

Evaluation of Literacy Instruction

For Adult ESL Students

The **Evaluation of Literacy Instruction for Adult ESL Students** is a national research project designed to test the effectiveness of literacy instruction in improving the reading and speaking

skills of literacy level adult English as a second language (ESL) learners. It is the first rigorous evaluation of literacy instruction designed for these learners, who lack English language skills and who have limited literacy skills in their native language. The study is sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education and conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partners, The Lewin Group, Berkeley Policy Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and the Educational Testing Service.

The evaluation will address the following research questions:

- Do adult ESL learners who receive the study-related ESL instruction make greater improvements in English reading and speaking skills than adult ESL learners who receive the instruction normally provided by the program?
- Does the study-related literacy instruction have different effects on subgroups of adult ESL learners?
- How well do instructors implement the study-related instruction?

The study will provide practitioners with valuable information on the kind of instructional strategies that are likely to improve the skills of this challenging population.

The Study Design

The research team, in consultation with the U.S. Department of Education and experts in the fields of research

design, adult ESL, and literacy instruction, has designed a randomized field trial to examine the impact of literacy instruction based on the workbook *Sam & Pat* provided by the study, along with the professional development needed for the teachers to implement the instruction.

The final design of the impact study will be contingent on the nature of the sites participating, but will include approximately:

- 10 adult education programs;
- 40 teachers (4 in each program); and
- 1,800 low-literate adult ESL learners (180 in each program).

Within each program, teachers and students will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions:

- The *Sam & Pat* condition, which will include five or more hours of literacy instruction per week for approximately 15 weeks.
- The control condition, which will consist of the instruction usually provided by the program across the same amount of time as the experimental classes.

Data will be collected on two student cohorts enrolled in fall of 2008 and winter of 2009.

The Literacy Instruction Materials

A critical component of this study is the use of instructional materials appropriate for literacy instruction in the literacy-level adult ESL classroom, with corresponding support to monitor and train teachers to implement the study-related instruction faithfully.

Instruction based on the *Sam & Pat* literacy workbook is systematic, direct, sequential, and multi-sensory. It also includes multiple opportunities for practice with feedback.



In addition to providing the *Sam & Pat* workbook, the intervention team will also provide professional development to teachers implementing the literacy instruction through a three-day training institute, with ongoing follow-up during the intervention period.

Criteria for Program Selection

The study will include programs meeting the following criteria:

- Program has at least 2 classes of 15 to 30 non- or low-literate adult ESL students (each) per semester (or equivalent academic term) and that provide at least 5 hours of instruction per week.
- Program has a managed or limited time enrollment process that allows the random assignment procedure at the beginning of the class instructional period.
- Program has a record of high retention among the intended student population.
- Program has at least one pair of ESL literacy classes that meet at the same time and location.
- Program has at least 3 adult ESL literacy instructors who teach the target classes.

Selection criteria will also aim to achieve geographic diversity within the U.S.

Data Collection and Reporting

Data will be collected from participating programs, teachers, and students for the following purposes:

- Screening the native language literacy levels of potential study participants to determine study eligibility;
- Conducting interviews with students to collect background information;
- Conducting classroom observations to document instruction in treatment and control conditions;
- Collecting background information on the programs and teachers;
- Collecting attendance throughout the intervention period; and
- Assessing students' pre- and post-intervention performance in English reading and speaking.

A report on post-treatment findings will be available in 2010.

More Information About the Adult ESL Literacy Impact Study

For general information about the study, please contact Dr. Ali or Dr. Condelli. For information about participation, contact Dr. Condelli or Mr. Fishman.

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