.

**Professional Development**

Director B reported that this center had regular professional development. The curriculum coordinator was responsible for the professional development. They called it periodic development, which took place twice per term at this center. He confirmed:

> We have regular professional development and we have a curriculum coordinator who has a half-time load and is responsible for seeing to those. . . that’s part of the CEA requirement. . . Well, we have periodic development at staff meetings, we have implemented an independent reading lab that allows for one or two instructors to monitor while the rest of the faculty engage in professional development. . . Well, it’s ongoing but when we first implemented it two terms ago, we did it twice during the term and we did it twice again last term. And then we may do it more frequently.

**Trust and Support**

I asked director B to describe his working relationship at this center. He declared that he trusted and supported his faculty and he had a professional working
relationship with his staff and faculty. He also provided some examples to explain his trust and support. He reasoned:

I wouldn’t characterize it as family; I don’t think that’s professional. I think that we’ve got a professional working relationship. I have instructors who are qualified in their field and they demonstrate their abilities to me when I do observations, and through professional development discussions. And I have a very cordial relationship with the faculty and I trust them to do their jobs and to do that well. And I will give them the support that I can to see that that happens. . . Well, when I say support I mean that if an instructor, for example, came to me and said they’ve got an issue with a class then I would want to support that. If they came to me and said they would like to present at the TESOL conference but it’s during the week and they would have to miss classes, I would support that. If they had some reason why they wanted to do a particular activity I would want to support that so the support is wide spread. I mean it could be in multiple areas.

Administration

Because director B talked about how he trusted and supported his staff and faculty, I asked him whether or not he felt being empowered by his supervisor, the
executive director. He answered, “Absolutely, yeah, from day one.” He agreed that he was empowered with trust and support from the upper administrators.

**Grammar**

The students at this center only had two classes. One was the listening and speaking class and the other was the reading and writing class. I asked the director why they did not have a grammar class to help ESL students with their academic writing. Director B pointed out that they did not have an explicit approach to grammar instruction; however, they did not separate grammar from context. He responded:

If by your definition grammar is syntax, then in any sentence the student speaks, they’re dealing with syntax or grammar. With any sentence the student writes they’re dealing with syntax or grammar. So, it’s not that we don’t have a grammar class, we don’t have an explicit approach to grammar instruction. We don’t divorce grammar from context. Alright, so, the listening and speaking class obviously includes grammar. And the reading and writing class obviously includes grammar. And what we know from years and years of practice in the field that students can master grammar rules and yet not be able to produce utterances and expressions with accuracy and that’s because of the nature of the role of context in determining the correct grammar. So it’s more of a just syntax,
it also involves who you’re talking to. What is the message you internally want
to convey. . . We employ communicative methods, yes, but. There is a lot more
to quote grammar than just practicing commutative activities. There is
awareness raising, there’s practice, there’s repetition drills, but clearly if
students are making grammatical errors in their production then that’s the place
to begin instruction.

**Students' Self-learning**

Director B believed that ESL students acquired their English proficiencies
because they internalized the English language and used English to interact with
other students. Therefore, students were responsible for their own learning. He
claimed:

Learning comes from within the student not from the teacher. . . but language
isn’t like that. Language is interactive, and language is internal. Language is
social and cultural and so. . . ideally students will take responsibility for their
own learning by identifying their strengths and weakness and then devising
strategies to approach those. . .

**The Other Two Groups of Stakeholders**

As director B himself pointed out he had no problems with the students and
the teachers. He believed, “[T]he students feel comfortable with me. If they’ve got
issues they bring to me and I try to resolve them.” Additionally, he argued that he trusted and supported his staff and faculty. He claimed that “I have a very cordial relationship with the faculty and I trust them to do their jobs and to do that well. And I will give them the support that I can to see that that happens.” However, his belief and claim did not match five teachers' interview data and nine students' interview data.

**Five ESL Teachers’ Frustrations**

The five ESL teachers (Jeremy, Jessica, Martin, Holly, and Abby [pseudonyms]) experienced both director A and director B. Director A is female. She was a previous director of this center. I interviewed her in April. Director B is male. He was a current director at this center. I interviewed him in June. Jeremy, Jessica, and Abby are native American-English speakers whereas Martin and Holly are not. They shared their feelings and commented on both directors. Under both directors’ supervision, they gave more credits to director A than to director B. They pointed out five flaws of director B: (a) oppression, (b) no communication, (c) no teaching expertise, (d) no trust, and (e) race and gender discrimination. As far as issues with students, they claimed that “students are students. They come here to learn.” These educators taught foreign students at the center for international students who were learning to become more proficient in English. They agreed to
speak with me and to have the interviews recorded on an audio recorder. All five of these teachers met as a group with me at the center and at a restaurant.

**Oppression**

According to the group, some described the center as full of (a) disrespect, (b) discouragement, (c) poor interpersonal skills, (d) no academic freedom, and (e) dictatorship.

**Disrespect.** I started with the first question, asking these five teachers’ feelings at working at this center. Holly answered, “Uncomfortable.” She felt discouraged. She reported that she felt:

> Like a fish out of water or rather like a person, but is constantly harassed. You [teachers] don’t have any value. Nothing is good enough, unless you do what I [director B] am telling you to do. That’s the way to do. So all the experience you bring in, everything you know how to teach doesn’t count. You have to do what they tell you to do. And you have to believe that that is the right way of doing it, which I don’t agree.

I confirmed the response with a question, “Do you mean like sort of disrespect?” Holly answered, “Oh, yeah [raising her voice]! Yeah! Absolutely!” Jeremy agreed with the term *disrespect*. He explained, “I think we feel uncomfortable [because] the curriculum was so dramatically changed. I’ve been here through so many changes.”
Discouragement. Teaching at the center was discouraging. Holly talked about writing classroom summaries. However, she argued, “Once you give him [director B] the summary, it’s never ever good enough. Ever!” Martin claimed, “Everything is wrong. Everything you’re doing now is not right, it is wrong.” Jessica responded, “The people are wrong. And the plan is wrong.”

Poor interpersonal skills. Jessica sharply pointed out that director B and the curriculum coordinator at this center had poor interpersonal skills. This also explained many visible and invisible conflicts at this center. She described:

I think a lot of problems are [related to] interpersonal skills. They [the director B and the curriculum coordinator] don’t know how to treat people. So even when they might have some good ideas about teaching, they don’t know how to communicate them. They offend people. So then that offense creates a wall.

Then nobody wants to learn from them because you don’t want to get hurt again.

Jessica suggested:

If they [director B and the curriculum coordinator] presented it, and explained and took time in a kind of loving, we-care-about-you, we-trust-you manner, even to students, they might have taken it better than they did. But what happened was they just did it. And then when people showed resistance,
[both director B and the curriculum coordinator would think] “let’s just fight them because we are the best.”

**No academic freedom.** Jeremy shared, “They [director B and the curriculum coordinator] give us the freedom. He [director B] said, 'You should be able to teach. Whatever you want, use the material you want.' But that’s kind of that way, kind of not.” When I asked Jeremy to explain “kind of that way, kind of not,” he asserted:

> I can use the material I want, but I can’t teach it and present it the way I want. I think it’s being an effective educator if you can do multiple things in your classroom and use different styles because everyone learns differently. You can’t just teach. You can’t teach directly. So that is why I am not happy here because I don’t feel comfortable in the classroom.

**Dictatorship.** According to the faculty group, the director led the team with a dictatorial style. The main task of director B was to have the ESL program accredited. If he had failed the ESL accreditation, he likely would have been asked to step down. According to Abby, “He [director B] was hired for one job, one very specific purpose, and that is for the Commission on English Language Accreditation (CEA). That’s been lingering long time.” I asked, “If he didn’t finish that, he needs to leave?” All three teachers, Jeremy, Jessica, and Abby, simultaneously answered, “Yes!” Jessica continued saying, “Yes, he is afraid. He is afraid.” Jessica further
explained:

I think that’s the whole issue. Everything else is less important. He [the
director B] said that [she emphasized]. He is honest about what he is doing. He
wants people to agree with him completely because he said, “If you don’t want
[to agree with me], then you go.”

I asked, “Like you need to completely agree with me, otherwise you need to leave?”

Jessica rephrased, “If you are not supportive, you are not staying.” Martin used an
alternative, or more specifically, an euphemism to describe the situation. He claimed,
“We should be all on the same page.” However, Abby suddenly responded, “What is
the page? Where is the page? Can you show me the page?” Both Holly and Abby
agreed that director B changed many things so that they had difficulty in
determining his thoughts. Compared to director A and director B, Holly claimed,
“She [director A] has a lot of sense. She knows how to do [things]. She knows how
to teach. She would never go this route [director B's dictatorship management]. Ever.
Radical!”

