

International Drive Community Redevelopment Area
ESOL For Working Adults Pilot
Performance Update, October 2023



Background

2021 Orange County Board approval enabled the use of International Drive Community Redevelopment Agency (I-Drive CRA) funds for economic and workforce development initiatives to be accessed by stakeholders within the CRA's boundaries. The first initiative launched by Orange County Government was a pilot program for English instruction tailored to the needs of working adults in the CRA. The pilot, with Rosen Hotels & Resorts as the sponsoring employer, UCF Global as the education partner, and Aeras Foundation for devices, ran in three 8-week cycles ending in June 2023. Based on employer interest, the pilot was extended in May 2023 to one additional 8-week session with Paramount Hospitality Management and IMA Medical Group, both employers within the CRA.

Pilot details:

- Each employer hosted classes on site and compensated employees during their time in class, testing if this would address key accessibility issues of time away from work, transportation, childcare, and cost.
- Instruction was offered in-person or hybrid (online and in-person) for 2 hours, twice each week, tailored to participants' language skill levels.
- Participants in hybrid learning were provided Android devices with access to an online platform.

Data was collected on participant literacy levels and perceptions, and on employer operational impact to help the County design and implement a sustainable employer sponsored ESOL program. This report was developed by Orange County Administration based on an analysis by UCF Global and is based on responses from 159 participants and three employers.

Pilot Performance Update

Key findings:

- **Demographics:** Half the students had never taken an English language class, including 40% of those who have been in the United States for 8 years or more. The primary barriers were "work schedule (49%) and "lack of time (27%).
- **Learning Gains:** There were statistically significant gains across all areas of instruction, with Speaking showing the most improvement. Instructional strategies that allayed anxiety and reinforced meaning and context had a direct impact on learning and satisfaction. Online-only learning was found not to be effective in the first cohort and was transitioned to a hybrid (in-person and online) approach.
- **Satisfaction:** Overall perceptions of the program were overwhelmingly positive with a majority (89%) indicating a willingness to recommend. "*My employer supported me*" ranked as the top benefit.
- **Employer Feedback:** Anecdotal evidence indicates improvements in employee morale and guest experience. All pilot program sponsors would like to continue the offering.

Details:

1) Demographics and Needs Assessment

Program participants were administered a demographics and needs-assessment survey in advance of class placement.

- A majority (83%) of the participants were not born in the United States.
 - The top countries of participant origin were Haiti (42%), Venezuela (18%), and the Dominican Republic (8%) but the mix of country of origin and length of stay in the country varied by employer.
 - More than half (56%) identified as Hispanic, and 37% as African American/Black.
 - More than a third (39%) had been in the U.S. for more than 8 years.
- The average age of the participants was 45, with ages ranging from 19-82. Two-thirds were women.
- More than half (54%) had not taken English classes in the past, and notably, 40% of those who had been in the country for 8 years or more had not done so. The primary barriers were “work schedule (49%), “lack of time (27%) and “cost (26%).
- More than a third (38%) had completed high school and 22% had a bachelor’s degree or higher levels of academic accomplishment. However, the level of education varied by employer industry. IMA Medical had the most participants with Associate degrees or higher, including five participants with advanced degrees. Individual conversations with the latter group indicate that language was their primary barrier to practicing their trade.
- “Better work opportunities” was indicated as the main interest factor in the program across all students (75%), followed by “Daily Communications” (38%) and “For school/continuing education” (20%).
- In this pre-screening, a majority (68%) indicated they preferred in-person modes of learning, but virtual (18%) and hybrid (14%) were also options.
- A majority (76%) had access to a mobile phone, 49% had Wi-Fi/Internet, and 41% said they had access to a computer or laptop (multiple responses allowed).

2) Participant Learning

Gains in reading and vocabulary, writing, speaking, and listening are measured using pre-course and post-course assessments for each 8-week session. Note that an impactful number of students were not present on the days that the assessments were administered. The results below are based on the students who participated in the assessments.

Participants statistically significantly improved their English in each skill and competence area from the beginning of Session 1 to the end of Session 4. The most gains occurred in scores for Speaking assessments, and relatively speaking, the least in Vocabulary.

Table 1: Pre and Post – Test Assessments

| Assessments | | Mean | Number of Participants Taking Assessment | Standard Deviation | Standard Error Mean |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--|--------------------|---------------------|
| Pair 1 | Post-Listening | 6.93 | 147 | 3.76 | .310 |
| | Pre-Listening | 5.69 | 147 | 3.79 | .313 |
| Pair 2 | Post-Grammar | 7.17 | 151 | 6.140 | .500 |
| | Pre-Grammar | 6.20 | 151 | 4.808 | .391 |
| Pair 3 | Post-Vocabulary | 5.36 | 146 | 2.384 | .197 |
| | Pre-Vocabulary | 4.99 | 146 | 2.413 | .200 |
| Pair 4 | Post-Reading | 4.75 | 130 | 2.633 | .231 |
| | Pre-Reading | 4.19 | 130 | 2.434 | .213 |
| Pair 5 | Post-Speaking | 34.60 | 115 | 19.186 | 1.789 |
| | Pre-Speaking | 26.94 | 115 | 17.369 | 1.620 |

Source: UCF Global, September – July 2023.

