

**A study of the opportunities and challenges of providing non-  
formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland  
Libraries**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Research Problem**

Auckland has become more ethnically diverse in the last two decades. Auckland Libraries with its 55 branches can make a considerable contribution in integrating immigrants into the community by offering adult ESOL programmes. This study investigates the key issues related to providing ESOL adult programmes in Auckland Libraries.

### **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten library staff members including three managers. A purposeful sampling approach was used with the participants recruited from five community library branches that run adult ESOL programmes.

### **Results**

The findings show that participating libraries use the opportunity of providing ESOL programmes to invest on community building. They face many challenges in terms of staffing, funding cut, change in organisation structure and other practical issues. However, they are able to use various strategies to overcome or work around the challenges because of the positive attitudes and passion of the library staff members who run the programmes. However, there are much room for improvement in the area of collaboration and partnership.

### **Implications**

Auckland Libraries branches should work together to minimise duplications of effort by sharing ideas, resources and expertise. Library managers should instil the mission of using ESOL programmes to achieve the aim of community building in every library staff and set a healthy work culture in the organisation. In addition, they can look for more training options for their library staff. Future research could look at investigating the attitudes of adult ESOL learners in the community libraries and other library staff in general towards the programmes, and the effect and outcomes of Fit for the Future new service model on the programmes.

**Keywords:** Auckland Libraries, non-formal ESOL programmes, opportunities, challenges, adult learners, community building, adult literacy, attitudes and perceptions

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Research problem**

Auckland has become more ethnically diverse in the last two decades as it increasingly receives more immigrants from countries where English is not spoken as the first language. According to the 2013 census, Asia accounts for 36 percent of immigrants to Auckland (Statistic New Zealand, 2014) and the Asian population in Auckland is projected to grow from the current 23 percent to 27 percent (Gilbertson, Meares, Auckland (N.Z.), & Council, 2013, p. 29; Sutherland, 2013, p. 11 ). In addition, New Zealand has been receiving about 750 refugees annually mainly from Asian countries like Myanmar, Bhutan and Afghanistan in recent years and many of these refugees reside in Auckland region (Friesen & Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2015, p. 14).

According to a report by the Office of Ethnic Communities (2014), English language proficiency plays a key role in integrating immigrants into the New Zealand society. Those with low English language ability can face tremendous difficulty in their social interaction and participation in New Zealand life. Conversely, immigrants' ability to settle successfully and contribute to the Auckland economy is closely tied to their English language ability ( Plumridge, New Zealand, Department of Labour, & Labour & Immigration Research Centre (N.Z.), 2012, p. 4; Woodley, Williams, Auckland (N.Z.), Council, & Point Research Ltd, 2012, p. 40).

According to Gill (2001) and Hoyer (2011), a core role for a public library is to serve the local community and to provide access to knowledge to support both formal and informal education. Since a public library exists for the benefit of its local community, it needs to be aware of social, economic and demographic changes in the community and provide services that mirror these changes in order to meet local needs (Gill, 2001, p. 9). In addition, as a community hub which is freely accessible, it is often one of the first public places visited by immigrants (Sutherland, 2012, p.26).

Auckland Libraries with its 55 branches can make a considerable contribution in integrating immigrants into society by offering adult ESOL programmes. A few community libraries have already identified this need and started adult ESOL programmes and the classes are proving hugely popular. However, the number of community libraries offering the

programmes is limited in proportion to the total number of community libraries. In addition, some have also discontinued the service because of staff and financial constraints.

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

Like many of its counterparts in developed countries, Auckland Libraries is undergoing a transformational time in the face of the digital revolution. It is shifting its roles from being primarily an information centre to be a community hub and a learning organisation (Sutherland, 2013, p. 50). Sutherland (2012, p. 25-26) also emphasized social inclusion and the provision of services which meet local community needs.

When Auckland Libraries broadens its services to cater for the needs of the community, the staff have to go beyond their usual day-to-day jobs to plan and facilitate the running of the programmes. In addition, the library service is under great financial pressure as Auckland Council executes funding cuts over the next ten years (Orsman, 2014, July 7). With increased workload, a lack of funding for training and resources, the library service is facing tremendous challenges.

There is currently very little information regarding the delivery of ESOL programmes in Auckland Libraries. In the face of the challenging environment and the increasing number of immigrants and refugees residing in Auckland, it is important to investigate the key issues related to providing ESOL adult programmes in Auckland Libraries so that the service can base decisions on programme design and delivery on research evidence.

## **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the opportunities and challenges of providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland Libraries. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges facing Auckland Libraries' staff in providing adult ESOL programmes?
2. What are the strategies used by the library staff to overcome any challenges that they face in the delivery of adult ESOL programmes?

3. What are the attitudes of library staff involved in the adult ESOL programmes toward the adult ESOL programmes run by Auckland libraries?

#### **1.4 Definition of key terms**

##### **ESOL**

An acronym for ‘English for Speakers of Other Languages’, which in this study, refers to English taught to learners who speak a language other than English. This term is chosen over ESL (English as Second Language) as many immigrants are learning English as their third or fourth language. In the library context, ESOL programmes are categorized under adult literacy, adult learning programmes or lifelong learning and are considered an integral part of the mission of library services (Kong, 2013, p.40).

##### **Non-formal learning**

Learning that takes place outside the formal education system. Non-formal learning can be organised and have learning objectives but it does not lead to any formal qualification or certification (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], n.d.; Council of Europe, 2003).

##### **Adult learners**

The definition of “adult learners” can vary in different libraries depending on purpose and type of library services (Ashcroft, Farrow & Watts, 2007, p.128). Auckland Libraries issues an adult library card once a person turns 18. Hence, adult learners for this study refer to people who are over 18 years old and are in the process of learning English as second or additional language.

##### **Auckland Libraries**

In this study, Auckland Libraries is considered as one organisation with 55 community libraries in the Auckland region.



**Immigrant**

According to Oxford dictionary, an immigrant is “A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country”. People normally migrate for economic, social and political reasons. In this study, refugees are thus included in the immigrant group. In many research articles, this term is used interchangeably with “immigrant”.