When I asked again if the word dictatorship fit the current situation at the
center now, both Abby and Jessica immediately agreed. Jessica further shared a
correspondence between her and director B:

The director himself said that he’s going to be a general. That’s what he told me.
He told me personally. He said, “We have to get the CEA [the Commission on English Language Accreditation] stuff. Anyone who does not support me will be gone. I have to be a general! You have to understand. I have to be a general!”

No Communication

All teachers agreed that many miscommunication issues existed at this center. Martin attributed the miscommunication as a “different philosophy.” He further explained, “It is different philosophy of teaching. Each time a new director comes in, they bring in their own philosophy of teaching. This one is very different.” Holly argued that director B did not explain things clearly. She claimed, “He [director B] never told us what he wants. He never told us what a good book is. We never saw him teaching.” The teachers provided two examples of the communication problems at this center: (a) a lot of changes in curriculum and (b) no grammar instruction.

A lot of changes in curriculum. Martin argued that a lot of changes existed at the center and he felt frustrated because these changes were incoherent. He said:

I am satisfied with teaching the class. But I am not happy with the whole situation, [and what happened to] my colleagues. Look at the program. [There are] a lot of changes. That’s really frustrating. You [teachers] have to start from scratch. There are a lot of variables could change everything.
Jeremy commented on curriculum changes and how teachers were not told about some changes. He added, “I think we feel uncomfortable especially [when] the curriculum was dramatically changed. I’ve been here through so many changes.” He went on sharing director B's policy, **communicative method**, which was less teachers' talking and more students' talking. Jeremy recalled that director B stated percentage of communicative method: 20% of teachers' talking and 80% students' discussion. Nonetheless, he highly doubted the policy. He argued:

> When we came back from vacation in August, I was warned. We came in and talked like we always did. And then he [director B] reports back saying that we are not teaching [correctly] because we do not teach in the way that he wants us to teach which is just sit back and let the students teach themselves.

**No grammar instruction.** Another obvious example of no communication at the center is the grammar instruction. All teachers claimed that they needed to teach students the English grammar “secretly” because “they [students] need it [the English grammar] so desperately.” According to Holly, “They [students] don’t know anything. They need everything.” In terms of the director B’s principles, communicative method meant to make students discuss topics and communicate their ideas or thoughts to one another. Students integrated grammar while communicating with their teachers and other students. According to the director B,
this method should be modus operandi at the center so that each student could
acquire English proficiencies while communicating with one another and outputting
what they have learned in the classroom. Additionally, as far as the teachers’
understood, director B expected students to teach one another instead of receiving
the teaching from teachers. Jeremy argued, “When I first came back in August, you
[other teachers] had mentioned that things are different. So I am like I don't know
how to teach. Like I didn’t know I wasn’t supposed to teach.” Jessica added, “If you
want me to teach them without teaching them, I don’t know how to do it.” Holly
asserted, “They [students] are totally lost. They don’t know anything. Worse than
anything you could imagine. And it’s really, really sad to see how much money is
being wasted.”

The main purpose of this method was to let students discover the English
grammar rules by themselves. However, in the words of Jeremy, “But honestly, they
don’t discover by themselves [without teachers’ instruction].” When I asked the five
teachers whether or not the executive director and director B asked them not to teach
grammar anymore, four of them indicated that they were never directly told not to
teach grammar. It just was an unspoken understanding. Jessica asserted, “They
[director B and the curriculum coordinator] didn’t say that.” She further explained,
“What we are trying to do is sneak the basic knowledge without getting in trouble.”
No Teaching Expertise

The teachers maintained that director B was unprofessional because of lack of (a) schema theory, (b) professional development, (c) academic preparation, (d) clear grading scales, and (e) assessments. For the record, each ESL student at this center paid up to $3,500 USD for a seven-week term. Holly expressed her sadness when she talked about this. She stated, “I feel so sad. The students are paying high price for . . . a price of frustration, of not learning enough, not being able to write. I feel so embarrassed to see that. It’s really, really sad.”

Lack of schema theory. When director B launched the communicative method and expected students to pick up the English grammar rules at the center, he neglected schema theory. Schema is students’ past acquired experiences and preexisting knowledge. The center director adopted communicative method; therefore, students should communicate with one another based on their past and preexisting knowledge. However, students were unable to communicate, discuss, or even talk about any topics if they were unfamiliar with the background knowledge of these topics. In other words, higher-level students who had more vocabulary and English proficiency generated good learning outcomes because they understand what is going on and they can follow the discussions and conversations. On the other hand, low-level students with very little vocabulary and limited English
proficiency were lost and overwhelmed because they encountered too many vocabulary or completely new and unknown topics.

Martin explained that he put students together and let them communicate to one another in the classroom because he “let them discover things on their own.” Nevertheless, Jeremy responded, “But they don’t discover because they are not aware of it.” Martin admitted that a few students could discover new content if teachers drew students’ “attention.” Jeremy provided an example:

For example: writing. I told you [Martin] about this as well. You have a student who desperately needs help with parallel grammar [structure], writing, and what tense to write in. And I said, “You have a problem about your verb tense.” But he [the student] has no idea. And I said, “OK. You need to use the past perfect.” And he has no idea. He needs help. And there is no one there [who] can help him. He doesn’t have any formal instruction, so you give him an online website. But he still needs someone there to explain it.

Both Jeremy and Martin agreed that the current program was only for the “highly motivated” students. Martin asserted that the current ESL program at the center was about “perfection.” Jeremy further explained, if students had come in with good English proficiency, they would have been able to communicate with others and acquire knowledge. On the other hand, if students had come in with limited English
proficiency, they couldn't have had the capability to communicate with other classmates and they would have learned very little knowledge. In other words, the communicative method advocated by director B only fit higher-level and highly motivated students. Martin claimed, “You are teaching perfect students.” Jeremy told everyone in the interview room:

I always suggest to any student who comes in, because I am very honest with them ever since I was told, “If you come in below level four, transfer! Because you will never pass, you are never going to pass.”

After I expressed my gratitude for Jeremy's honest answer, Jeremy explained why students at the lower level are never going to pass the ESL classes. “Because we are not teaching the correct format to be able to get to the level that they want you to be, to graduate from level 6. They are not being given the background that they need.”

Jeremy provided another example:

A lot of our students come from a language where grammar doesn’t have the complex grammar the English has. So they don’t have that knowledge. Use Chinese for example, what is the past participle of go? Well, in Chinese, there is no past participle of go. They don't even know what it is.

I asked Jeremy whether or not he was talking about schema and background knowledge for students, he asserted, “Yes. That was why I said. Again. If you come
in at the lower level, you will never get out.” In addition, Holly was opposed to adopting communicative method at the lower level because of lack of schema and background knowledge. She pointed out:

What’s the value of communication? There is no meaning. That’s why I keep asking myself: “How can I make a level 1 [the very beginning level] student [keep] communicating, communicating, communicating” [She expressed this with irritated tone]? But they don’t have the vocabulary. They don’t know the grammar. They don’t know anything. What are they going to communicate? [Communicate] what? You have to model for us. At least give them some hints and some clues. Give them something. Just give them something. Then you can collect.

Holly was completely opposed to the communicative method and admitted that she did not know how to teach students with communicative method. She argued, “I don’t know how to do it [communicative method] because I don’t know. I am happy I am out. I don't know this. I don’t understand that.”

**Lack of professional development.** Jessica stated they were puzzled because of no teaching demonstrations. She explained, “It might make more sense if he [director B] demonstrates it. You know? Show us what he meant. Instead of just talking about it, show us what you want us to do it.” Jeremy further added, “about
the professional development, it is a lack of professional development. We were
supposed to have professional development.” When I challenged the five teachers by
asking, “But you have the Ohio Teaching English to Other Languages (TESOL) conference,” Jeremy answered, “We are not allowed to go to that. Basically, well, yes, we were. But he [director B] didn’t like the idea of all of us going [to Ohio TESOL conference].”

Furthermore, Jeremy pointed out that their director B and curriculum coordinator did not know how to help teachers with their professional development. He provided an example:

We have professional development day. One day, we had director B and our curriculum coordinator coming. The director was trying to do a reading scale. Someone asked a question, so they spent rest of the time searching on the computer for them to find lexical skill. They had no idea. So they had to spend the rest of the time while we were sitting here and playing games. You are the curriculum director and the curriculum coordinator, and you are supposed to know all of this, present the material, and, present examples, so that we are learning. Not what do you [teachers] guys think? For me, that is a waste of time. I am here to learn something, not to teach you. I mean we don't know. You [the director B and the curriculum coordinator] are telling us. You are asking us [he
raised his voice]. We give you what we think what you want, and, of course, it is not right. What do you want?

