

EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL PEER SUPPORTS ON A COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENGLISH LEARNERS SENSE OF BELONGING

Ryan Alvarez

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine English Learners (EL) experiences with institutional peer support programs and how they affect their sense of belonging. This study aims to answer the following questions to develop policies that will aid in ELs success in CCC.

RQ1: What is the impact of peer support programs on Community College English Learners sense of belonging?

RQ2: How do English Learners' country of origin impact their sense of belonging?

RQ3: What are English Learners experiences with faculty, peer, and counselors as it relates to their sense of belonging?

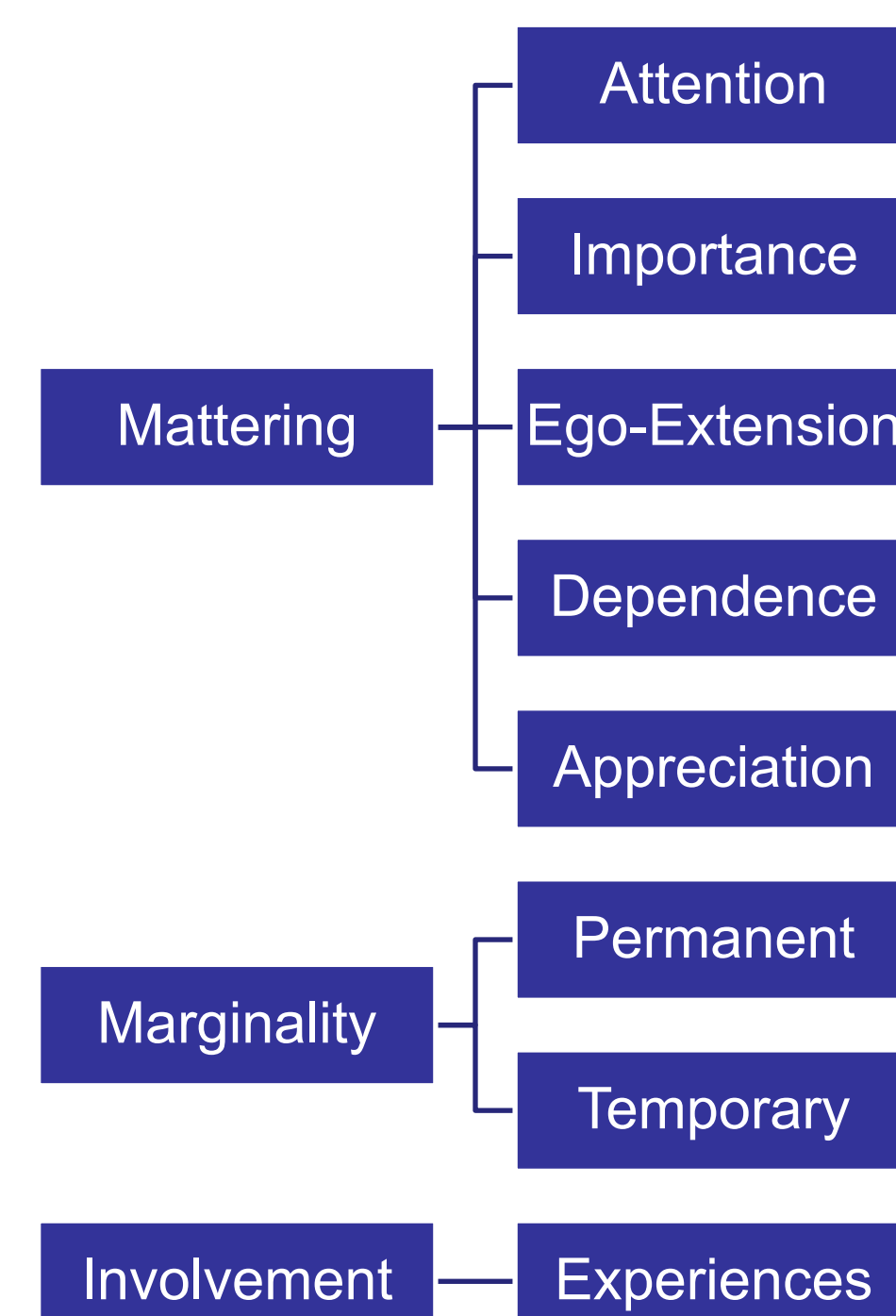
ELs have been a long-standing demographic that has faced inequities throughout their educational journey. We can see this in their limited success rates ELs have seen over the decades (Goldschmidt & Seifried, 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2019). Most ELs who intend to transfer do not successfully within 4 years. It is critical that we examine other ways to improve ELs success at school like developing their sense of belonging.