Key learnings:

- Participant interactions indicated that students who lack first language literacy need to be separated from other cohorts to increase learning gains for all participants. Beginning with Session 2, the Foundational cohort was split into two courses – one level to help build literacy in both first and second languages, and a second level to build literacy in the second language (English).
- Instructors and program leaders noted high levels of uncertainty around employer support, schedule impact due to two hurricanes, program learning expectations, and self-consciousness regarding literacy. This uncertainty declined in session 2.
- Support from a literacy coach was introduced several weeks into session 1 to address cultural and learning concerns.
- Creating opportunities for conversation, providing more communicative tasks to the participants, incorporating media such as songs and videos, as well as multimodal activities such as language games keeps students on task, motivated, and more communicative based on the survey results are good learning. The main need for the participants was to be able to communicate in English, mainly verbally at work.
- While conducting instruction with a mixed group of immigrant learners, teachers who prompt these all-ability learners and provide appropriate wait time allow all students to experience success with language learning regardless of their level. Giving students enough time and context as well as personalized course materials based on their needs will help the whole class.

Analysis suggests that instructional strategies that reinforced meaning and context had a direct impact on students' learning and perceptions, as did instructors' creating a safe and flexible environment for learning. The latter was especially important in decreasing students' affective filter and increasing communication and participation.

Academic research also emphasizes the importance of creating a community of practice in which all students are expected to become active participants in the co-construction of meaning and are held individually accountable.

- Although findings are limited due to the small sample size, applying the proper and correct techniques and communicative approaches will develop main language skills such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and their second language grammar. Students of all ability levels can develop basic interpretive and interpersonal skills in another language when provided with consistent, meaningful, and appropriate input.
- Data showed that all learners can enjoy the language learning experience, especially when a high level of motivation and support is offered by their classroom teachers.

3) Participant Satisfaction Survey

A satisfaction survey was conducted at the end of each session inviting participants to rate their experience from on a scale of 1 to 5 and provide open-ended responses.

Based on the statistical prediction data, instructors are the determiners of student learning through their methods and techniques. Qualitative data analyses and individual conversations further suggest that instructors' creating a safe and flexible learning environment, especially to decrease students' affective filter and increase communication and participation was very important. Participants clearly indicated what they liked about their teachers and how it helped them to learn English. They also stated that instructors' providing practice opportunities for the learners, obtaining additional materials, communication in general, and location and time of the courses were very helpful in the process of learning English.

- The overall reported satisfaction among respondents was very positive, with no difference between those taking classes online and in person/face to face.

- Most (77%) of perceptions of the program overall is predicted by perceptions of the instructor, indicating that instructors and their unique approaches are crucial for participants' learning.
- The correlation is even stronger (87%) for perceptions of course materials. When students think that their instructor cares about students' learning and show effort for their learning, participants find the course materials more helpful.
- Variance in the perception of the course overall also depends heavily on the perception of course materials (79%).
- Worth researching further, the analysis found a statistically significant difference in instructor satisfaction between participants who took the course online perceiving their teachers more positively than the peers taking the courses F2F. However, when the qualitative comments are examined, the participants wanted more F2F courses to be able to interact with others such as teachers, peers, colleagues, other employees, and employers.

4) End of Program Survey

- Ninety-six participants responded to an "End of Program Survey" distributed in F2F sessions as well as online through the Qualtrics survey website. The survey focused on understanding participant needs for future sessions.
- A majority (85/96) indicated they would recommend this program to family, friends, and co-workers. One respondent indicated "Maybe" and 10 did not respond.
- The main benefits selected by respondents were:

| | |
|--|-----|
| My employer supported me through the program | 59% |
| It fits in my work schedule | 51% |
| The class was available to me | 50% |
| It is no cost to me | 42% |

Source: UCF Global, September – August 2023. N=96

- Most participants indicated that classes between 7am and 9am would be most convenient for them if this program is offered again.
- Most participants would be able to attend the program if it was offered somewhere else other than at the employer site, indicating an option for employers with smaller groups of interested employees.

How likely would you be to participate in this program if the classes were offered elsewhere but at no cost to you (e.g., nearby training center, church, college, library)?

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Extremely likely | 46% |
| Somewhat likely | 19% |
| Neither likely nor unlikely | 14% |
| Somewhat unlikely | 6% |
| Extremely unlikely | 14% |

Source: UCF Global, September – August 2023. N=96

- For those wanting assistance in supporting their job growth, "English as a second language (ESOL) classes" was top ranked as expected, but opportunities to visit employers & learn about career openings, tuition assistance, and assistance with starting up or growing a small business were the next three.