**Lack of academic preparation.** Teachers agreed that the communicative teaching method was not effective and made students guess all the time. Holly argued:

Communicative style does not require that students guess all the time. And they are not instructed on how to do it better. What is going on here is crazy. We choose either do their way, then [students] learn absolutely nothing, or we hide what we are doing in class and we teach them according to good sense. We need to teach them. We are the managers in the classroom. We coach them. We have to guide them how to learn.

Jeremy confirmed, “Sometimes they [students] need lectures.” Abby responded, “We are not allowed to do that [lectures].” Holly agreed, “We are not allowed. But at least we need to show them the way. But they [students] have to find it themselves [now].” When I inquired about whether or not the teachers were not allowed to lecture in the classroom, Jeremy provided a percentage: “It’s supposed to be 20% for speaking and 80% for students.” Teachers Holly, Abby, Martin, Jeremy all agreed that the communicative teaching method was only suitable for advanced students. Holly declared, “Unless they come here ready and then we prefect them, they would
never make it.” Abby confirmed, “They will never make it. There is no way.”

In addition, the English as Second Language (ESL) program did not prepare students to meet academic study requirements. Jeremy argued that if they did not help students acquire the capability of being lectured and jotting down their notes in the classroom, most students were going to encounter many academic difficulties when they finished their ESL program. He explained:

We are not preparing them for undergraduate classes in the university, because that is mainly lecture. You [the undergraduate students] sit there, you take notes, you [he raised his voice] don’t say too much for undergraduate classes. Yet! In English classes, you write an essay, but I think we are not preparing them for what they are going to encounter in the classroom. For graduate school courses, you have to be more interactive. But for undergraduate courses, you basically sit there and listen to professors.

**Lack of clear grading scales.** Second, director B did not provide clear grading scales at this center. Teachers needed clear grading scales because clear grading scales could help teachers evaluate students' English proficiencies. Both teachers Jeremy and Jessica talked about no grammar standard at the center. Jeremy argued, “That’s something we need. We don’t have that.” Jessica further agreed, “We don’t have that.”
Meanwhile, Jeremy pointed out that the curriculum coordinator “did not know how to teach grammar.” Jeremy stated, “The coordinator said, too, that he never teaches grammar.” I was very surprised and tried to verified the fact with a question, “Really? He told you in person?” Holly jumped into the conversation and argued, “He said he never ever uses a grammar book. He doesn’t even use a book. He told us.” Jeremy repeated, “the curriculum coordinator told us he doesn’t know how to teach grammar. He’s never taught grammar.” Holly commented, “It’s because he doesn’t like it, doesn’t know way, doesn’t know how to teach it.” Jeremy emphasized, “This is what I say you come in the lower level, you would never get out of here.” Without a clear grading scale for every class, teachers did not know how to evaluate students' English proficiencies. Students' English grammar was one of examples. Despite having English speaking fluency, students still made many grammatical mistakes. Jeremy shared a conversation between him and an English professor at this university, “When I talked to the English professor, she [the professor] gets their ideas, but their grammar is awful, grammar is awful.”

**Lack of assessments.** Director B did not assess the program. To be more specific, he did not adopt any English proficiency assessments. Jeremy reasoned that no assessments caused a lack of understanding of students' English proficiencies. Students were puzzled, as were the teachers. He declared:
There are ways of assessing the program to see if we’re doing what we are supposed to do. We don’t have any way of assessing the program. We don’t have an outcome. Like in the past, we used to have the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam. This was something to assess the program. Ok, if I were teaching level 4 writing and they couldn’t pass the proficiency for TOEFL level 4 for writing, then obviously, I wasn’t doing my job as far as saying, yes, they passed. Or we used to have a Michigan Test [“The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) is a general proficiency test for adult non-native speakers of English who will need to use English for academic purposes” (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012)] every level. And if they weren't progressing, then we weren’t teaching what we were supposed to teach. You have clear outcomes. That’s something we don’t have now [they had assessments and evaluations for students under director A].

No Trust

There appeared to be very little trust within this center under director B’s supervision. The previous director also mentioned that she encountered the faculty trust issues; however, she perceived that she needed to rebuild trust (see An ESL Administrator's Pressure in Chapter IV). Three examples given by teachers explicitly illustrated distrust under director B’s supervision: dear diary,
micro-managing, and lack of trust in director B. Jessica described the no trust situation as follows:

You don’t feel like you’re trusted. You just feel like a child most of the time because you’re questioned so much about everything that you do. But it’s not like everything they’ve done is evil and wicked. It’s just that people started to get that feeling because they have been mistreated. It’s kind of put on negative glare over everything.

**Dear diary.** Director B asked the five full-time teachers to write reports of their classes. The teachers did not believe there was necessity to do it. Therefore, they sarcastically nicknamed the report, *dear diary.* They considered the reports as a representative of distrust. According to the five teachers, the director questioned whatever they wrote in the report, which frustrated them. Holly asserted:

And there is no trust [she raised her voice]! We have to report like idiots. Dear diary! He [Jeremy] makes up his diary . . . . Because whatever you write, there is not good enough. It’s never good. And then he [director b] writes back asking why you are doing this, why you are doing that. It’s none of your business [she raised her voice]! It’s my class. I know what I am doing.

Otherwise, don’t have me here.

When I asked the group whether or not they have received encouragement after
turning in their reports, Jessica responded, “No.”

**Micro-managing.** Abby brought in a term, *micro-managing*, toward the middle of the interview. According to *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, the word *micromanage* means “to manage or control very closely, as by making decisions about even the smallest details, often so as to be regarded as acting inefficiently or counterproductively” (Agnes & Guralnik, 2001, p. 910). She argued that director B was using micro-managing at the center. She further explained that it was “humiliating.” Holly agreed that it was “embarrassing.” Jeremy concluded, “But again, this goes back to mistrust.”

**Lack of trust in Director B.** Director B told Jessica that students had more trust in the teachers than in him. Jessica shared, “Because they [the students at this center] trust us, not him [director B]. That’s what he said.” Jeremy explained, “If you look out in the hallway, the door [director B's door] is always closed. I asked students before, “How often do you see the director?” [Jeremy was insinuating not many students saw the director.]”

**Race and Gender Discrimination**

The group shared two types of discrimination at this center: race and gender. Holly is a foreign teacher at this center. She complained:

Now if you wear pants, then we have another situation. Girls are not welcome
[as well as] foreigners. If I have an accent [while speaking the English language], it’s not good. He [director B] wrote one of our colleagues [and talked about] how bad it is to have me here because I have an accent. Jeremy turned his head, facing Holly and added, “Well, you’re going to notice. It’s okay for me to do it, but not for you [implying gender discrimination].” Holly concluded, “Huh. You see? There is no consistency.” With a sense of being discriminated at this center, some teachers did not have trust in director B and the curriculum coordinator. They collected e-mails related to race and gender discrimination. Jeremy went along with the idea. He shared with me, “We keep the proof and evidence [of race and gender discrimination].”

The Other Two Groups of Stakeholders

When I asked the five teachers whether or not they had any issues with students at the center, they all agreed that there were no issues with students. Abby concluded, “Students are students. They come here to learn. They are pretty much very nice.” However, most teachers agreed that the communicative method enforced by director B did not help all students at the center. As teachers Jeremy and Martin stated, the communicative method might help highly motivated ESL students, but not every student. Teachers Holly and Abby felt sad for students because they spent so much money and learned very little.
The teachers agreed that they had many problems in this uncomfortable working environment as stated above. While sharing their relationship with the supervisor, director B, they felt oppressed, disrespected, discouraged, and distrusted. Furthermore, because of director B's “micro-managing” (stated by teachers Abby and Holly) and “dictatorship” (stated by teachers Abby and Jessica) leadership style, teachers became silent and believed that there was “no communication” at this center. On the other hand, they expected to be empowered by director B, to have more academic freedom to teach their classes, and to have clear grading scales.

**Nine ESL Students’ Negative Learning Experiences**

I e-mailed twenty students who had one-year studying experience at this center. They were from China, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. They had a different level of English proficiency. Some at the intermediate level had basic English communication capabilities. Some at the advanced level were in the graduate programs at this university. I received no response from the Saudi students. A student from Japan was unable to participate in the student focus group because of her academic schedule. Nine students (five students from China and four students from Taiwan) participated in the focus group interview. Five Chinese students' pseudonyms were Macar, Minerva, Achilles, Fantasia, and Leto. Four Taiwanese students' pseudonyms were Troy, Themis, Yathartha, and Jupiter. Each student had
studied at this center for almost one year. All of the international students in this study volunteered to be interviewed for this investigation. The focus group was held at this ESL learning center. The students were aware that the interviews were being taped with audio recorders.