Methodology

Data was collected simultaneously with both quantitative and qualitative starting in 2023 spring in the form of a survey and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data is still being collected.

The qualitative aspect of the study includes one-on-one interviews with EL students who participate in peer support programs like student clubs, peer ambassadors, and peer tutors.

For the qualitative data, a code book was created based of the theories and deductive coding was used to first identify codes that eventually led to the themes displayed in the findings section.



Literature Review

The focus of this literature review revolves around how peer support programs effect students' sense of belonging. Various studies have linked an increase of student sense of belonging to persistence and resilience (García et al., 2019; Garza et al., 2021; Hoffman et al., 2002).

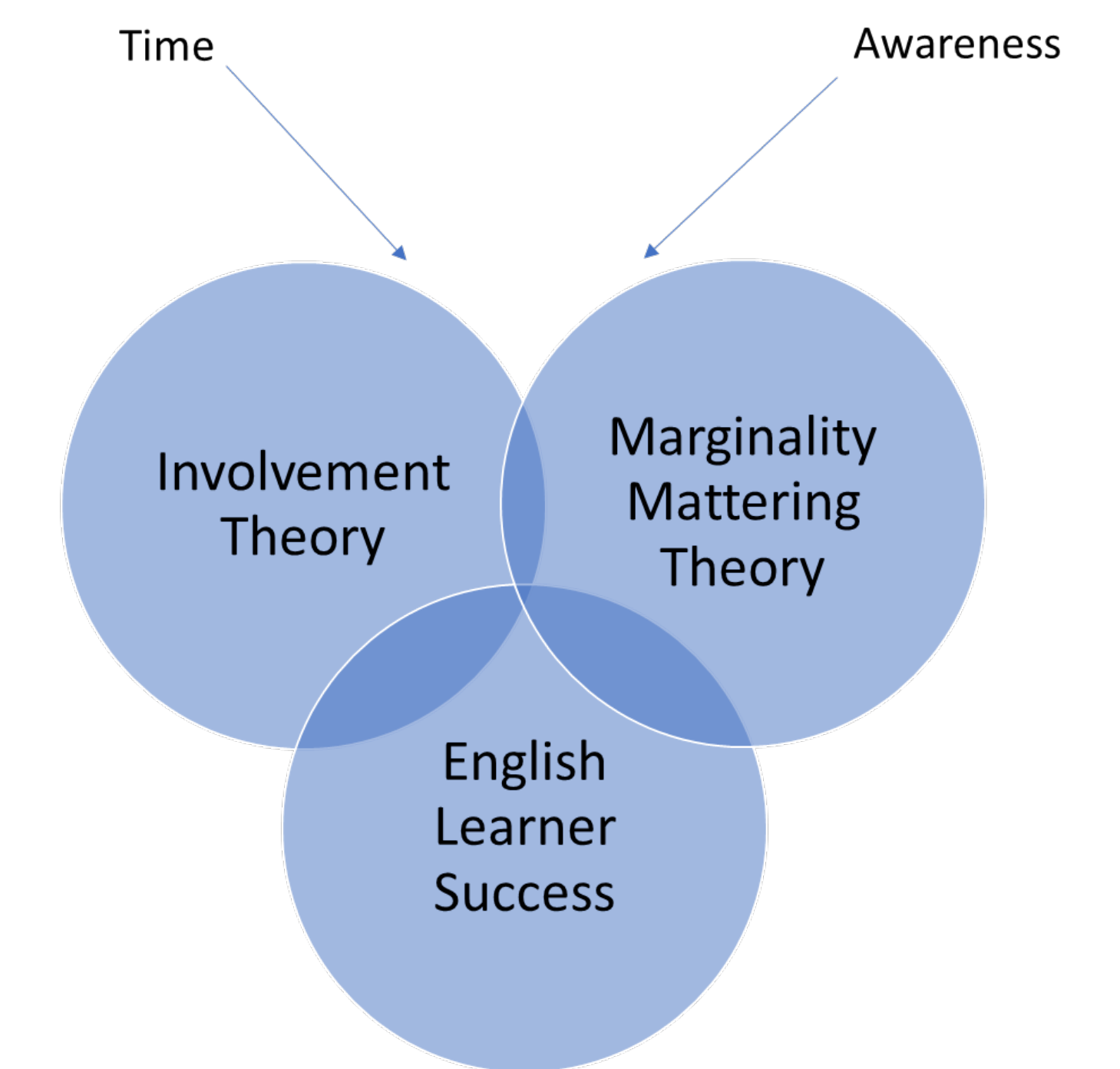
Students with mentors felt they were more connected to campus and had at least one person they could go to for emotional support (Colvin and Ashman 2010; Yomtov et al., 2015)

