

The impact of church-based ESL classes on participants' social capital

Introduction

Church-based English as a Second Language (ESL) classes run by the Anglican churches in Sydney play a significant role in enhancing participants' social capital by providing not just language skills but also opportunities for networking, cultural integration, and emotional support. They also foster relationships and provide access to crucial resources. These programs go beyond language learning to build a sense of community and empowerment leading to greater social capital, mobility and well-being for participants.

They are also unstructured, have irregular attendance, lack uniformed levels and lack collaboration amongst churches. After multiple decades of running ESL in churches, research and development in this field in Australia is still in its infancy stage. Many studies have been carried out on church-based ESL programs in the United States (Bradridge & Walsh, 2019; Bretz, 2021; Chao & Kuntz, 2013; Chapin, 2016; Chao & Mantero, 2014; Sanchez, 2017; Gallagher, 2017; Smith, 2018; Tsaneva, 2022) but very few are focused in Australia (Russel, n.d).

The scope of this article is my reflection of church-based ESL classes within the Anglican churches in Sydney. My reflection is of an academic and manager, after having managed a variety of ESL programs for many years in Malaysia and Australia. I have also been the Director of an English centre for an Australian university and a university college.

Through the lens of social capital theory, I am investigating if church-based ESL classes help in the development of immigrants' and refugees' social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Leana & van Buren, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Social capital theory is discussed further in the literature review section below.

In the course of this study, two research questions emerged. They are:

- 1) What are the notable positive aspects currently present in the teaching of ESL within the Anglican churches in Sydney that impact on participants' social capital?
- 2) What are the notable negative aspects currently present in the teaching of ESL within the Anglican churches in Sydney and what strategies can be implemented to address the findings?

The aim of this research is to consider the impact of church-based ESL classes on participants' social capital. When exploring the impact, both positive and negative aspects will be discussed, practical effectiveness will be considered, and sound recommendations will be provided to improve the delivery of these classes. Before that can be done, a review of current literature is needed.

Literature review

In this section, the key themes of the research will be investigated and the gap that exists in the literature for church-based ESL classes within the Australian context determined. Before any of the secular literature is reviewed, it is important to first evaluate how the ESL ministry is justified in the Bible.

Contemporary Christian Ministry

Church-based ESL classes serve dual purpose. Firstly, they are an evangelistic tool and secondly, through this ministry, immigrants and refugees are taught English. Therefore, many view this ministry as a legitimate way to both serve their communities and have a Christian witness (Chapin, 2016).

The Bible¹ in many instances instructs believers to reach out to non-believers. Bearing witness or evangelising to non-Christians is considered to be a mandate from Jesus and the early church. The following are some of the Bible verses that instructs Christians to share the gospel.

- Luke 9:2 says "...and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."

¹ All Bible references, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the English Standard Version.

- 1 John 1:5 says, “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”
- Mark 16:15 says, “And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”
- Matthew 24:14 says, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”
- 2 Timothy 4: 17 says, “But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.”
- Matthew 5: 14-16 says, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that^[a] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

As demonstrated above, there are many instances when Christians were asked to share the good news of Jesus Christ. By sharing the gospel, Christians hope that those hearing it will come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour. Therefore, many Christians believe that when non-Christians ask God to forgive their sins (Psalm 32: 1-5), they will be forgiven and no longer be separated from God. This act is believed to spare them from eternal condemnation.

In Chao & Kuntz (2013) study, they explored the ways in which artifacts and classroom discourse of a church-based ESL program in a Southeastern U.S. city facilitate or constrain the immigrant adult learners’ participation. They concluded:

This study indicates that the church-based ESL program is a Christian figured world that is not natural but nurtured and naturalized. This program serves as a linguistic, cultural, and community broker to help the adult learners with learning English and socialization, whereas Christian principles, norms and values are imposed on the adult learners. This can lead to some learners’ resistance or non-participation. The church-based ESL program is

therefore a missionary tool to proselytize. Learning English in this Christian figured world is a process of being, self-assigned or other-assigned identity transformation. (p. 470)

The above findings are damning for the church-based ESL class especially if Christian doctrines, practices and tenets are forced onto non-Christians. It is not the teaching of the Bible to forcibly convert people. Another serious issue that the above study raises is the possibility that ESL class is the front for conversion. That premise suggests that the church lacks a genuine interest in teaching participants English and instead exists solely to convert them.