5) Attendance

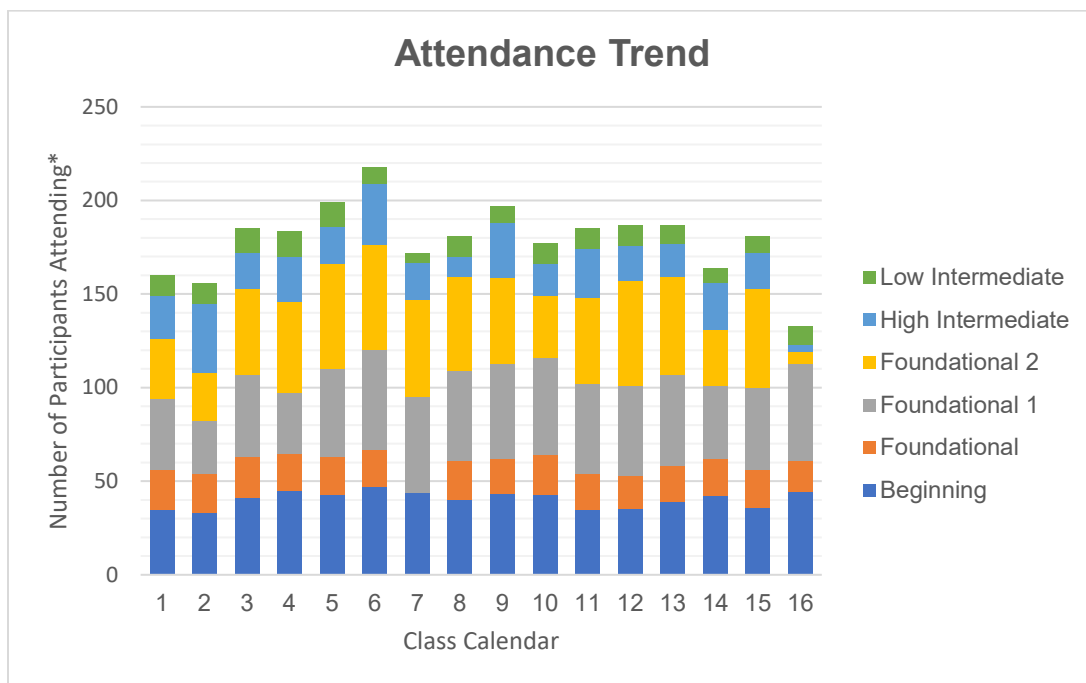
The average class size was 11 participants, with classes ranging from 5 – 25 students. Foundational classes, designed for those with minimal to very low literacy in English and in their native language, had the most students. Over the course of the program, these classes were further divided into Foundation 1 (very minimal literacy) and Foundation 2 (slightly higher literacy) to accommodate learning needs.

| Course Name | Number of Participants |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Beginning | 47 |
| Foundational | 22 |
| Foundational 1 | 53 |
| Foundational 2 | 56 |
| Low Intermediate | 14 |
| High Intermediate | 37 |

Source: UCF Global I-Drive ESOL Pilot Attendance. N=153, Rosen employees could participate in multiple 8-week cycles.

Attendance trends indicate that as students became more comfortable with the cadence of classes, attendance increased, then dropped as the end of the session approached. Attendance decreased dramatically on assessment days: Foundational levels students were least likely to miss assessment days, but High/Intermediate students were most likely to be absent.

High/Intermediate level students were placed in online classes and provided tablets in Session 1. However, they struggled with attendance and digital access, and they were transitioned to a hybrid experience in Session 2, with in-person support from an instructor on alternate weeks.



Source: UCF Global I-Drive ESOL Pilot Attendance. N=153, *Rosen employees could participate in multiple 8-week cycles. Accounts for classes cancelled due to external events (hurricanes, national holidays) and operational issues (lack of space).

6) Employer Feedback

Anecdotal evidence from Rosen Hotels and Resorts teams indicates the program provided learning gains for the 130 associates who participated. The team reported growth in speaking and understanding of the English language and that associates were engaged and committed. The opportunity to attend while at work, both from a location and cost perspective, is invaluable from Rosen's perspective. "A key component of their learning gains, their confidence and their

engagement was that the curriculum was designed based on the level of our students and their pace.” -Rosen Hotels and Resorts HR Program Lead

Additional notes:

- Increased associate confidence, in turn comes with increased morale and associate retention. We noticed associates becoming more comfortable in their roles, with the guests and overall, and with their happiness at work.
- Increased guest satisfaction scores on greeting from staff.
- Increased opportunity for growth within organization.

Leaders at IMA Medical Group and Paramount Hotel Management indicated similar experiences with employee morale and guest experience. All three indicated a strong interest in continuing the program offering.

Based on findings from this pilot program four other regional employers have directly established relationships with UCF Global (as of October 2023) to provide ESOL instruction.

Key Contacts

Orange County Administration: Renuka Sastri, Sr. Professional Workforce & Economic Development, I-Drive CRA

University of Central Florida: Jennifer Haddad, Director of Business Partnerships, UCF Global; Hilal Peker, Ph.D., Lead Research Analyst

Aeras Foundation: Michelle Leeper, Head of Client Relations