They shared their complaints about (a) too many unpleasant changes, (b) unclear grading scales, (c) no grammar classes, (d) not worthwhile program, and (e) arbitrary management at this ESL center. In the end of the interview, they shared why they still stayed at this ESL program to study in spite of many complaints.

**Too Many Unpleasant Changes**

Some participants claimed that there were too many changes at the center. Before the curriculum, level, test, and policy adjustments, they enjoyed studying at this center because they felt encouraged. I asked the group whether or not they considered this center as an encouraging learning institution, Themis answered, “I think before they did [consider it to be a learning friendly center].” Troy responded, “It was like a family here. They want[ed] to have you [graduate from here] and go to your graduate study or undergraduate study. But right now, the teachers just like to keep you here.” Minerva argued, “Before the change, we enjoyed studying.” When I asked the group whether or not they felt frustrated studying here, both Macar and Minerva agreed that they did.
One of many changes was the classroom hours. Students stated that they only had two classes per day during weekdays. One was a combination of listening and speaking. The other one was reading and writing. Regardless of having five or ten minutes for a break, every class was two hours long. When I asked them if they felt tired in a two hour class, Minerva kept nodding her head and argued that “we focus on many things during two hours.”

Another example of many changes was the grading scale. After experiencing six major problems at the center (see An ESL Administrator's Pressure in Chapter IV), director A reformed the curriculum and built a clear grading scale. Students agreed that they had a clear report card and a grade scale under director A's supervision. Minerva reported, “We had to have the 75% to pass. We had the score. We had the test. We had the final test. At the end, we knew if we could pass or not.” Before director B came to the center, the policies remained the same. Students had clear grading scales for all courses. They had 20% for their daily attendance, 35% for their assignment grades. Achilles gave an example: “So if these put together, it would be 55%. So for the test and exam, if we did well, we could have passed. We knew that we could pass.”

After director B changed the grading, students felt lost. Achilles added, “after the director [B] came here, everything changed.” They claimed that they did not
have a clear report card and a comprehensible grade scale to follow. Therefore, they
did not know what they should do in order to pass their courses.

**Unclear Grading Scales**

Student participants pointed out that teachers did not provide clear grading scales, rubrics, and standards; therefore, it depended on teachers' subjective judgments to decide students' English proficiency. According to students, the center was adopting a new grade scale, which only shows three types of grades: *fail, pass,* and *repeat.* Of three types, *fail* and *repeat* were very similar because both required students to retake the same class again. When I asked students if they liked this grading method, they claimed that they did not like it.

**No course standards: Pass, fail, repeat.** Without writing it clearly on the syllabus, students did not know how to follow and meet the course requirements. Fantasia asserted, “The syllabus says it’s no grade.” When she gave me the syllabus, I pointed out and said, “Here it [the syllabus] says, 'If you meet the minimum proficiency required for this level, you will receive 75% which will allow you to pass the course.' 75% is a very clear number.” Yathartha challenged me and argued, “You don’t have grades. How can you have 75%?”

What was worse, different teachers had different standards for passing a class. Students were lost. According to Minerva:
In my opinion, first, different term we have the different teachers teach us the same level. Teachers have the different scales. For example, I am in this term, my teacher [says] we should learn how to write the research paper. But four weeks ago, we just knew how to write the essay. So many teachers have their scales to teach. Just like you adapt to this teacher’s scale. And next term, you must adapt to another teacher’s scale.

Troy reasoned, they were “different styles.” Thus, students felt confused. Minerva kept explaining that a teacher's requirement and standard were different from another one. She tried to be rational and stated, “It’s very difficult to us.” Fantasia added her comments, too. She argued that teachers' senses of subjectivity were the standards. Without a clear written grading scale, each teacher evaluated students' English proficiencies by his or her subjective judgment, not by any rubrics or rules. She shared that teachers “think level 4 standard is blah, blah, blah. At least [they should] give you some rules or some principles you should follow.” Fantasia shared a writing example:

Different teachers would have different opinions about writing an introduction.

Some teachers just think that in the direction part I should have a topic sentence to explain the background or something. I should see that and the teacher would say the introduction is good. But some teachers, when you go to next level,
maybe level 6, different teachers will think 'I don't care about [what you have learned] but I think your thesis statement is not good. Maybe I think your organization is not good.' I know it all depends on your teachers' knowledge and understanding about how to write a good introduction [sic] paragraph. But I think teachers should have some things they agree with.

In addition, she indicated that teachers gave students signs or messages about teachers as the standards of a class. She explained:

But they think that because they are teachers, they can just deliver this kind of message to the students. Maybe they don’t say like, “I am the king of world.” Not this kind of sense. But from the classes, you would get that feeling. You would get some signs or messages from that, from him or her. If you repeat your level, it doesn’t mean you will make the progress next term because they will change your teacher to teach you. But you would have different feelings when you just repeat the same level.

Fantasia also talked about teachers' favorite term, proficiency. She resented teachers used proficiency as the course achievement without providing clear rules and explaining what level or rules of proficiency contain. She maintained that clear rules concerning the grades were not articulated, and there was no explicit standard regarding whether a student could pass or not. As she related:
They just give you the word “proficiency.” What’s proficiency? Nobody explained it to me. [The teacher] every time just told me that 75% of proficiency you get [from this course]; you can pass. But how to add to 75% of proficiency? I just want to know the clear rules about my grades. On the homework we would get checked: check plus, check best, check, and check minus.

When I asked whether any teachers put clear rubrics and grade scales on a syllabus, Yathartha laughed and sarcastically stated, “The syllabus is totally unknown.” I continually asked, “Would you be happy if the teacher provided you with a clear grades scale? You wouldn’t have any complaints if teachers do this?” Achilles confirmed, “I totally agree if teacher did this [to provide a grade scale].”

**A double standard.** Because there was no standard concerning how to pass courses, a double standard emerged. During the interview, Troy asked student Minerva whether the teachers explained some reasons or shared any information why they failed. Minerva denied receiving any written reports to tell her why she did not pass. Furthermore, she shared her experience of a double standard between herself and a male Saudi student:

When we were in the same level, a Saudi student had a problem. But you [Minerva] had the same problem [as the Saudi student], the teacher let he
Saudi student] pass, but you repeat. So [it was because] no standards and no reports.

Minerva believed that it was a double standard when the Saudi student passed whereas she failed. She reported, “No standard. I think my skill achieved this level, but the teachers didn’t think so. We did the homework on time. We worked hard [too].”

**No report card: Here and here.** Students emphasized that they did not have report cards, but a language folder. When I asked students whether or not they had report cards, Minerva answered, “No. We have the folder. It includes our assignments in this term. Actually, the teachers don’t say, “I like you, you can pass.” They said, “Okay, this level is here and now you are here [she used her hand to point out an invisible spot in the air].” Fantasia confirmed, “Nobody knows what here means [she used her hand to point out an invisible spot in the air].”

**Speaking in class.** Without a grading scale, students were in a catch-22 situation. Speaking in class was the best example to explain this dilemma. If students spoke in the class and made some mistakes, they could have been required to repeat the same class. If students spoke less or even did not say anything in the class, they were definitely failed by their teachers. This catch-22 situation seemed ridiculous; however, it was one of the many challenges for students. Fantasia argued,
“Speak more. Maybe you will pass the level. If you have no words, you are silent in
the classroom,” Yathartha added, “Every student worries about speak[ing] because
in the end, your teacher would say, 'Your grammar is bad.' [That meant] you will
repeat. So a lot of students do not want to speak.” All participants yelled, “Yeah.”

**No evaluation or assessment.** Another issue was no standardized English
proficiency tests like TOFEL and Michigan test in the end of semester. Troy
indicated that they used to have a final exam “like TOEFL and Michigan exams.”

TOEFL and Michigan exams were like standardized tests, which helped students
and teachers understand students' English proficiencies. Without the standard
indication, students' English proficiencies were completely judged by teachers'
subjective judgments. Troy pointed out that the core issue was no reliable
evaluations or assessments. He shared his own experience: Before director b made
these changes, there were two indications of passing courses: either students
achieved 90% of grades of their final exams, such as TOEFL and Michigan exams,
or students achieved 90% of grades of every course. If students had failed one
course out of all courses, they still failed and needed to repeat the same level.

Therefore, it was very clear to students. If they could not achieve 90% of grades of
every course, they would have known that they needed to work harder on their final
exams. Troy argued, “It was very clear. But right now, it depends on teachers. They
don't have grades. The core issue is this. They don’t have evaluation method for
that.”