The second purpose for the church-based ESL classes is to help those less fortunate. Throughout the old and new testaments, believers were told to provide help to the fatherless, widows, orphans, sick, etc. The verses below demonstrate this request.

- Deuteronomy 14:29 says, "And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do."
- Proverbs 19:17 says "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed."
- Proverbs 3: 27 says, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it."
- Matthew 25:44-45 says, " Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'"

Immigrants and refugees are seen as people who need help. They lack English proficiency which reduces their ability to make friends, communicate with health professionals, obtain employment and discuss their children's education with their

teachers. Therefore, helping immigrants and refugees to learn English is like helping the 'fatherless, widows, orphans, sick, etc'.

Since ESL classes delivered in churches are for immigrants and refugees, it is important to explore the migration journey of these two groups of people.

Immigrants and refugees

According to the World Health Organisation (2022), more than 1 billion people which amounts to 1 in 8 people are on the move globally. International migrants accounts to 281 million people while those forcibly displaced amounts to 84 million (World Health Organisation, 2022). The World Health Organisation (2022) also claim that they expect the number of people on the move to grow due to poverty, lack of security, lack of access to basic services, conflict, environmental degradation and disasters. This data includes the migration to Australia.

When the global pandemic occurred in 2020, it caused the closure of borders and disruptions to international travel. Covid-19's border closure resulted in a noticeable reduction in the number of visas approved in Australia to permanent migrants in 2019-20 financial year (Cross, 2022). Australia's permanent migration intake fell to its lowest level in the last decade to 140,366 which was significantly lower than the planned ceiling of 160,000 and the 10- year average of 175,000 (Stayner, 2020).

The above situation changed after the pandemic. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), there was a net gain in overseas migration to Australia. This means there were more people migrating to than from Australia in the financial year ending 30 June 2022. Overseas migration contributed a net gain of 171,000 to Australia's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This represents a very large increase in net overseas migration compared to the 2020-21 financial year which saw a net loss of 85,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). According to past data, more people immigrated to Australia than left the country each year which means overseas migration has been a significant source of population gain for Australia.

According to the World Health Organisation (2021), migrants and refugees can be exposed to various stress factors which affect their mental health and well-being before and during their migration journey. It then extends to during their settlement and integration. Some of these stress factors are unemployment, poor socioeconomic conditions, and lack of social integration. The World Health Organisation claims that stress from their migration journey can increase the risk of developing mental health conditions.

Therefore, learning English will reduce their stress levels as it helps immigrants and refugees secure jobs in Australia, improve their socioeconomic background, make new friends, navigate their daily lives and increase their confidence which will encourage them to integrate socially.

According to a paper released by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) (2019), English language skills have increasingly become the focus in the Australian Government's settlement and multicultural policies for immigrants and refugees. This report claims that for new arrivals to have long-term settlement outcomes, it is important to have English language skills. The report states that English language skills help people to navigate Australian life such as transport, housing, employment and education, and the health and justice systems. Therefore, the lack of English language skills would be a barrier to successfully settling in Australia because of the difficulties in accessing the labour market and accessing government services.

The FECCA report released in 2019 clearly defines the need for newcomers to Australia to have or learn English language skills to help them feel that Australia is home which will give them the sense of belonging.

Church-based ESL program

The church-based ESL programs run in Anglican churches in Sydney belong to their individual church and are considered to be a ministry. They are managed and run by volunteers. The volunteers are not required to have any special qualification such as a qualification in TESOL or similar. Some training can be provided by Anglicare

which is explained in greater detail in the next section, but this training is not mandatory for the volunteers who wish to teach English in their church.