**1.5 Significance of the study**

The resulting research will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of providing ESOL programmes to adult learners in Auckland Libraries. It is hoped that the findings can guide libraries offering the adult ESOL programmes with better planning and management of the services. The discussion generated can also pave the way for libraries to work together and find innovative ways to ensure the sustainability of the programmes. At the same time, more libraries can be encouraged to embark on running ESOL programmes if appropriate for their communities. Finally, it is hoped that the issues and gaps identified through the findings will provide the basis for further research in this area.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review aims to provide an overview of the key constructs and issues pertaining to the delivery of adult ESOL programmes in Auckland libraries with the purpose of providing a foundation and direction for the research study to follow.

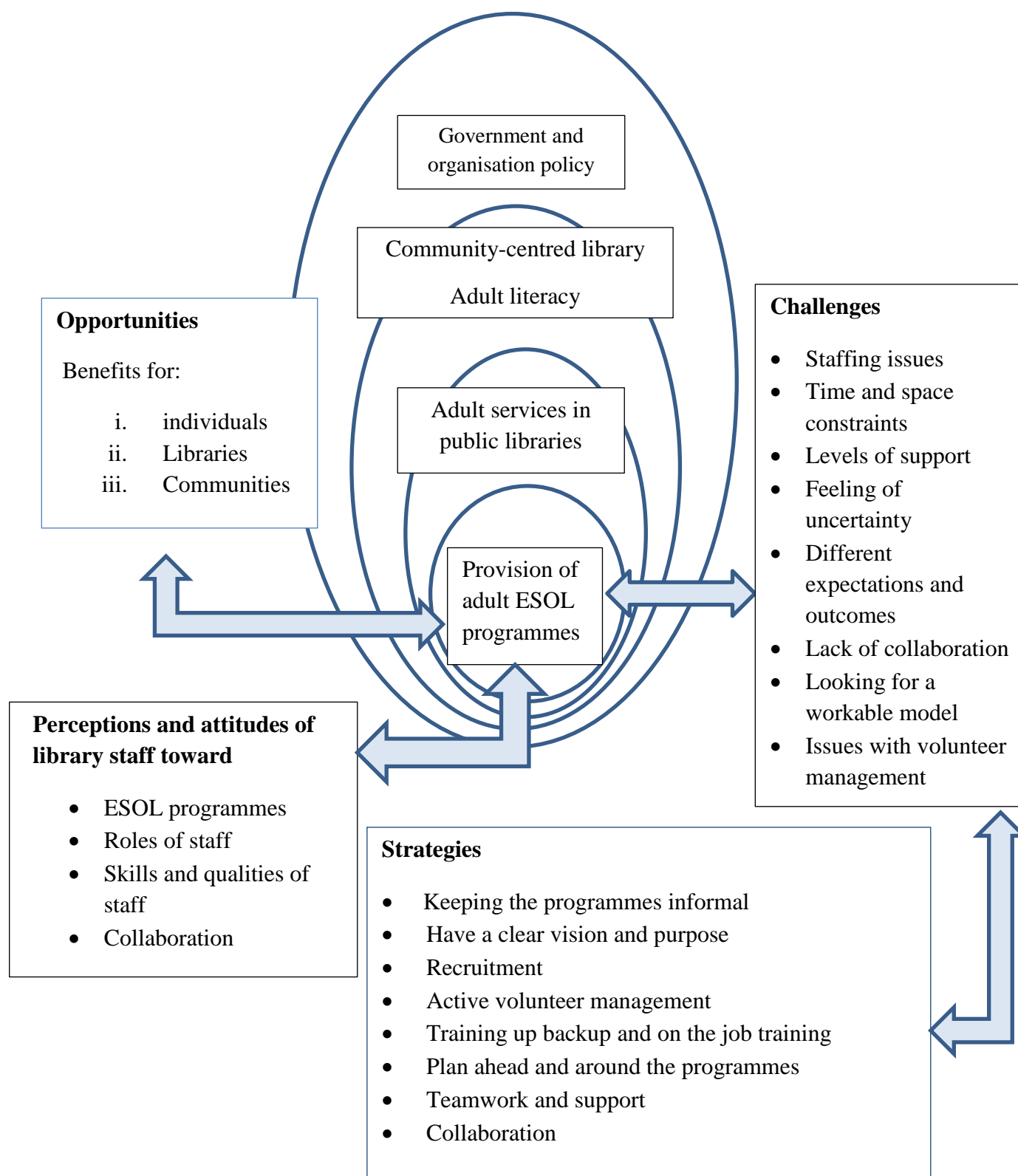
Most of the articles were gathered using the following databases: Emerald Insight, EBSCO host, ProQuest and Auckland Libraries databases. Material was also gathered from Google Scholar and other appropriate Internet sites. In addition, citations in articles of interest and citation indexing function in Emerald Insight and EBSCO host were used to generate more relevant articles. Articles from different points of view were included in order to provide additional context on the research topic and identify areas that need to be included in the proposed research.

Many of the articles in the review are about adult literacy programmes or adult library services; they are relevant to the research topic as shown in the conceptual framework diagram. Thus, their findings and discussions can be applied to this study as ESOL programming is considered an adult literacy programme and also a part of the public library services for adults.

In addition, many articles also touch on the role community libraries play in integrating new immigrants into the community. In many cases, delivery of ESOL programmes for adult learners are considered as one of the core services by libraries to immigrants in addition to the provision of community language collections and free Wi-Fi.

## 2.2 Conceptual framework

The literature review is based on the following conceptual framework:



### 2.3 Adult literacy

Many researchers agreed that there is no common accepted definition of ‘literacy’ and the understanding and interpretations of this complex concept differ based on social, cultural, political, national context and technology development (Cervero, 1985; De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016). Traditionally, literacy in its simplest term refers to a person’s ability to read and write. Today, its definition has broadened to include numeracy acquisition, problem solving skills, information skills and other related skills that enable a person to function successfully in today’s complex technological environment (Cervero, 1985; Tolbert-Bynum, 2015).

UNESCO (2013) as cited in Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy [MTML] (2015) stated

“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society”.