What was worse, after teachers noticed students that they needed to repeat the
same class, students were unable to discuss their grades. The answer was crystal
clear: There was no grade teachers and students could discuss. Student M explained
again:

The situation is you would have no words with the teacher [who] repeats you.

And he also said you are smart. In the classroom, you participate in activities,
and maybe you gave a presentation. Teacher said, “That’s good. That’s great.”

Then, at the end of the term, you [are told that you] should repeat.

**Obey your teachers.** Students' grades were completely manipulated by
teachers' judgments, according to these students. Five teachers means five different
standards. Students said that they were intimidated by their teachers; therefore they
indicated that they were afraid to discuss questions with their own teachers. Minerva
argued that teachers gave students feelings and attitudes as if they were the
standards and they were the boss. Fantasia supported Minerva and claimed, “You
would get that message, even [only] few words.” Achilles completely agreed and
added, “Yeah, because they [the teachers] are the judge[s]. If they say [you are not
good enough], you cannot pass.” Student T claimed sarcastically, “[A] teacher is
God.” Yathartha alleged that “if the teacher doesn’t like you, you will fail [or] you will repeat.” He wondered, “How do you know every teacher’s personality? You don’t know that, right?”

**Teachers' favorite card.** Without a grading scale, students thought they needed to play teachers' favorite cards. In other words, if teachers had positive feelings toward certain students, these students believed that they were more than likely to pass classes. If teachers had negative feelings about other students, those students were going to receive a fail or a repeat grade, according to these interviewed students.

**Content does not match tests.** Macar complained that content and tests were completely different at the center. In other words, content was one thing and tests were another. Content was easy and tests were difficult. Macar explained:

For example, in level 2, they [teachers] only taught me “nice to meet you,” like this is as easy as drinking water. But the tests at the center were very difficult.

But I don’t think it’s a good teaching system. They did it only for money.

**No Grammar Class**

Students complained that they did not have the grammar class while teachers kept saying that they needed to improve their grammar capabilities. Minerva argued that “we don’t have grammar. But the teacher always told you that your grammar is
bad.” I found that the situation was a paradox and asked the interviewed students if they tried to communicate with their teachers for this contradiction. Yathartha responded, “The key point is if you say 'Teacher! you didn’t teach me grammar,' they will repeat you. You never know.” When I was surprised and tried to confirm if this were a joke, Minerva answered with very firm intonation, “No, it’s not a joke.” I murmured, “Seriously?” Achilles responded with very plain intonation, “Seriously.” Fantasia claimed, “You can take a survey and discover that most students repeated their levels. The reason is just because their grammar is bad.”

Furthermore, students did not understand why teachers taught them the English grammar secretly. Yathartha insisted that students, especially for international students, should have grammar classes because the English grammar was a key to academic writings. Achilles added, “We pay the money. And if we really need this [the grammar class], why [can we have it]?” Achilles continued, “We told them [teachers]. And they said [we could not have the English grammar classes] because [of] the director. They said no grammar class. So they cannot teach grammar.”

Not Worthwhile Program

The students were asked if they thought the program was worth having to pay $3,500 USD for a seven-week, intensive ESL program, all the participants
indicated that they thought the program was not worth what they had to pay.

Fantasia claimed that it was “too expensive.” Macar pointed out that to “compare the same knowledge here, maybe in China, the price will [sic] be no more than 500 Chinese currency [less than $ 90 USD]. I don’t think the American teachers are better than the Chinese teachers because the knowledge is same.” Achilles also stated, “We pay the money like buying something. But we pay the money, we didn’t get anything [knowledge].” I challenged this thought and asked further if they benefited from an English immersion environment in the United States. Troy responded and pointed out that he believed the program was not worthwhile for students because they believed that teachers at the center were deficient in professional ESL training.

**Teachers just walked around.** Students pointed out that they thought teachers were not very helpful to them. Students received the impression that they paid up to $3,500 USD to study in the United States, and all they had was to teach one another in the classroom. Achilles shared an example of the speaking class. In the speaking class, he stated, “We just listen and the second day we discuss the notes. For example, like yesterday, we had to listen [to a] lecture. It’s about the arts. We took notes. And today, this morning, we were supposed to discuss the notes.” Troy was wondering and shared his listening class experience with all participants. He
recalled, “we had the listening class, teachers gave you a topic and you just listened to it. After a while, they gave you 10 questions and expected you to answer them.”

Achilles responded, “Just like our class, we have seven or six people. And we have different groups. Maybe three people in one group. And we just talk. And the teacher would walk around.” Troy was surprised and confirmed what he just heard by asking “What is the function of this teacher in this class?” Macar answered for Achilles, “Just look and walk around in the classroom.” Moreover, teachers did not teach any study skills, Yathartha felt disbelief and asked:

The teacher doesn’t teach you how to catch the key word? For example, before, when I was [a] student [here]. During the class, my teacher played the CD. And then they would catch your transition word. For example, when you heard “however,” the next sentence would be key [an important part to remember]. The teacher didn’t [teach you this]?”

Some students answered, “No.” Achilles emphasized again, “I talked to another classmate and shared our discussion.” Minerva added, “The teacher just guides us to talk to ourselves. In the class, students talk to each other.” I asked Minerva if this communicative method is helpful to help build up a good speaking proficiency. She answered, “No.”
Teachers picked wrong level materials. Students complained that teachers did not pick up the suitable materials for their levels. A gap was between the students' current levels and the studying materials. Achilles declared:

I have something to share. Why I am learning here? Because my English is not good. So, I want to learn more about English and how to use English correctly. So I pay the money and learn here. But when I was studying last term, the teacher just gave us the lecture [and] talked very professional [sic]. Some words I never see [sic] in my life. I don’t know the meaning [sic]. I don’t know how to pronounce it [sic]. How can I discuss with my classmates and next day share my notes? You never teach me [sic] how to use this word and use this vocabulary and how to pronounce it. And you tell me I have to speak well. How can I do it?

When I asked why Achilles did not ask the teacher questions about vocabulary, he answered, “Just like the lecture we listen, it was very professional and million, million vocabularies [sic] I don’t know the meaning and how to pronounce it. So if I ask [sic] every word, the class how to continue? [sic]”

Teachers did not check students' writings. Students claimed that some teachers asked them to do their writing assignments; nevertheless, the teachers did not correct their writing assignments sometimes. Therefore, they could not improve
their English writing by understanding what kind of mistakes they were making.

Macar asked a question, “Does your writing teacher help to correct you writing paper?” Minerva answered:

The teacher, this week, every day, our homework is the journal for the writing class. But next day, the teacher doesn’t collect [the journal]. You can see my journal. The teacher doesn’t mark. I do [did] my homework. But the teacher didn’t mark it.

I continued asking, “If nobody corrects that, then why do you need to write it? Because you write it, you want to know your mistakes.” Minerva answered, “If I don’t write it, the teacher would feel, 'Oh, you didn’t do your homework.’” Troy asked Minerva, “Have you ever tried just [to] copy online essay?” I added, “Yeah! They didn’t check it. They wouldn’t know.” Minerva answered, “Because you are not sure the next day if the teacher would check or not.” Achilles confirmed, “It depends on their emotion.” Troy emphasized, “They [teachers] check [the journals], but not every time, right?” Minerva contended, “um hum [with an affirmative tone while drinking her water].”

**Why not transfer?** When I asked students why they did not transfer to another ESL institute to study, they gave a very honest answer: They did not want to start over again because of the cost. Yathartha shared an example:
I think the reason we don’t want to transfer [is that] before I was a student here,
I asked some Saudi students, [who] started from level 1 to level 4. I just said,
“If you [have studied] here so long, why don’t you transfer?” And they just said,
“Come on. I am starting from level 1. So far [I am at] level 4. [After] this semester, I will overcome.”
Troy added, “A student studied from level 1 to level 3, and he transferred to Boston.
He got back to level 1 or level 2. Every ESL center does not have the same program.”
Achilles agreed and further explained:
Like now, I am studying in level 5 and one class in level 6. If I am going to transfer another school and if I can learn at the same level, I prefer to transfer.
But maybe not, maybe I have to [start] from level 1 or level 2.