The program is left to the volunteers to determine if they would like to teach any or all of the macro skills which are reading, writing, speaking and listening. The volunteers also decide if they would like to have one group of participants with mixed abilities or separate groups with varying proficiency level. Participants are not required to take a placement test to determine their level or assessed during their time there. This means participants do not progress in a systematic manner from one level to the next. This program is not aligned with any of the awards (such as a Certificate I, II, III or IV) in the Australian national awards system.

Immigrants and refugees come to Australia with a variety of different mix of education, experiences and upbringing (FECCA, 2019). They also have different needs which then requires that language providers consider their needs to ensure a socially cohesive society (FECCA, 2019).

For those reasons, English language providers, whether they are organisations or individuals, teaching English to immigrants and refugees for a fee or for free must consider FECCA's policy recommendations below.

1. Acknowledge that migrants/refugees in Australia learn in diverse ways.
2. English programs for migrants/refugees must be flexible to respond to diverse needs.
3. English learning for beginners must include a focus on everyday English.
4. English classes for migrants/refugees must be available in a safe place where focus is on trust.
5. Acknowledge that, while English language skills are essential in the early settlement period, English learning begins at different stages in life and throughout life in Australia.
6. Acknowledge that English learning is a life-long process.
7. Keep, support and resource community English programs.
8. Develop a database with resources community driven English language programs providers can access.
9. Develop a range of learning-based practices to increase accessibility for all.

10. Ensure resources are available to ease access for all migrants/refugees to Australia to access English fitting their needs.
11. Facilitate and encourage connections and collaborations between community driven English language programs, AMEP and settlement support providers.
12. Acknowledge the need for community driven English language programs to complement the AMEP (FECCA, 2019, p. 5).

Since church-based ESL classes serve immigrants and refugees, all the recommendations above from FECCA are relevant for this ministry.

Practical effectiveness

One volunteer ESL teacher said that although he had not taken any formal training in ESL instruction, he claimed that there was evidence that language learning did occur.

He said that circumstantial evidence indicated that learning did occur in his classes because the participants wanted to continue attending ESL classes. The participants also informed their Pastor that they learned a lot. They were also able to clearly indicate the learning that took place from the phonetics lessons (Chapin, 2016).

In a study by Chao & Mantero (2014), they investigate immigrants who are parents who attend church-based ESL classes. The research concluded a more positive outcome stated below,

...the programs are sources of funds of knowledge for immigrant parents. Local knowledge is used in the church-based ESL literacy education. Through field class, a way of reaching out to the community, the programs use it as part of language, literacy, and cultural learning. By doing so, the programs not only build the parents' confidence in their own ESL literacy learning, but they also empower them to exercise parental authority and agency in family literacy practices (p. 106).

The above findings reflect more closely to my experience working with coordinators and volunteer teachers in the church-based ESL classes in the Anglican churches in Sydney than Chao & Kuntz (2013)'s claims. The Anglican church ESL ministry in Sydney is supported by Anglicare through various means which is mentioned below.

Anglicare

Anglicare is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to serve people in need in communities in Sydney to enrich lives and share the love of Jesus. It holds true to the Christian motivation while responding to meet the changing needs of these communities. Anglicare seeks to promote and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the organisation serves those who are ageing, vulnerable or marginalised; respecting and valuing every person as made in the image of the living God (Anglicare, n.d).

Anglicare has a Cross-cultural Services team which comprise of eight Cross-cultural Advisors that serve different regions in Sydney. This team works in partnership with churches to assist them run their ESL ministry (Anglicare, 2023). Each advisor visits the Anglican churches in their region and provide assistance such as resources, training and other help as mentioned below. There are nearly 100 church-based ESL classes across the Diocese of Sydney (Anglicare, n.d). Each of these ESL ministries belong to the individual churches. ESL ministry is a community outreach program geared to helping immigrants and refugees who need to learn English and adjust to a new culture while demonstrating to them Christian care, acceptance and friendship.