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey which was first conducted in 2006 at both national and international levels have investigated the proficiency level of adults in four domains:

- i. Prose literacy – the ability to read and understand continuous text such as books and articles
- ii. Document literacy – the ability to read and understand discontinuous text such as graphs and maps
- iii. Numeracy – the ability to understand mathematical and numerical information
- iv. Problem-solving – the ability to reason and think analytically

(Satherley & Lawes, 2007, p.3)

The survey showed that although the proportion of adults with very low literacy skills (level 1) has reduced substantially in New Zealand when compared to a similar survey, the International Adult Literacy Survey undertaken in 1996, the proportion with low literacy skills (level 2) persists (Satherley, Lawes & Sok, 2008, p.4).

After the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1996, the New Zealand government began addressing the literacy, numeracy and language needs of the adult population by investing significantly in foundation learning. One of the main funding streams is Adult and Community Education (ACE) which subsidises the majority of short term non-formal foundation skills education providers in the community and two such large scale providers are ESOL Home Tutors and Literacy Aotearoa.

(Benseman, 2013, p.2-5)

#### **2.4 Differences between adult literacy and adult ESOL learners in New Zealand**

Although language is one of the three components of foundation learning, there are significant differences between adult ESOL and adult literacy learners. According to Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005), adult literacy learners normally have good spoken fluency but poor reading comprehension, writing and other literacy skills. Many also have many years of formal education but have bad experience, incomplete schooling or educational failure which may affect their motivation to learn (p.70).

In contrast, while some adult ESOL learners among refugee and immigrant groups have literacy needs, others have excellent levels of literacy and education in their first language and some exposure to formal English teaching. A survey on 248 recent immigrants in New Zealand in 2000 found that over half of them have tertiary, polytechnic or vocational training (White et al., 2001). This figure is supported by a more recent study on Asian immigrants in Auckland in 2013 which indicated that 33 percent of them have tertiary and above qualifications compared to 25 percent for the total population (Friesen & Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2015).

Many adult ESOL learners are also multilingual (Benseman, Sutton & Lander, 2005, p. 70). As a result of the English proficiency requirements in the immigration policy, most principal skilled immigrants have competent English skills before gaining residence although the same cannot necessarily be applied to their dependent applicants. A report on migration conducted in Auckland showed that older people and housewife with children encounter more barriers

in terms of cost, transport, child care and service locations when learning English (Gilbertson, Meares, Auckland (N.Z.) & Council., 2013).

The levels of English proficiency are also not evenly distributed among the principle applicants, studies have shown that skilled Asian immigrants especially North Asians have lower English ability than other skilled immigrants (Office of Ethnic Communities, 2014, p. 11; Plumridge et al, 2015, p.7). The disparate factors that influence the immigrants' English level include age and education levels, the distance between their heritage languages and English and also the opportunities to interact with native speakers after their arrival in New Zealand (Office of Ethnic Communities, 2014, p. 15).

## **2.5 Filling the gaps left by Adult ESOL classes providers in Auckland**

There are several funded English language classes for immigrants and refugees run by churches, tertiary institutions and support agencies of which English Language Partners is the largest provider (Woodley, Williams, Auckland (N.Z.), Council, & Point Research Ltd., 2012, p.39). For immigrants who have paid English language tuition fees as a part of their residency requirements, they need to make use of the fees within five years of the payment (Tertiary Education Commission, 2016). According to the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC) Chief Executive, Tim Fowler, out of 12,035 immigrants who have "pre-purchased tuition" between 2011 and 2016, only 21 percent have used their payment to enrol in English language programmes ("Almost half of ESOL tuition bought by immigrants is not used", 2016).

Due to the recent economic crisis, there has been a significant funding cut for free and low-cost English language classes for immigrants and refugees, resulting in reduced class capacity and shortened course length. In addition, many programmes are offered in an ad hoc manner, making the services hard to access by immigrants. In many cases, the demand has far exceeded capacity in both government funded ESOL programmes and those run by charity bodies and finding a place in a suitable programme can be challenging for many adult ESOL learners (Woodley et al., 2012, p. 44).

Another study by White et al. (2001) indicated that many immigrants do not enrol in English language classes because of family commitment, lack of money, preoccupation with settling into New Zealand and looking for work. Many of the courses offered are formal and competency based (Thompson, 2012, p.190) which are not attractive to the older adult learners. Moreover, both the subsidized and the fully funded English language classes are held for short periods of time ranging from 2 to 4 months which are insufficient to make a real impact with learning. According to White et al. (2001), only one fifth of the immigrants who enrolled in former English classes indicated a marked improvement in their English language skills after one year.

## **2.6 The role of public libraries in adult literacy, language learning and community building**

The roles of libraries have moved away from being just passive repositories of information to focus more on users and community. They are embracing the social role of connecting people and building community by extending their services to marginalized people (Krolak, 2005; Mi, 2015). Seen as places that are safe, friendly, convenient, accessible and highly trusted by the community, community libraries are well suited to provide support and guidance for informal and lifelong learning. (Eve, de Groot & Schmidt, 2007, p.5; Goodman, 2015, p.219; Nielsen & Borlund, 2014, p.7; Spacey & Goulding, 2004; p.3; Witteveen, 2016, p.45)

Community libraries can play a crucial role in alleviating immigrants' social exclusion resulting from a poor mastery in the English language and help integrate them to the workforce and the community (Hoyer, 2013, p. 300; Mcloughlin & Morris, 2016, p.38). This is a meaningful extension of the traditional services offered by the libraries. It also fits well with the mission of Auckland libraries which is to educate, inspire and make connections (Sutherland, 2013).

According to McNicol and Dalton (2003), a major advantage of libraries in comparison to other learning providers is they are able to encourage people who shy away from formal education to participate in learning. Shrestha and Krolak (2015) further stressed that in order to promote acquisition of literacy skills, an environment should be created where people can spend their everyday life, like the community library. Moreover, creating language-learning

programmes can also help bringing in more patrons for the libraries (Falkowitz, 2013; Teshuba, 2012).

Kong (2013) was a strong advocate for the inclusion of literacy programmes as a core library service as they have a significant impact on the rapid transition of immigrants into their communities. She contended that libraries should encompass “communities without borders, reaching out to learners—including new immigrants” (p.42). Libraries can provide relevant instruction that suit the learners, at a flexible and convenient time which are accessible to all. She further stressed that library-based literacy programmes such as ESOL that integrate relevant life skills and library usage can “contribute to the future of communities by engaging the learners in the social, economic, and political activities of their communities (p.40).