Arbitrary Management

Students believed that director B did not show adequate respect to them.
Under no circumstances did they appreciate his leadership style. Students confirmed that someone at the center told them that if they did not like to study here, they could transfer. When I asked students who said this, Achilles asserted, “Actually, the director said that.” Minerva echoed this and said it very deliberatively, “[The] director. He said 'If you don’t like this, you are free, you can go.’” Because of her limited English proficiency, Minerva used a metaphor to describe director B: “He is
like a Germany[German].” I and other students did not understand what she meant. Therefore, I told her that she could explain her idea in the Chinese language. She used four Chinese characters: 霸權主義, meaning totalitarianism, arbitrariness, and dictatorship in the English language. She spoke very slowly, “For the students, if you don’t like it, you don’t have right to discuss with [the] director. And you must agree with this change.”

Fantasia completely agreed and explained:

In my opinion, I think director is not friendly to the students. Every time I want to talk about something, he says, “Okay. I will tell you.” It forces me to accept his reasons or his words. Maybe I have some misunderstandings. He forced persuasion [She believed that director B forced students to agree with his ideas], which made [makes] you feel like force, force, force, force. So I would say, “Ok. I accept that.” Because I want to end this dialogue. I understand how busy a director is. But I just don't think it is a right way or right acceptable way to discuss some problems [which] came from students.

Why Stay Here?

When I asked the whole group why they chose this university to study, Macar claimed that the studying abroad agent introduced him this university.

Meanwhile, this university did not require a Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)
score or a Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) score. Most importantly, the living fees here were lower than other places. Other students agreed with some of his points.

The Other Two Groups of Stakeholders

The students strongly addressed their needs of studying the English grammar. They tried to communicate with their teachers and director B at this center. However, they felt that the teachers and director B could not satisfy their learning needs.

The students disagreed with no clear grading scales on their syllabus, no course standards, no report cards, and no standardized evaluations or assessments such as TOFEL and Michigan exams. They questioned whether or not this ESL program at the center was worthwhile because their teachers did not lecture them or check their writing assignments. What is worse, as Achilles asserted, some teachers even picked wrong levels materials (too difficult) for them to study.

The students claimed that director B did not respect them. Achilles, Fantasia, and Minerva stated that they did not appreciate director B's response, attitude, and leadership style. As Minerva used her native language, Chinese, to express her experience of totalitarianism, arbitrariness, and dictatorship in this center.
Summary

This chapter consists of four parts: (a) director A's pressure, (b) director B's policies, (c) five ESL teachers’ frustrations, and (d) nine ESL students’ negative learning experiences. Two directors (director A and the director B), five instructors, and nine students shared their voices and sharply commented on this English language learning center, which provided a holistic view of the center. Each group of stakeholders described its situation and shared its authentic feelings. All categorized themes and headings were organized to address the three research questions of this dissertation. A discussion of the findings is provided in the next chapter.
CHAPTER V

Introduction

This chapter consists of five parts: (a) discussion of findings, (b) an emergent grounded theory, (c) an applicable educational leadership, (d) recommendations for future research, and (e) personal reflection. First, grounded themes were identified from the responses of director A, five teachers, and nine students. These themes were the answers to research questions. Second, the themes provided by all participants interwove to create a complete picture of this English as Second Language (ESL) learning center at the university. A whole picture based on the collected data grounded a management theory of an ESL learning center. An emergent theory grounded theory from this study is related to ethics, freedom, and hope. Third, I stated how this study is applicable. Fourth, I proposed three approaches to further investigation for further research (to participate in staff meetings, to interview each participant separately, and to enroll in this ESL program) and questions to be pursued. Fifth, I restated why it is so important to listen to the voices of all three kinds of informants: teachers, students, and administrators.

Discussion of Findings

I coded themes based on the verbatim transcription from the one-on-one and the focus group interviews. The three groups represented the voices of an
administrator, five ESL teachers, and nine students. These categorized themes provided answers for the three main research questions. I also commented on how the findings fit in with previous research and theory.

**Research Question 1: For administrators, what frustrations do they encounter while implementing tasks in the ESL learning center?**

Director A shared six major problems she faced at the center: (a) no mentor, (b) no faculty trust, (c) no policy being enforced, (d) no course outlines and syllabi, (e) the Saudi students' aggression, and (f) an illogical and impractical program. Furthermore, she pointed out four conflicts that led to her decision to leave this center: (a) an unethical organization, (b) a short-sighted vision, (c) no respect, and (d) no management concepts. She was willing to solve the six major problems; nevertheless, she was unable to fix the four systemic obstacles.

First, director A completely disagreed with how the provost and the executive director decided not to renew teacher Anastasia's contract. She believed it was intolerable, unethical, illegal not to renew her contract because of her illness. Second, she, as an educator, believed that this ESL center should have put people first, not money, although many universities have difficulty in keeping this belief at present. Those universities focus on their financial situations instead of people due to facing low student enrollments. Nonetheless, for director A, this policy could be
realized if people understood her philosophy of educational leadership. Third, she stated that she was unable to work with her boss, the executive director, who did not respect her ESL experience and expertise. She decided to leave this center because she felt that she was not being appreciated. Fourth, according to her, the executive director had no management capabilities, no adequate knowledge about international education, no experiences, and, most importantly, no willingness for reflection. She disagreed with the executive director's opinion that center's faculty members were slackers.

**Research Question 2: For teachers, what do they encounter while working in the ESL learning center?**

All five teachers shared their feelings and commented on director B and the curriculum coordinator. Their comments were categorized into five themes: (a) oppression, (b) no communication, (c) no expertise of ESL, (d) no trust, and (e) race and gender discrimination.

First, the teachers felt oppressed because of their perceptions of disrespect, discouragement, poor interpersonal skills, no academic freedom, and dictatorship in the center. Second, they believed insufficient communication and many miscommunications existed due to the many changes in the center. Teachers chose to be silent instead of sharing their thoughts because they felt oppressed. No grammar
instruction in their classrooms was an example they cited. They disagreed with this policy; nevertheless, they chose to appear to follow the policy, while teaching students the English grammar secretly. Third, they admitted that the center lacked ESL expertise. Director B adopted a communicative method, which called for more student peer discussions (80%) and less teacher instructions (20%). However, this method did not include the application of schema theory, grammar rubrics, teachers' professional development, and assessment. Therefore, the center did not prepare international students to meet the academic requirements for their university studies.

Fourth, the teachers concluded that there was no trust in the center because director B asked teachers to write reports of their classes. Teachers did not appreciate his micro-managing leadership and felt humiliated and embarrassed. In the meantime, according to Jessica, director B admitted that students did not trust him. Fifth, both female and male teachers pointed out that they experienced race and gender discrimination at the center.

**Research Question 3: For students, what do they struggle with while learning in the ESL learning center?**

The nine students pointed out five drawbacks at this ESL learning center: (a) too many unpleasant changes, (b) unclear grade scale, (c) no grammar classes, (d) not a worthwhile program because of unprofessional ESL faculty, and (e) arbitrary
management at this ESL center. Despite these five drawback, they shared three reasons why they still studied at this center and did not transfer to other ESL learning centers at different universities: (a) they did not want to start over, (b) they did not have to take other standardized tests, and (c) they paid lower living fees at this university.

This center experienced five directors in these five years. Each director brought his or her own educational values, assumptions, and beliefs. Students suffered from these frequent variances. Director B had changed the previous grading scales to a three-level grade scale: fail, pass, and repeat. This ambiguous scale created problems such as no course standards, no report card, a catch-22 speaking class, no evaluation or assessment, complete obedience to teachers, and teachers' favorite card as being stated in Chapter IV.

Director B ignored English grammar, which the students felt was a vital academic capability to help them write academic research papers. Furthermore, students were keen to have an English grammar class because they might have failed or been forced to repeat a course if teachers sensed that their grammar could not meet academic requirements. The students also asked what the requirements were and where they were written.

Most students declared that this ESL program was not worth $3,500 USD
owing to the communicative method (80% of student discussion and 20% teacher
instruction) enforced by director B, teachers just walked around in the classroom
and expected students to teach and talk to one another. Some teachers picked
materials that were far beyond students' current levels. Students felt that they did not
learn the expected knowledge and did not develop adequate English proficiency.
Some students insisted that some teachers did not check their homework and
assignments; therefore, they did not perceive where and what mistakes they made.
Students completely abhorred director B's arbitrary management style. They
resented the way the director treated and talked to them after they paid so much
money per term.

In spite of these five negative aspects, the nine students admitted that if they
had transferred to another organization, they would probably have started over again
from the very beginning and at a rudimentary level. In other words, they would have
spent more money if they transferred. This university did not require standardized
tests such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and the Graduate
Management Admission Test (GMAT). Students stated there were lower living fees
here compared to other big cities such as living at Manhattan, Boston, and
Providence.
Findings with Previous Research and Theory

While reviewing the previous research and the findings from this study, I found four key points: (a) bidirectional effects among three groups of stakeholders, (b) empathetic listening, (c) communication, and (d) trust.