Anglicare's aim is to train, equip and support church volunteers in the ESL ministry through a variety of ways (Anglicare, 2023). They provide:

- Teacher training for volunteers that consists of eight hours of training.
- Two conferences a year
- Ongoing support through the help of Cross-cultural Advisors
- Teaching resources
- A well-resourced ESL Library (Anglicare, 2023).

From time to time, the Cross-cultural Services team of Anglicare develop new initiatives to equip and support churches to widen their cross-cultural outreach beyond ESL with activities like cultural awareness training (Simon, 2022). Volunteers

set aside a few hours a week to prepare and teach lessons that often include Bible segments (Simon, 2022).

In this study, I will be reflecting on the church-based ESL ministries run by Anglican churches in Sydney using social capital theory.

Social capital theory

A socially cohesive society increases the social capital of that society. Social capital is the value available in both the physical aspects of a social network and the content of the network relationships (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Leana & van Buren, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In other words, social capital is understood to be a network of connections which help in the development of societies and in this case, in the improvement of the quality of life of immigrants and refugees.

Since the early 1980s, social capital has been conjectured in different ways (Martin, et al., 2020). Although there are many different views of social capital, we will be using Lin's (2001) conceptualisation of it which is explained below. It is viewed an individual's social network as a pool of resources that helps the individual achieve a goal (Lin, 2001; Son & Lin, 2012;). Social capital theory theorises that although individuals can achieve goals independently of their social networks (Lin, 2001), the resources exists in their social network offers valuable assets to them that can be positively pulled together (van der Gaag, 2005).

Therefore, social capital theory indicates that in addition to the people whom an individual knows, what the people in the individual's social network know is also critically important. In the case of immigrants and refugees, their social capital is enhanced with their interaction with church-based ESL classes because the networks developed through their interactions in their local churches improve their social capital in more ways than one. They not only gain English language skills but also leverage their network's connections to help them settle into the society.

Gap in literature

Literature for church-based ESL classes in Australia is very limited. Furthermore, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no literature connecting church-

based ESL classes to the participants' social capital. As mentioned above, social capital is defined as the value of the physical aspects of a social network and the content of the network relationships (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Leana & van Buren, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). This is the gap that this study aims to investigate.

Methodology

Reflections is a qualitative methodology. The role of reflection in research has been discussed since the early 1900s (Dewey, 1933). However, it is only since the 1980s that this method became prominent in discussion of practitioner, including teacher development. In the field of English language teacher education, reflection is often promoted as an important feature of effective practice (British Council, 2015). According to van Beveren et al., (2018), the term lacks conceptual clarity while Man & Walsh (2017) claim that there is relatively little understanding about the role of reflection in language teacher development.

In teacher reflection, Anderson (2019) suggests a more intuitive and conscious reflection that rejects academic knowledge as 'technical rationality', and encourages teachers to draw on experiential knowledge as the main source of learning. According to Dewey (1933), reflection is a metacognitive process in which a person can consider their feelings, responses, views, theories, information and experiences (Vinjamuri, Warde & Kolb, 2017). This process allows individuals to critically analyse their experiences and capture the knowledge emerges from them (Johns, 2004; Plack et al., 2007).

There has been a move from quantitative research methodologies toward naturalistic methods where many of these research methods have emerged in teacher training sector and identified as teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), action research (Winter, 1987), reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987). According to Newman (2000), at the heart of all of the naturalistic methods has been a focus on practice-as-inquiry (Newman, 1992). Newman (2000) goes on to say that there is no one "right" way of doing action research, of being a teacher researcher, of engaging in critical reflection. She also claims that practitioners engaging in this newer

methodology that are more open and reflective are inventing methodology as they go along.

I am using Donald Schön's (1983, 1987) understanding of reflective methodology where he sees practice as inquiry conducted primarily to inform and change on-going practice. My study is aimed to improve and change the current practice of running ESL classes. As suggested by Anderson (2019), I will be drawing on my experiential knowledge to analyse my data. I will also be using the suggestions presented in Dewey's (1933) seminal paper which are using feelings, information and experiences (Vinjamuri, Warde & Kolb, 2017).