Edwards, Robinson and Unger (2013) pointed out that a community-centred library should build and strengthen community asset by creating opportunities for immigrants to meet and interact with a variety of community members, while at the same time providing valuable and relevant information and skills. They further mentioned the potential of providing English classes where both library staff and volunteers can be employed to provide a meaningful and rewarding way for participants to engage in the community and the library.

*“Open to All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion”* was a study of the public library and its role in tackling social exclusion of excluded communities in UK in 2000. It was found that library services toward disadvantaged groups were often patchy and uneven. The study urged public libraries to contribute towards building a more inclusive society by becoming “much more proactive, interventionist and educative institutions, with a concern for social justice at their core” (Pateman & Williment, 2013, p.6).

## **2.7 Organisation policy, adult literacy programmes and social inclusion**

Many researchers have contended that community libraries can raise their profile and prove their value and relevance when they align themselves with their organisation’s policy in providing active support to community-centred services and lifelong learning (Eve et al, 2007, p.5; Goodman, 2015, p. 271; Spacey & Goulding, 2004, p.11). In addition, language



learning can be used as a tool to strengthen community connections (Teshuba, 2012, p. 20) and promote cross-cultural understanding (Falkowitz, 2013, p. 288).

Spacey and Goulding (2004) provided an extensive literature review on the connections between governmental literature, research, public library plans and policies in the UK. They observed the shift in relationship between public libraries and adult education following the government's policy changes. In recent time, adult education services in public libraries have been mainly focused on providing support for ICT and delivery of information services relating to learning and work (p.345).

Train (2003) cited various government documents and reports that show clear conviction of the library's role in adult literacy education in the UK. However, this conviction is not unanimously shared by all parties (p.396). In 2003, the Framework for the Future was published which outlined the UK Government's ten year strategic vision for public libraries in England. The report clearly reiterated the library's role in adult education provision but advised libraries against duplication of services by other providers. Instead, they should work toward complementing their services through partnership (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p.7).

Public Libraries of New Zealand A Strategic Framework 2012-2017 reiterated support for all forms of literacy, independent lifelong learning and community based services and considered the provision of adult literacy programmes to immigrants as an important practice of social inclusion (Sutherland, 2012, p.19). Focus area 4 of Auckland libraries *Te Kauroa* – Future Directions 2013-2023 also stressed the needs to deliver inclusive and tailored services to new immigrants including programmes that encourage lifelong learning and literacy (Sutherland, 2013, p.29 & 31).

Similarly, the focus on communities and diversity is also clearly stated in the Auckland Libraries and Information Business Plan 2015/2016 with its purpose statement

“Auckland Libraries connects the diverse communities and people of Auckland with the world of information and ideas, providing opportunities for growth and employment through inspiration, innovation and creativity”.

(Auckland Council, 2015)

The Business Plan 2015/2016 also made ‘Improve literacy levels of Aucklanders’ and ‘Increase awareness of library services’ as two of their four strategic objectives. However, there are no further specifications of what they actually mean at ground level and their interpretations and any initiatives are very much up to individual libraries.

## **2.8 Resources, staffing and level of support**

A study of three pilot initiative adult reading projects in Western Australia showed that their success required long term commitment in terms of staff time, involvement and skill level (Anderson, Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Haig, & Leitão, 2013, p.278-279) and this can be challenging for libraries that are already understaffed and overworked. Spacey and Goulding (2004, p.35) also believed staff resources and skill levels as major factors influencing the levels of involvement of community libraries in adult learning programmes.

A major issue faced by the library in the delivery of community-centred adult literacy services is extensive budget cuts as governing bodies reduce expenditure on public services (Kong, 2013, p. 40; Library & Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa [LIANZA] & Tregaskis Brown Ltd, 2014; Train, 2003, p.395). When library resources and salary budgets are constantly under review, libraries have to make hard decision either to downsize their operations or even discontinue literacy programmes as a cost saving measure (Awcock, 2001, p. 362; Hall, 2009, p. 162; Kong, 2013, p. 42).

A study from the UK showed the range of skills needed by staff includes people-oriented skills, communication skills and teaching skills and some libraries employ staff with teaching qualification (Spacey and Goulding, 2003, p.349) in order to acquire staff with the necessary skills. A study conducted by Nielsen and Borlund (2015) showed a great number of library staff do not feel confident in delivering and facilitating learning as it is not part of the librarianship curriculum. A majority also feel they do not have pedagogy competencies and need more training and practice. However, they are reluctant to undergo training outside work hours (p.100-101).

While Train (2003) mentioned the needs for both internal and external training to be made available to all staff, a study by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [MLA] in England found that “restructuring of staff roles in connection with learning may help address

staff training needs to some extent” (as cited in Ashcroft et al., 2007, p.131). In this respect, Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson (2010, p.95) believed librarians should take on different roles depending on the situations.

Libraries and Information Workforce Plan 2013-2016 (Auckland Council, 2013) was closely aligned to *Te Kauroa* – Future Directions. It outlined 20 actions to provide directions and help Auckland Libraries build a dynamic and competent workforce to meet future challenge. It stressed on the ability for library staff to be flexible and take on multiple roles in response to diverse community and customer needs. It also listed a genuine enjoyment of people and an ability to facilitate connections among the required personal qualities of all roles (p.22).

## **2.9 Perceptions and attitude of libraries and staff toward adult literacy services and services toward immigrants in public libraries**

There are different opinions with regards to the role of staff in guiding and training learners. While most support adult learning programmes, some do not see them as an integral part of their role or library services (Kong, 2013; Spacey and Goulding, 2014). There are also different opinions as to the extent of staff involvement and whether it is everyone’s job or should be designated to certain groups of staff (Spacey and Goulding, 2004, p.352; Train, 2003, p.400).

Shrestha and Krolak (2015) commented that staff need a service-oriented attitude, an engaging personality and the ability to build personal relationships with the learners in order to support literacy and learning (p. 404). With regard to services to excluded communities, Pateman and Willement (2013) considered empathy and humility as essential attributes for library staff working with members from these communities. Hoyer (2001) asserted that both libraries and staff need to be flexible in providing relevant services and taking on new roles in order to meet the needs of the new members in the communities.