First, bidirectional power dynamics between any two groups of stakeholders echoes critical theory. The bidirectional power dynamics between the teachers and the students was: the teachers gave the students their final grades (pass, fail, repeat) while the students filled in evaluation sheets based upon teachers' teaching qualities. The bidirectional power dynamics between the teachers and the administrators was: the teachers chose whether or not they wanted to put their efforts on implementing policies or cooperating with the administrators whereas the administrators renewed the supportive faculty's contracts. The bidirectional power dynamics between the students and the administrators was: the students could threaten the center directors by transferring to other universities whereas the administrators might expel students from this center (see Figure 4).
Second, director A rebuilt trust with these traumatized faculty by empathetic listening. Johnson (2011) pointed out the importance of empathetic listening.

“Ethical leaders put aside their personal concerns to engage in empathetic listening. They seek to understand, not to evaluate, advise, or interpret. Empathetic listening is an excellent way to build a trusting relationship” (p. 101). Solomon and Flores (2003) argued that trust is an emotional skill. “It requires judgment. It requires vigilant attention. It requires conscientious action. It involves all of the intricate reciprocities of a human relationship” (p. 6).

Third, communication is key. Nevertheless, the findings showed that there was very little communication existing in this center. Without communication, each group of stakeholders felt oppressed and then conflicts emerged in organization culture and leadership. For example, director A believed that the executive director did not respect her. She could have told to him how she felt. However, she chose to turn her head around and left as most people would do. When teachers disagreed the
communicative method, no one would have challenged director B and told him that this method was creating a learning catastrophe for students. They chose to silence themselves even thought they knew this method did not integrate students' prior knowledge, motivation, study skills, assessments, and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory. On the other hand, the students were trying to communicate with their teachers and director B. The students wanted to know whether or not they could have the English grammar classes. However, teachers' frustrations and director B's arbitrary management style slaughtered students' willingness of communication.

Fourth, no communication not only generated conflicts and oppression in this center, but also sabotaged trust. Morgan (1989) stated collaboration and decision-making rely on trust. Bashyakar and Menon (2010) argued that trust is “based on the trustor’s perception of the trustee ability, benevolence, and integrity” (p. 29). People are not able to collaborate when they do not trust each other. “If the level of trust is low, the credibility of the system may go down as a consequence. In such a case, the system may become weak and cease to achieve the desired objectives” (p. 28). Reina and Reina (2007) pointed out that lacking collaboration is related to no trust. “When trust erodes, relationships are compromised and people shut down, pull back, and hesitate to engage. Without trust, employees have little interest in being creative, taking risks and collaborating” (p. 36). They also have a
significant finding on what makes trust erode. Although most people think that betrayals contribute most to eroding trust, Reina and Reina found a totally opposite assumption. They think “trust is broken in subtle ways every day. When people fail to deliver as promised, take credit for another’s work, look out only for themselves, neglect to collaborate in decisions and spin the truth, trust is broken” (2007, p. 38).

Once trust is broken, it seems to open Pandora’s Box. All the disappointment, frustration, doubt, confusion, and pain are flooding into the team dynamics.

Once people communicate with one another, trust emerges. In other words, people are willing to communicate with one another because they feel safe and trust. Therefore, with communication increased, stakeholder are cooperative and supportive. In fact, trust is a very simple logic. “People need trust to do their jobs. It is at the heart of effective working relationships and employee engagement” (p. 30).

Trust accelerates teamwork efficiency, enhances cooperation, encourages risk taking, shares a common vision, has higher job satisfaction, and creates a feeling of commitment to the group. Each member recognizes or acknowledges his or her sense of belonging, which means a sense of responsibility.

According to the findings, the students did not trust their teachers and director B. The five teachers did not trust director B. These situations were all attributed to lack of communication. Therefore, critical theory advocates that their
voice to be heard and understands the cause and effect of feelings oppressed. In this study, students, teachers, and even an administrator were victims and oppressed people because of education oppression. This dissertation functions as a tool “to overthrow totalitarianism and oppression” (Freire, 2000, p. 12) and to give the three character voices simultaneously.

**An Emergent Grounded Theory**

This section summarizes the three informant groups' points of view. The three multi-dimensional voices contributed to a theory that drew an outline of system thinking concerning this ESL language center. That is, this grounded theory combines the insights from each perspective. The grounded theory from this study focuses on ethics, freedom, and hope (see Figure 5).

![Figure 5. An emergent grounded theory](image)

**One Administrator's Perspective: Ethics**

According to director A, this center, or even this entire university, needed a sense of ethics, long-term vision, respect, and management know-how. Among these four needs, she thought that ethics could bring the other three together. In her
opinion, an ethical leader knows it is important to respect people, every single one.

Once stakeholders feel respected, they are willing engaged with a long-term vision.

Even though an ethical leader may not have management know-how, a sense of ethics rooted in his or her heart will remind him or her to be humble and respectable.

A humble leader will listen to other people's suggestions and try to communicate with people. Communication can improve inadequacy or lack of management capabilities.

In addition, ethics is a perspective. According to Johnson (2012), there were five general ethical perspectives: (1) “Utilitarianism: do the great good the for the great numbers of people” (p. 154), (2) “Kant's categorical imperative: do what's right no matter the cost” (p. 158), (3) “Justice as fairness: guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities behind the veil of ignorance” (p. 161), “Communitarianism: shoulder your responsibilities and seek the common good” (p. 164), and “Altruism: love your neighbor” (p. 170). Putting them together, ethics is a type of love or benevolence. An organization without ethics is doomed to fall and to fail. Ip (2011) provided several examples of unethical organizations, such as Enron, WorldCom, the Lehman Brother, Citigroup, and Goldman Sachs (p. 693).
Five Teachers' Perspective: Freedom

The five teachers described this center as having oppression, no communication, no expertise of ESL, no trust, and race and gender discrimination. A solution to all of them is freedom. These teachers thought that if freedom were provided at the center, people would no longer feel oppressed, and they will be willing communicate to one another. Perlow and Williams (2003) reasoned that “people silence themselves to avoid embarrassment, confrontation, and other perceived dangers” (p. 53). Once people start to communicate, trust emerges. With communication and trust, people can talk about any issues and “bring an outpouring of fresh ideas from all levels of an organization-ideas that might just raise the organization's performance to a whole new level” (p. 58).

Nine Students' Perspective: Hope

These nine students experienced too many unpleasant changes, unclear grading scales, no grammar classes, a program they thought was not worthwhile, and arbitrary management at this ESL center. A belief sustained them: hope. Because of hope, they chose to fly from the other side of world and to study in the United States. Because of hope, they chose to pay up to $3,500 USD per seven-week term. Because of hope, they believed that their persistence would eventually pay off.
Despite their resentments toward this center, they chose to stay because they had hope.

Interrelation among Ethics, Freedom, and Hope

An ethical leader who is willing to provide adequate academic freedom for teachers can realize students' hope of academic success. Ethical administrators are able to build an organization culture full of communication, trust, and cooperation. When administrators are ethical, they modestly introspect themselves by listening to their subordinates' and supervisors' suggestions and critiques. Because of introspection, they perceive the importance of respecting stakeholders. Additionally, respect is accompanied by benevolence. With administrators' introspection, listening, respect, and benevolence, teachers are able to embrace freedom and students are not going to abandon their learning hope.

Teachers with freedom are able to share their thoughts and suggest some practical policies for administrators because they are working at the educational frontline with students. They understand their students' academic needs. With ethical administrators' listening, respect and supports, teachers are capable to enhance students' learning quality. Meanwhile, teachers with freedom do not silence themselves when they see ineffective policies. They will be “the Dutch Uncle” (Pausch & Zaslow, 2008, p. 66). They will speak up what they think, will talk to
administrators, and will come up with solution to improve these unsuccessful policies.

Students' learning hope is an intrinsic motivation. If students do not see any hope of learning, they give up. Ethical administrators and teachers with freedom support students' learning hope and help students generate better academic outcomes. While learning at the center, students feel comfortable and encouraged because they know that administrators and teachers always help them. On the other hand, students' learning hope is a fuel for ethical administrators and teachers with freedom. Hope is an education mission. Student's education hope makes administrators and teachers meaningful. Because of students' learning hope, education lives.

**An Applicable Educational Leadership**

The grounded theory from this study consists of ethics, freedom, and hope. An ethical leader who is willing to provide adequate academic freedom for teachers can realize students' hope of academic success. Ethics, freedom, and hope are broad and rudimentary concepts for most educational leaders. These three characteristics that reminded me of an adage: treat people as people.