This study did not require ethics approval because it is a reflection of my time working as a cross-cultural advisor with Anglicare. I did not interview anyone. Unlike other methodologies such as action research where the issue of how the consent of the research subjects were obtained and if they would be affected by the ways in which they are represented collectively in the research could be questioned (Wolfson et al., 2022), this study is purely a reflection.

My data collection was from the 1 March -30 June 2023 when I worked as a Cross-cultural Advisor for the western suburbs for Anglicare where I visited 11 Anglican churches and had meetings with all the other Cross-cultural Advisors who covered the whole Sydney regions and Wollongong. I reflected on the participants, the volunteer teachers, the way the program was run and the role of Anglicare in supporting the ESL ministry when I worked in the above capacity in Anglicare.

In this study 'data' was my reflections based on the categories in the table below. My reflection is from the perspective of an academic and manager, having managed a variety of ESL programs since 1992. I managed eight ESL programs in eight language centres, taught ESL in nine language centres and was the Administrator for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Centre, Examiner (Reading and Listening) and Marker (Writing and Speaking) for an Australian university centre.

Findings

As mentioned in the literature review, church-based ESL program has been viewed by those in the church as a legitimate way to both serve their communities and have a Christian witness. The findings in this section are based on my reflections of the ESL ministry in the Anglican churches in Sydney.

Table 1: Researcher's observations

| | Category | Observation |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Purpose for enrolling in the ESL classes | Attend classes to learn English, make friends, get local information, learn Australian culture, overcome loneliness and/or escape domestic violence. |
| 2. | Class attendance | Not regular, participants start and stop when they like. Some return to their home country and re-join the class when they come back to Australia. Many miss classes regularly for personal reasons such as childcare, housework, health reasons, family arrangements, etc. |
| 3. | How the programs are run | Each ESL program has different levels, use different resources, have different teacher qualifications and use different styles of delivery. |
| 4. | Volunteer qualifications | A small group of volunteers have TESOL qualifications while most of them do not have a formal TESOL qualification and have attended 8-hour training provided by Anglicare. A small group have neither TESOL nor Anglicare training. |

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| 5. | Volunteer commitment | Volunteers care for the whole-person and are not only concerned about teaching English. Most of the volunteers have been in the role for many years. |
| 6. | Evangelistic tool | The church-based ESL program is an evangelistic tool. |
| 7. | Resources | Most of the classes use Anglicare resources while a small group use other resources like English File, Headway, Side by Side, etc. |
| 8. | Class days and times | Different churches choose different days and times to teach ESL. Classes are run one weekday. The earliest class starts at 9am and the latest class ends at 9.30pm. |
| 9. | Class duration | Most church-based ESL classes run for a total of two hours per week during school terms, but some run multiple two-hour sessions per week as the need arises. |
| 10 | Impact of participants' social capital. | The resources that exist in the social network of volunteers and the church offers valuable assets to participants that can positively help immigrants and refugees settle into Australia. |

From my observation, I found that immigrants and refugees enrol in ESL classes not only to learn English but for other reasons as well. This ministry helps immigrants and refugees not only learn English but also to make new friends, get local

information and learn Australian culture. Some participants use the classes to overcome loneliness or escape domestic violence. Therefore, participants join these classes for a variety of purposes.

Participants' attendance is not regular, and some participants drop off and return to class as they feel. Some return to their home country for a few months and rejoin these church-based ESL classes upon their return. Many miss classes regularly for personal reasons such as child-care, housework, health reasons, family arrangements, etc. This lack of commitment to learning English may be because the participants do not take the ESL classes seriously and attend when it fits in their daily life. That could be because the ESL programs are not aligned with any of the awards offered in the Australian national awards system.

Central to the issue of attendance is the casualness in which these classes are run. Each ESL class has different levels, use different resources, have different teacher qualifications and use different styles of delivery. Although each of the ESL ministry is set up to help their community, be it by teaching English, providing practical support or making friends, they are run with no clear structure. This could be why many participants do not take it seriously enough to attend regularly. As far as can be determined, this aspect of church-run ESL classes has not be explored in the USA or Australia.