A study by MLA in 2005 recorded that some staff think they have no obligation to take on the role of tutors as it is not part of the job specification and they are also not paid enough to do so (as cited in Ashcroft, Farrow & Watts, 2007, p.131). Similarly, libraries also differ in their support of adult literacy services. While some think they have a duty to provide

services to disadvantaged groups, some consider such services a luxury in times of low staffing and financial stringency (Train 2003, p. 395). There are also library staff who hold the view that libraries have already provided too many non-library services which are irrelevant to the “traditional roles and concepts of the profession” (Pateman and Williment, 2013, p.144).

## **2.10 Understanding the needs and expectations of the learners**

Eve et al. (2007) cautioned against establishing our knowledge of our users’ needs based on our assumptions (p. 405) but should “develop strategies to know their needs and develop ways of meeting the needs” (Train, 2003, p.401). Library staff should systematically collect and develop their knowledge of the library target group through communication (p. 98) and constant evaluation (Hallberg & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2010, p.98; Norman, 2012, p.344).

Witteveen (2006, p. 45) supported by Hoyer (2011) also stressed the importance of identifying the gaps of services through community analysis when planning programmes to the immigrants and English language programmes.

Many researchers showed that adult learners have unique social and cognitive characteristics that are different from traditional learners and propose applying andragogy theory and developing adult-centred instruction when working with them (Duay and Bryan, 2008; Gold, 2015; White, Watts and Trlin, 2001). Anderson et al. (2013) cited various authors that contend “the teaching and learning of adult literacy is more effective in real-life contexts that meet an adult’s immediate needs (p.274). A research by Duay and Bryan (2008) showed that senior learners prefer learning experience that is engaging, that involves familiar topics and instructors that they can relate to.

Based on the research by White, et al. (2000, p.39), many immigrants like to have the opportunity to converse with local English speakers to improve their language skills and at the same time acquire local knowledge to help them integrate into the communities.

## **2.11 Collaboration and partnerships**

Train (2003) and Norman (2012) emphasized collaboration within the library where all staff work together in serving the customers. At the same time, many researchers stressed the importance of partnerships with community groups, government agencies, businesses and not for profit organisations to ensure the sustainability of library services and provided evidence to support their claims (Bourke, 2007, p.136-138; Norman, 2012, p. 347-348; Shrestha and Krolak, 2015, p.404-405; Spacey & Goulding, 2003, p.350-351; Train, 2003, p.395).

In support of this view, McNicol and Dalton (2003) thought libraries can overcome the problem with staffing and a lack of staff skills through working with partners who have the knowledge and experience. Similarly, Pateman and Williment (2013) advocated recruiting volunteers from the local communities to support library staff in the delivery of the programmes. However, it is imperative to have clear strategies and specification of roles when different parties are involved (Ashcroft et al, 2007).

## **2.12 Auckland Libraries and ‘Fit for the Future’ organisation-wide workforce restructuring in 2017**

Auckland Libraries is currently undergoing a major organisation-wide workforce restructuring called ‘Fit for the Future’ following its amalgamation seven years ago. The main objectives for this change are:

- i. to have a new service model to meet the changing customers’ needs;
- ii. to make significant saving of 1.8 million for Auckland Council

Under the new service model, community library staff will be based according to Local Board areas, each comprising one to five libraries. Staff will then rotate in a period of three to six months among the libraries in the same Local Board and each staff also needs to take turns working on weekend days. There are major changes to the existing posts including changes in terms and condition, disestablishment of posts and creation of new posts. Staff who are affected will need to reapply for positions through the Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

The initial consultation was started in the middle of 2016, followed by workshops and roadshows for library staff towards the end of 2016. In February 2017, 104 library staff took up the opportunity to apply for voluntary redundancy and 74 of them were accepted. By the time of the interviews conducted for this research project, the staff were yet to go through the EOI process. The 'Fit for the Future' new service model would take effect on 1 July 2017.

(Edmundson, 2017)

### **2.13 Conclusion**

The review of the literature indicates that there are many factors that can impact the delivery of adult ESOL programmes in public libraries. Their existence and development are closely tied to the local and international developments and trends, government and organisation policy, resources, staffing and level of support as well as the perceptions and attitude of libraries and staff toward the programmes.

As most of the studies have been undertaken outside New Zealand, there is a need to explore if Auckland Libraries faced similar challenges and how the staff involved in the programmes work to overcome these challenges. The multifaceted issues relating to the research topic indicate it may not be possible to cover all the issues in this study but hopefully it can help suggest possible directions for future research.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research design**

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design. A qualitative approach was appropriate because this research involved a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that occurred in a 'real world' environment (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p.269). This approach was also a good fit for the objectives of this study due to its ability to yield rich data that allowed the researcher to understand the opportunities, challenges and other issues the participants might face in the delivery of ESOL programmes. It also allowed the researcher to gain insight into their personal experiences, the context in which they acted and how their understanding

and perceptions of these influenced their behaviour (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 221; Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.24).

The five chosen library branches were involved in the delivery of adult ESOL programmes. They were located in adjacent suburbs with the two furthest branches being 14 km from each other and all the suburbs had a very high concentration of Asian immigrants. Although the participant libraries might have quite similar demographic structure, as Anderson et al. (2013) pointed out, some issues could be context specific even though the libraries were located in the same vicinity.

### 3.2 Population and sample

The study interviewed ten participants, two from each of the library branches based on either one of the two selection criteria:

- i. the manager from the participating libraries
- ii. a library staff member who was involved in the delivery of the ESOL programmes

The ten participants were made up of three males and seven females, including three managers, three senior librarians, one librarian (on secondment) and three library assistants. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the interview participants.

Table 1: *Breakdown of interview participants*

<b>Library</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Senior Librarian</b>	<b>Librarian</b>	<b>Library assistant</b>
A	1	1		
B		1		1
C	1			1
D	1		1	
E		1		1

The inclusion of managers is because their input to the research questions from a management point of view can complement the input from the frontline staff. It also helps

present the different ways the library staff and the managers understand the phenomena under investigation (Nielsen & Borlund, 2014, p.97).