Hardy's (2010) “the Ripple Effect” (p. 14) and “the Compound Effect” (p. 9) provided how to put these three characteristics into practices in the realm of education. When ESL education leaders are trying to build a culture full of ethics,
freedom, and hope, they need to learn some small and smart changes. For administrators to be ethical, they need to learn how to introspect themselves, listen to other people, respect people, empower people, and communicate with people. Once a positive relationship built in their centers, teachers start to share their opinions and students' learning hope will be enhanced. This is the main idea of the Ripple Effect. “[O]ne small change can have a significant impact that causes an unexpected and unintended ripple effect” (p. 14). With administrators, teachers, and students on board, the Compound Effect starts. “The Compound Effect is the principle of reaping huge rewards from a serious of small, smart choices” (p. 9).

This grounded theory is based upon an ESL learning center at this university. Of course, no qualitative case study can be generalizable to prove certain cause and effect relationship between variables. However, this critical case study should be applicable to other similar settings or people. Furthermore, the three characteristics (ethics, freedom, and hope) are not only needed by the ESL center at this university, but only by any educational enterprise.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

After reexamining the data collection and analysis, I asked myself what I would do differently. I discussed alternatives with some participants and came up with three exploratory methods that could prove beneficial to future studies: (a) the
researcher could participate in staff meetings, (b) rather than using focus groups, each participant could be interviewed separately, and (c) the researcher could function as a participant observer by enrolling in such a program. First, researchers who are interested in ESL center dynamics should go to staff meetings because such interactions can shed light on the whole picture. Second, the date obtained from an individual interview is different than those obtained during focus groups. During an interview, a researcher may obtain more honest responses due to the lack of peer-pressure that can be present during a focus group. Third, researchers who enroll in an ESL program and function as a participant observer, would experience the teaching and learning environment in an authentic manner. As Merriam (2009) noted, “[T]here are variations in the disciplinary base that a qualitative study might draw from, in how a qualitative study might be designed, and in what the intent of the study might be” (p. 2). Later in this section, I will outline a series of questions that could be pursued in the future.

**Recommended Method 1: Participating in staff meetings**

In order to understand the conflicts between teachers and administrators, I suggest that future researchers should go to staff meetings. Despite “the sensitivity or exclusivity” (Merriam, 2009, p. 122) of an organization, researchers can still participate in staff meetings and observe the dynamics of an ESL language center.
With observations, researchers can compare filed notes as peer-review. Merriam (2009) suggested that filed notes have three forms: “descriptions, direct quotations, observer comments” (p. 137).

**Recommended Method 2: Interviewing individuals**

In order to obtain more honest answers, to filter some off-topic comments, being able to omit emotional data, I suggest that future researchers should interview each participant individually and separately. In the words of Patton (2002), researchers can perceive the real voice “in and on someone else's mind” (p. 341). Individual interviews alleviate peer-pressure. When I was collecting data of this study, some participants were very quiet or seldom shared their voices. Regardless of few numbers, each participant was equally important. Therefore, individualized interviews could help researchers collect “in-depth” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 93) data.

**Recommended Method 3: Enrolling in the program**

In order to verify students' comments, I propose that future researchers may enroll in the program. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000) discuss the concept of “going native” in which the researcher, in essence, functions on the same level as those being researched. Like going undercover, researchers may experience teachers' instructions, administrators' policies, and peers' learning outcomes first-hand.
Furthermore, as Merriam (2009) pointed out, enrolling in the program can collect authentic and direct documents. She used “the term document as the umbrella term” (p. 139). Documents include “public records, personal papers, popular culture documents, visual documents, and physical material and artifacts” (p. 162).

**Questions to be Pursued**

This study mainly asked about negative sources of frustrations for the participants in this ESL center. However, several questions can be pursued in the future. First, some readers may be curious about positive factors that lead to the participants' satisfaction. For instance, what are the main factors making ESL learners enjoy learning English? To recognize advantages of an ESL center can help the center stakeholders maintain their vantage point. Second, I also suggest that future researchers should explore what successful ESL management practices are. For example, how do successful ESL organizations cope with their management? Third, we can compare and contrast two completely different ESL centers. What are the positive management practices for an ESL center to generate good organization culture? What are the negative management practices for an ESL center to create a catastrophic organization dynamics? Fourth, the lack of other international students', the executive directors', and the provost's voices and input (see *Limitations of the Study* in Chapter I) made it difficult to capture the current challenges at this center.
Because of the same way director A made some drastic decisions, could it be that the new administrator is doing the same due to accreditation? After director A left, teachers were in change of completing the accreditation report and then the new administrator took over. Could there be a conflict between the two groups of stakeholders due to a great deal of baggage? In order to better understand the system thinking of an ESL learning center, not only should future researchers focus on the triangular relationship among the administrators, the current teachers, and the students, but future researchers should invite more stakeholders associated with an center such as other international students (all nationalities), the executive director, and the provost in this study.

**Personal Reflection**

After pondering several days, I started to map out three groups of stakeholders data. The data from the teachers and the students pointed out that the director B was a dictator. According to the teachers, director B had exhibited oppression, no communication, no trust, and no respect, According to the students, director B also made arbitrary management decisions. However, director B believed that students were comfortable to be with him and that he trusted and supported the teachers. This is one of many paradoxes in this study.
I still remembered the first and the only interview with the director B on June 26th. When we met, I told him that I was doing this study based on critical theory. Even though critical theory suggests that some people are oppressors whereas other people are the oppressed, I tried not to judge or categorize people.

In the end of this study, I believed that miscommunication caused many issues that two administrators, five teachers, and nine students experienced. Most people silence themselves when an elephant is in the room. However, as Pausch and Zaslow (2008) insisted, “when there’s an elephant in the room, introduce it” (p. 16). Only by communicating problems and getting issues off every stakeholder's chest can each stakeholder engage in “comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness” (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010, p. 2).

**Conclusions from this Study**

This chapter consists of three parts: (a) discussion of findings, (b) an emergent grounded theory, (c) an applicable educational leadership, (d) recommendations for future research and questions to be pursued, and (e) personal reflection. A theory grounded from the research data showed each group's expectation. The administrator looked forward to ethics. The five teachers were desirous of freedom. The nine students maintained their hope. At the end of this investigation, I wondered if an ethical leader who is willing to provide adequate
academic freedom for teachers can realize students' hope of academic success.

Ethics, freedom, and hope are broad and rudimentary concepts for most educational leaders. Nonetheless, as Hardy (2010) reminded us, “We've lost sight of the simple but profound fundamentals of what it takes to be successful” (p. 1).

This qualitative study told the story of three constituent groups (two administrators, five teachers, and nine students). It was very important to listen to these groups of stakeholders' voices because their voices piece together and interweave a whole picture of this ESL language center. However, only after interviewing more stakeholders associated with this center can we better understand the system thinking of this center. As a result, this is not the end, but just a new beginning.
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http://elc.unlv.edu/mtelp.html


APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
TO: Ku-Yun Chen
FROM: Brent Mattingly, HSRB Acting Chair
DATE: April 26, 2013
SUBJECT: Human Subjects Review Board Approval
PROJECT TITLE: An ESL Learning Center: A critical case study
HSRB APPROVAL CODE: 04-25-13-#113

The Human Subjects Review Board has approved the research proposal you submitted. You may proceed with the project.

The primary function of the HSRB is to ensure protection of human research subjects. As a result of this mandate, we ask that you pay close attention to the fundamental ethical principles of autonomy, justice, and beneficence when establishing your research proposal. These ethical principles pertain specifically to the issues of informed consent, fair selection of subjects, and risk/benefit considerations.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Brent Mattingly, Ph.D.
Phone: 419-289-5342
E-mail: bmatting@ashland.edu
Informed Consent Letter

Title: An ESL Learning Center--A critical case study

Purpose of this study: This dissertation is a study of a triangular relationship among teachers, students, and administrators at this English language learning center. Theoretical framework of the study is critical theory, which gives oppressed people voices, especially their inner voices. With an increased understanding of the three main characters’ true voices, this dissertation is a report of study on macro level of the English language learning center.

Procedures: 1~1.5 hour semistructured interview

Confidentiality: You give permission to Ku-Yun Chen to interview you in order to complete this study. However, you are aware of your rights:
(1) to stop the interview at any time if you feel you do not want to continue.
(2) to withdraw your consent during the interview process.

Information about this study: You can ask all your questions about this research by e-mailing or calling the principal researcher or his supervisor, whose contact information is listed at the bottom of this letter. All inquiries are confidential. This interview can only be used for academic study, not for any commercial purposes.

Participant’s agreement statement: If you agree to participate in this study, please sign your name below.

I have read the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

____________________________  _______________________
Name                                  Date

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,