My next reflection is that the volunteers who either teach, help in class or prepare morning or afternoon tea are extremely committed and give up a lot of their time for these new arrivals. They do this as their service to God and may do so because they see it as a worthy cause. These volunteer teachers and helpers are usually mature Christians and are always ready to lend a helping hand, provide comfort or show immigrants and refugees where they can get help. I noticed that participating in these church-based ESL classes is an empowering experience, grounding adult English learners within their communities and giving them a voice in the larger society as Chao & Mantero (2014) claim.

Although ESL programs run by churches are an evangelistic tool, unlike the conclusion from Chao & Kuntz 's (2013) study, I found that Christian principles and

values are not forced on the adult learners. It reflects more closely to Chao & Mantero (2014)'s findings. From the churches' angle, ESL classes are run with the hope that through this ministry, immigrants and refugees may encounter Jesus in the context of genuine Christian care, acceptance and friendship and respond to Him as their Lord and Saviour.

I also saw that church-based ESL classes are very relational. The volunteers take their relationship with the participants and each other very seriously. These relationships exist in and outside the class. Volunteer teachers often act as cultural directors by helping immigrants and refugees navigate their life in the Australia culture by explaining norms and behavioural expectations. These volunteers go well beyond their classroom duties and in many instances welcome migrants and refugees into their home to have a meal and fellowship. This is what Anglicare Team Leader and Advisors also claim (Simon, 2022). Some even meet lonely participants for coffee or a meal on days when there is no class. Since social capital, as mentioned in the literature review, is the value available in both the physical aspects of a social network and the content of the network relationships (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Leana & van Buren, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), the way in which the volunteers embrace their relationship with the participants help them increase their social capital.

Volunteers care for the whole person and not just the participant's English language learning. These participants are seen as someone with a family and community context and for that reason, they may connect them with other Anglicare services like the mobile food pantry, counselling, youth support services or men's mental health service. I believe this immensely increases individual participant's social capital. This aspect of looking at their participants as a whole and not only helping them with their language training helps to create a more socially cohesive society which then increases the social capital of that society.

Anglicare plays a supportive and not a leadership role. According to the Team Leader, Louise Afful, "The purpose of the team is to inspire, equip and support local churches as they reach out and respond practically to their multi-cultural communities and under God make Jesus known." (Simon, 2022). Both Anglicare and

the churches see the delivery of ESL classes as a ministry where casual, unstructured learning and teaching of ESL within the community takes place.

Anglicare cross-cultural services team write ESL resources for the churches. Each resource seems to have different number of lessons. Some have eight chapters while others have ten or eleven or even twelve chapters. The ESL classes in the churches run on a ten-week term and that is not reflected in Anglicare resources. Whilst writers claim the number of chapters in a book is not important because churches progress at their own pace, the writers have not taken into consideration that the church-based ESL classes run for ten weeks a term and four terms a year.

The cross-cultural team in Anglicare provide much support to the church-based ESL classes. They are often just a phone-call away, ready to help volunteers with lesson plans, ideas, resources and fun activities.

Discussion

Discussion from the findings

From the ten observations in Table 1 above, the researcher has reflected on each one and determined whether they are strengths or weaknesses in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Researcher's reflections

| | Category | Observation | Strength (✓) or weakness (✗) |
|----|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | Purpose for enrolling in the ESL classes | Attend classes to learn English, make friends, get local information, learn Australian culture, overcome loneliness and/or escape domestic violence. | ✓ |
| 2. | Class attendance | Not regular, participants start and stop when they like. Some return to their home | ✗ |

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| | | country and re-join the class when they come back to Australia. Many miss classes regularly for personal reasons such as childcare, housework, health reasons, family arrangements, etc. | |
| 3. | How the programs are run | Each ESL program has different levels, use different resources, have different teacher qualifications and use different styles of delivery. | ✘ |
| 4. | Volunteer qualifications | A small group of volunteers have TESOL qualifications while most of them do not have a formal TESOL qualification and have attended 8-hour training provided by Anglicare. A small group have neither TESOL or Anglicare training. | ✘ |
| 5. | Volunteer commitment | Volunteers care for the whole-person and are not only concerned about teaching English. Most of the volunteers have been in the role for many years. | ✓ |
| 6. | Evangelistic tool | The church-based ESL program is an evangelistic | ✓ |