This study adopted a purposeful sampling approach so that the yielded data could show representation of the context, heterogeneity in the population and differences in comparisons between settings and individuals (Creswell, 2002, as cited in Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p.314). Although the small sampling size and the approach did not allow generalisation of results to the entire population, the data gathered could offer useful insights into research problem.

### **3.3 Data collection**

An in depth semi-structured, one-to-one interview lasting 30 to 50 minutes was employed to collect data from the participants. A one-to-one interview could “yield rich and detailed data about individual experiences and perspectives” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 80). At the same time, it allowed researchers to keep the interaction focused within the limited time frame as they usually had only one chance to carry out the interview (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p.359). In addition, it enabled the researchers to interact with the participants and probed for further details relating to the research questions. It also allowed the interviewees to express their views freely, without fear of being overheard by colleagues.

The open-ended questions were derived from the research questions of this study and also from the literature review. There were two sets of interview questions (Appendix C and D), one for the library staff members and one for the library managers. While library staff could provide valuable input based on their first-hand experience of interacting with the course participants and running of the programmes, the managers were able to provide input from broader managerial and administrative perspectives.

A semi-structured approach gives flexibility to make adjustments to the questions according to the situation. For example, a manager was asked if he thought the popular adult ESOL programme at his library could be duplicated elsewhere. Similarly, the participants also had more opportunities to touch on issues that were unanticipated by the researcher but were important to them (Braun & Clarke, p.78). In order to try out and review the interview questions, a pilot interview was carried out with a work colleague who had been involved in the ESOL programme two years ago. As a result of the interview, a question pertaining to



the 'Fit for the Future' organisation-wide restructuring that Auckland libraries was undergoing was added to the interview.

To recruit potential participants, libraries involved in adult ESOL programmes were identified from both the Auckland Libraries website and work contacts. Emails were then sent to the managers of five libraries located within 15km from the library where the researcher worked inviting them to participate in the study. The rationale of choosing libraries nearby was to minimise the amount of travel time as the researcher needed to take time off to conduct the interviews during workdays. All five library managers gave favourable replies and permissions were granted for interviews to be carried out with either themselves or their library staff running the ESOL programmes.

Individual contact and arrangements were then made with each of the participants through emails and copies of the interview questions were sent to the interviewees to allow reflections beforehand. All the interviews were carried out at the participants' workplace during work hours. In an effort to have a better understanding of the whole context, arrangements were also made for the researcher to attend a session of the ESOL programmes either on the days of the interviews or on different days. With the permission of the participant, each interview was recorded on a portable audio device for the purpose of data analysis and interpretations.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015) qualitative analysis is an iterative and ongoing process that involves going back and forth among data collection, analysis and interpretation (p.310, 315). The transcription of audio recorded data into written form started once data from interviews came in. The audio recorded data was transcribed fully by manually typing it into Microsoft Word through repeated listening and pausing of the audio recorder. The use of word processing software allowed easy manipulation and reorganisation of data in the later part of analysis process.

Upon completion of transcription, the researcher read through the text comprehensively and analytically and added comments at the margin. Chunks of data which could potentially address the research questions were identified at this stage of preliminary analysis and codes and sub-codes were developed inductively.

At the same time, themes and categories were derived deductively from the research problem and research questions. This was followed by identifying patterns and relationships among the codes and sub-codes and grouping them into themes and categories that had been developed earlier.

Finally, all the categories and themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they are able to “provide a rich, coherent and meaningful picture of dominant patterns in the data that addresses the research questions” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 249). A thematic table was then developed together with all the relevant data extracts relevant to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 233) to assist the interpretation of data.

The fact that the scripted interview questions were grouped thematically and focused on answering the research question had greatly helped the coding process. However, many new themes, codes and sub-codes were identified as the analysis progressed due to the open nature of the interviews. Other than looking for common themes across the interviews to address the research problem, the researcher was also alerted to the contrasting views in regards to the research questions.

### **3.5 Validity of data and the research**

Validity of the data and the research was supported by using the following strategies:

- Data was collected from multiple interviewees from different real-life settings and two interviewees were recruited from one setting to ensure comparisons of data and covering of different perspectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 105; Noble & Smith, 2015).
- Interviews were verbatim transcribed and interviewees were allowed to provide feedback on the transcriptions
- Different and contradictory opinions were taken account of and rich and thick verbatim descriptions of interviewees’ accounts were used to allow readers to draw their own conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 106; Noble & Smith, 2015).
- Discussion of data was done in the light of the findings of previous research and any points of difference noted.

### **3.6 Assumptions**

The data collection and data analysis of this study are based on the following assumptions:

- The interviewees can be trusted to give truthful answers based on their experience in relating to the interview questions.
- The perceptions of the interviewees with regards to the benefits of the ESOL programmes toward the individual programme participants are reflective of the point of views of the programme participants.

### **3.7 Delimitations**

The research problem was only investigated from the perspectives of managers from the participating libraries and staff who were involved in the delivering of ESOL programmes in Auckland Libraries. It did not include the perceptions of the library staff in general nor the perceptions of participants in the adult ESOL programmes. Coverage and discussions of issues relating to challenges of language learning for adult ESOL learners, adult learning theories, participants' motivation and attitudes were also beyond the scope of this project.

### **3.8 Limitations of the study**

This study was limited to ten research participants from five Auckland community libraries. Due to the small sampling size and the unique settings for each community library, the findings from the final research may not be generalized to other community libraries in Auckland or other parts of New Zealand. In addition, the issues relating to the research problem were complex and it was impractical to touch on all the aspects in this study. Aspects not discussed in this study will need to be investigated in future research.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Approval was sought and granted from both Victoria University's School of Information Management Human Ethics Committee and the manager of the Auckland libraries before conducting the interviews. Once approval was granted, formal letters of invitation were sent to the managers of the five library branches and their staff who had agreed to take part in the

research project. Prior to the interview, each participant was given an information sheet (Appendix A) about the research project and a consent form (Appendix B) which they needed to sign to indicate their voluntary participation in the project.

#### 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings in this chapter were reached by analysing the qualitative data of the study obtained through semi-structural interviews.