The benefits ambassadors have are their personal narrative and ability to relate to students during outreach attempts (Cupitt et al., 2015; Gartland, 2014; Ylonen, 2010)

Students participating have significantly higher grades and are less likely to leave compared to those not involved (Fischer, 2007; Kulp et al., 2021)

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theories, Astins (1984) Involvement Theory and Schlossberg (1989) Marginality and Mattering Theory. Both theories relate to one another and brings into considerations for ELs. Since ELs are marginalized due to their language ability, its important to consider if increasing their involvement will develop their matting. Mattering in other terms has describe a student's sense belonging as feeling cared about, receiving attention, and connecting to the campus. The combination of these theories indicates the more we involve students with peers and the campus, the higher their sense of matting and chances at success. Outside barriers to consider are ELs ability to participate due to limited time they have and if they have enough navigational capital to be aware of involvement programs.



Qualitative Findings

4 major themes were identified below

ESL vs. The Non-ESL Faculty	Mixed Feelings on Counselors	Tight Knit ESL Community	Representation Matters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various students cited how ESL faculty were supportive, patient, and always willing to help while receiving little support from non-ESL faculty “Even when they were kind of busy like they should have been in their office, for you know their open office hour. I would just stay there after classes. I would ask them, and then they would stay there help me solve the problems” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While counselors were there to support, it was difficult for EL to connect with them due to language barrier or little availability “...the second time he never answer because I had questions but honestly, I don't remember what kind of questions, and he never answered so I change for another counselor” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESL students were always there to support each other in with classwork or outside classroom support. They felt as if they were similar do to their language status making it easier to connect. “Even if they don't have time to do things, they try to help each other, we are from different cultures, we think differently but its not a barrier, to try to speak to them and be friends” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESL students felt more connected when they saw someone who had similar backgrounds as them. Rather it be their language ability or culture background, representation made a difference in their connections. “But I need help I sometime I call the ambassador because he talk my language. I call for him, hey I need help, but he help me”

Discussion

With the quantitative data for the study still in the collection and analysis process, it is difficult to make major assumptions but with current qualitative findings, we see a difference in specific programs and staff in schools that effect EL. Within the ESL community, if it be faculty or peers, they have strong bonds that connect students to campus. While these students will not be in ESL classes forever, it is important for them to make the connections when they are there like joining a club or having a mentor that they can lean on once they start general education classes. Institutions recognizing this can promote and develop the ESL community by expanding clubs, mentoring programs, or brick and mortar affinity centers. This can aid in continuing an EL connection to the campus even when they leave the ESL community. Future studies can dive deeper into each section of the ESL community like focusing on specific clubs or ESL faculty's perception.

References