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| | | tool. | |
| 7. | Resources | Most of the classes use Anglicare resources while a small group use other resources like English File, Headway, Side by Side, etc. | x |
| 8. | Class days and times | Different churches choose different days and times to teach ESL. Classes are run one weekday. The earliest class starts at 9am and the latest class ends at 9.30pm. | ✓ |
| 9. | Class duration | Most church-based ESL classes run for a total of two hours per week during school terms, but some run multiple two-hour sessions per week as the need arises. | ✓ |
| 10. | Impact of participants' social capital. | The resources that exist in the social network of volunteers and the church offers valuable assets to participants that can positively help immigrants and refugees settle into Australia. | ✓ |

Six of the observations are strengths. Together they contribute to participants' social capital. For example, by attending English classes, participants learn English be it in a slower pace or at the pace of a structured English language centre. This is

supported by Chapin (2016) mentioned in greater detail in the literature review. Learning English help them make friends, be successful in job interviews, communicate with their health practitioners, etc.

The other four reflections are considered weakness. These will be further discussed below and recommendations made to remedy them.

Recommendations

As mentioned in the findings section above, there is no real structure and levels in the church-based ESL classes currently offered in the Sydney Anglican churches. Currently, participants have no idea of when they will progress to the next level, if another level even exists. Participants remain in a class indefinitely. They are not given an assessment to determine how much they have learnt during the whole term or year. This issue could be rectified by creating a rubric that clearly shows the different levels of proficiency such as 'absolute beginner', 'beginner', 'elementary', 'pre-intermediate', 'intermediate', 'upper intermediate' and 'advanced'. The rubric should indicate what participants should be able to do for each macro skill for the different levels. Initially, it may not be viable for each church to have that many levels. However, over time it may be possible as participant numbers grow. Another way of overcoming the issue of not being able to have all levels is to collaborate with other churches within a close proximity. This way, churches may be able to provide a more structured, language centre-like ESL ministry where participants can move from one level to the next and possibly even receive a certificate of attendance. This may improve the participants' attendance. Anglicare could also investigate the possibility of aligning the church-based ESL classes with one of the awards offered in the Australian national awards system.

All volunteers should be trained in second language acquisition theories and methodology of teaching English as a second language (TESOL). This volunteer training should be made mandatory by the churches. Anglicare's cross-cultural services section could play a pivotal role in training volunteers. Volunteers should also receive a structured on-going mentoring by a qualified TESOL practitioner. This way, the church-based ESL ministry can play a more sound role in teaching English to immigrants and refugees.

As mentioned above, Anglicare plays a supportive role in the delivery of ESL classes in the Anglican churches in Sydney. The cross-cultural advisors are always willing to help and support the churches with ideas, training and resources. That is a massive undertaking by a small group of advisors headed by an experienced and committed Team Leader. Since each ESL ministry belongs to their individual church, Anglicare tries to only play a supportive role and not be overbearing. Therefore, although there appears to be a shared common and aligned sense of purpose across the different churches' ESL ministries, they do not collaborate. A strong and aligned sense of purpose and identity can improve the delivery of English classes. In the absence of such alignment, the volunteers in the ESL ministries turn to Anglicare for only support and advice and not leadership.

Anglicare cross cultural section write their resources based on four levels which are beginner, high beginner, intermediate and high intermediate. The resources developed by Anglicare are utilised by many church-based ESL programs but there is no uniformity in the way they were written or used. Currently, there are resources with different themes, different number of volumes and different number of chapters. Some resources introduce participants to the Australian culture while others are language-based or even Bible-based. There is also no clear progression from one level to the next in any particular theme.