##### 4.1 Characteristics of interviewees, ESOL programmes and participants, settings

The library staff members were asked about their job roles, length of service, hours of work, and length of time involved in the adult ESOL programmes. This information was not sought from managers. The results are summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2: *Characteristics of the interviewees*

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Job role</b>	<b>Hours of work</b>	<b>Length of time in the ESOL programmes</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
1	Senior librarian	Full-time	Less than 1 year	P1
2	Senior librarian	Part-time	Less than 1 year	P2
3	Library assistant	Part-time	Less than 1 year	P3
4	Library assistant	Part-time	Less than 1 year	P4
5	Librarian	Part-time	2 ½ years	P5
6	Senior librarian	Part-time	9 months	P6
7	Library assistant	Part-time	4 years	P7
8	Manager	Full-time	--	M1
9	Manager	Full-time	--	M2
10	Manager	Full-time	--	M3

From the table, it can be seen that five of the interviewees have less than one year of experience in the ESOL programmes. Among the seven library staff members who were directly involved in running the programmes, three inherited them from staff who had either resigned or gone to other libraries and the other four were initiators of the programmes. While all seven library staff members were parts of a team, two interviewees sole-charged the programmes with indirect involvement from team members.

The adult ESOL programmes were also run differently. Table 3 below shows the nature of the programmes in the five libraries.

Table 3: *Nature of the non-formal adult ESOL programmes in the five community libraries*

Library	Type of activity	How often	No of participants	Person in-charge
A	English class	Once a week	30 - 40	One staff member
	Conversation group	Once a week	5 - 12	One staff member
B	English class	Once a week	30 - 45	Two staff members, one as presenter, the other as assistant cum translator
C	Conversation groups	Once a week on two separate days	Four groups - around 10 participants per group	Each group was led by a library staff member
D	Conversation groups	Once a week	Three groups – around 10 participants per group	One group was led by a staff member, two groups by volunteers
	English group	Once a week	15 - 25	Run by a volunteer
E	Chinese Club	Twice a month	40 - 60	One staff member

Only one library had a high proportion of participants from different ethnicities, the ESOL programme participants from the other four libraries were mostly elderly Chinese, although there were also some younger recent immigrants. All the five ESOL programmes were either run by staff who were bilingual or had Mandarin speaking staff to help with translation.

The libraries were located in town centres and accessible by public transport. Their customers also had mixed socioeconomic status. In terms of space, three libraries did not encounter any problem and one library was able to make use of the adjacent big community room to run the programme. Staff from the other two libraries needed to move shelves, tables and chairs before and after the programmes to make room for the activity.

## **4.2 Opportunities in providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners**

All the interviewees said they started the adult ESOL programmes because they identified a need in the community or among the customers that came into the libraries. They were well aware of the presence of other English language providers and adult literacy centres in the community. However, they identified gaps in which libraries could step in and fill in those gaps. Generally, the gaps can be categorized into three aspects: individuals, communities and libraries.

### **4.2.1 Benefits for the individuals**

The main reasons given by the interviewees why people join adult ESOL classes in the community libraries are as follow:

#### **1. Free and accessible**

All interviewees considered ‘free of charge’ as one of the main reasons for people joining their ESOL programmes. One interviewee pointed out that there were free English classes elsewhere but they got filled up very quickly.

In addition, P3 said everyone could attend ESOL programmes at the libraries including people on working holiday visa or visitors. Other English language providers required people to be either New Zealand citizens or residents to enjoy free or discounted classes.

Two interviewees explained that libraries being accessible by public transport or located within walking distance from where the participants lived were very important especially to the elderly as a lot of them could not drive.

## 2. Non-formal setting

While one interviewee mentioned that the standard at the language centres could be too high for the participants, the other interviewees said people liked the informal and relaxed atmosphere at ESOL classes in the libraries. P3 said the elderly participants did not want the pressure of a structured class. This is in consistence with findings by Thompson (2012) that showed formal and competency based courses do not appeal to older adult learners.

## 3. Flexibility

Another advantage mentioned by interviewees was that people could join the programme at any time and there were no formal entrance and exit points.

“You can come half way through the year and leave anytime you like, there are no signing up or anything like that... it doesn't require you to commit in the same way as a formal class would” (P2)

## 4. Social interaction

Interviewees also mentioned people enjoyed coming to ESOL programmes because they could meet people and made friends in a friendly and safe environment. M2 mentioned the fact that the elderly participants were lonely and P2 added that adult ESOL programmes gave them “a good chance to socialise with people similar to themselves”.

### **4.2.2 Benefits for the community**

All the interviewees overwhelmingly considered community building and integration as the ultimate aims of running ESOL programmes. They noticed the immediate language needs of immigrants in their communities; they understood that without English, immigrants would encounter difficulties in their everyday lives, they would feel socially isolated. However, they saw ESOL programmes as more than just a platform to learn English or as an adult literacy activity as M2 put it, “...it is part of what we do but it is not all of what we do”.

Apart from seeing ESOL programmes as a good source of information about local happenings and events for the participants, the interviewees saw ESOL programmes as a means to create a sense of community and a sense of belonging for participants. P1 summed up the dilemma of many immigrants,

“they really want to feel part of something because the longer they stay here the more they become disconnected with their own country... they don’t feel like they are completely Chinese, they don’t feel like they are New Zealander... they don’t know how to move from that space to another space...”

P1 said the outcome he wanted to get from the ESOL programme was to make the participants felt “a little bit local”. P2 said besides teaching English, she also introduced library events or Council events to the participants so that they would get involved more in the community.

It was with community building in mind that libraries run adult ESOL programmes quite differently from other English language providers; their main aim was not teaching structural English that emphasized grammar, spelling or writing. M1 said they did not start the programme at either beginner or intermediate levels; instead they gave participants some pathways and practical tools to help them in their everyday process and to integrate them into the local community. M2 said the aim was to get the participants to contribute to the community, to use the library and to access information at a very basic level.

M2 felt strongly about the lack of understanding, racism and violence against immigrants by some young people in her community. She wanted to make the library an inviting place for immigrants where they were seen “doing something really positive...seeing them trying to engage with the culture, trying to engage with the language”. She pointed out that if immigrants could be seen openly doing something positive and be a contributing part of the community, they were less likely to be victimized. She hoped the effort of integrating immigrants into the community and fostering understanding among different ethnicities would make the community a safer place to live.