In other words, there are not enough resources on a particular theme that would take a participant from term one in the beginner level to term four in the high intermediate level. The lack of uniformity means some coordinators struggle to decide which resource to use at a particular level and how the progression would look.

Since ESL classes in the churches run for four terms in a year and each term consists of ten weeks, a well-consulted Master Plan for writing resources could first be developed taking into consideration ten-week terms and four terms a year. Each level could have four volumes of resources. Each volume could have ten chapters so the volunteer teachers could teach one chapter a week and then progress to the next volume. This way, a participant could start term one in the beginner level and

progress through each volume until they get to the fourth volume in the high intermediate level.

After writing any resource, a focus group of coordinators from different churches should be invited to view them and give feedback before they are published. Consultation should be a large aspect of writing.

Impact on the researcher

Observing and analysing church-based ESL classes provided me with first-hand data on how grassroots organisations contribute to education, especially in underserved communities. I gained valuable insights into how informal or community-driven programs differ from traditional institutional settings. It allowed me to explore how religious institutions impact immigrant and refugee communities' social capital. This understanding may in the future contribute to broader research on community support networks and their role in language acquisition and cultural integration.

Observing and presenting church-based ESL helped me understand how theories of language learning (e.g., communicative approaches) play out in real-world, low-resource settings. These classes often go beyond language instruction, fostering cultural exchange and social integration. Examining them enriched my understanding of the broader impacts of ESL education. They taught me how language learning intertwines with cultural identity and assimilation.

I gained access to unique qualitative data, such as learner narratives, challenges specific to community-based programs, and volunteer teacher experiences. I realised that the insights I gained highlight gaps in policy or resources and inform future recommendations. Engaging with participants and instructors helped me better understand the lived experiences of those involved. This improved the quality and empathy of my research. By discussing a church-based ESL class, I contributed to the dialogue on how non-traditional educational programs address social and linguistic barriers. It allowed me to explore the intersection of language education, community support, and faith-based initiatives, giving my research a multidimensional focus. I contributed to an understudied area especially in Australia,

such as the role of religious organisations in addressing linguistic and cultural barriers.

Conclusion

Church-based ESL programs serve as a crucial support system for immigrants and refugees who seek to improve their language skills whilst assimilating into their new communities. These programs provide more than just language instruction as they help build social capital by fostering relationships, increasing access to resources, and enhancing community engagement. This paper explored the various ways in which church-based ESL classes contribute to students' social capital.

The first research question which is, 'What are the notable positive aspects currently present in the teaching of ESL within the Anglican churches in Sydney that impact on participants' social capital?', was answered through my reflections in the findings part of this paper. Through this study, ten findings were uncovered and discussed above. Of the ten, six were identified as strengths which impact on participants' social capital.

The second research question is, 'What are the notable negative aspects currently present in the teaching of ESL within the Anglican churches in Sydney and what strategies can be implemented to address the findings?' From the ten findings, four were identified as weaknesses. In the recommendation part above, I have made constructive suggestions on how to solve those weaknesses. By adopting my recommendations, the ESL classes run by Anglican churches in Sydney could improve immigrants' and refugees' social capital.

There are also some limitations to this research. One limitation is that my time with my participants was quite short. This was not intentional but because the position was a short-term employment. Another limitation is the research in church-based ESL classes in Australia is sparse in contrast to those in other countries such as the United States.

Future research in this field could focus on collecting raw qualitative data by interviewing the volunteers and participants. Exploring qualitative data might reveal more in-dept benefits, issues and solutions. A mixed-methodology study that

includes quantitative data such as number of weeks participants attend these classes, number of participants who are successful in obtaining jobs, etc could be analysed. These studies could push the boundaries of knowledge.

In conclusion, this paper proves that what the churches are doing through their ESL ministry is phenomenal. With limited training and difficulties in using Anglicare resources, they still continue to reach out to their local communities. The volunteer teachers and helpers do a great job by fulfilling the mandate to reach out and help the less fortunate. The ESL ministry in the Anglican churches in Sydney help immigrants and refugees increase their social capital and settle into the community more smoothly and comfortably.

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