#### **4.2.3 Benefits for the community libraries**

Interviewees generally thought that people joined ESOL programmes because they trusted the library. They considered the programmes a good outreach and promotion opportunity as they brought more people into the library. They used this opportunity to connect the participants to the library by introducing them to library services and facilities. P6 got ESOL programme participants signed up for library card, introduced them to ESOL collections and other library services.



### **4.3 Challenges facing Auckland Libraries' staff in providing adult ESOL programmes**

The main challenges faced by all five libraries were staffing related issues and a feeling of uncertainty regarding the new service model brought about by the incoming organisation wide 'Fit for the Future' restructuring. Other issues were related to collaboration, levels of support and available resources, and different expectations and outcomes.

#### **4.3.1 Staffing issues**

The biggest concern for the three managers was having the right staff to run the programmes, especially for libraries that relied solely on one bilingual member of staff. M1 said he would have to bring the programme to a close if he lost his Mandarin speaking staff member in-charge unless he was able to engage a volunteer who would be willing to help.

All three managers thought only staff who had specific skills and characteristics could run ESOL programmes. M3 said although everyone in the team could be involved to some degree, the person who delivered the programme needed to have a good concept of how people learn, how to connect with the participants and to help them learn.

Some of the prerequisites listed by M1 were customer friendly attitudes, ability to relate to people of all age groups and to think like a customer, being organised and having the confidence to speak in front of a big group of people. In addition to having good customer service, M2 believed the person also needed to be patient, good at relationship building and a good listener.

Some staff members also shared similar views. P2 said staff needed both the skills and the confidence in order to do the job well and only those who met both criteria and were willing should be assigned the task. P1 said the task would become a chore for staff if they thought they were being forced to do it. In that case, M3 said staff would not put their best into it and participants would not get the best out of it.

However, P3 thought that it was possible for all staff to deliver the programme as she did not think any individual staff member would be more suitable than anyone else unless that person had an ESOL teaching qualification. While she agreed that personality and certain skill sets

were important, she did not think there should be any restriction on staff who showed a genuine interest in getting involved.

M2 indicated her concern that not all staff in the team had the same level of passion or skills. There was one time her main staff member in-charge was away for six weeks and the staff who took over could not perform at the same level and the programme suffered. There was also a concern with regards to a lack of stable and permanent Mandarin speaking staff to assist with translation for ESOL programmes. P6 said if her only Mandarin speaking staff member was away, she had to find someone from other libraries to help with the translation.

Two libraries run adult ESOL programmes as small conversational groups and they were very labour intensive as the optimum number was ten people per group. While one library had enough staff to lead the four English conversational groups, the other only had one staff to run the programme as it also needed to balance that with all the other service delivery in the library. It had to seek help from volunteers to lead the groups and put a cap on the number of participants attending the programme because it did not have enough manpower.

#### **4.3.2 Time and space constraints**

Some staff members were advised by their managers not to spend too much time in preparation as they had other responsibilities they needed attend to. P2 said she seldom had time to prepare material from scratch as she normally needed four hours of preparation time for an hour's lesson. Hence, she had to look for readymade online material but they were not New Zealand-contextualised.

While three of the libraries had enough space to accommodate big groups of people, more manpower and time were needed from two other libraries for area setup before and after the programme. This means extra workload for staff as a whole.

#### **4.3.3 Levels of support**

Most of the interviewees felt supported by their managers and colleagues in carrying out their work as reflected by P5 "...any time I need anything from the library, the staff and the manager are always willing to help". However, in terms of training or guidance, they did not

feel they received the kinds of support available to those involved in the children and youth programmes; they were practically left on their own.

“There is really no support from higher above this branch. It’s all sort of us figuring out things.” (P3)

“We don't really have the expertise to do it... It is just us trying to think of the best way of doing it ourselves and through learning by trial and error” (M2)

#### **4.3.4 Feeling of uncertainty over Fit for the Future**

Interviewees were generally pessimistic about the impact of the new service model on ESOL programmes. This was caused by the initially communicated service model whereby staff needed to move around libraries within the same local board every three to six month. Interviewees felt strongly about losing the personal connections with their ESOL programmes participants and had to start all over again at new sites. They were also concerned about the effect of the frequent movement of staff had on ESOL programme participants.

“Because customers like to see familiar faces, human beings like bonds. Even for myself if I see somebody different sometime I get nervous.” (P5)

Managers were worried that their staff member in-charge would be rotated to other libraries.

“a lot of it is the relationship she has got and the understanding of the community so somebody else maybe take over for a few week or months while it withers a little bit while she needs to come back to invigorate it... If customers like somebody and don't like you there is nothing you can do about it.” (M2)

“If she is moved about because of this rotating roster or whatever this might be then I would need a Chinese speaking staff to replace her to sustain this programme.” (M1)

Several interviewees also voiced their concerns over the impact of further staff cut on ESOL programmes as this meant library staff would have to shoulder more responsibilities and this would put more pressure on programme delivery. P6 said “If a lot of us got redundant then you can’t run a lot of the programmes”.

#### **4.3.5 Different expectations and outcomes**

Although libraries run adult ESOL programmes for the purposes of community building and integration, some participants had different expectations. They expected to get the same amount of teaching as they would from a formal language class. M2 said “it’s like providing food to the children. They come for the food and they get something we think would be good for them”.

Both library A and B initially hoped to pair up people who wanted to learn another language in their conversation groups so that they could learn from each other. However, this did not happen as the people who turned up were mostly Chinese wanted to learn English but there were very few if any wanted to learn Mandarin.

The participants also did not have enough vocabulary to carry out meaningful conversations with each other. P7 had to give them structured conversations which were not his original intention.

“Conversation is what they want but conversation is really a one-on-one and if they really don't have much to offer the other person that's the difficult thing” (M2)

All five libraries did not intend to focus only on one ethnicity but only one library managed to have a more diverse group. Several interviewees mentioned the difficulty of attracting participants from other ethnicities as the few who joined drop off very quickly. As one interviewee said when one ethnic group got too big, people from other ethnicities felt excluded.

#### **4.3.6 Lack of collaboration**

There was little collaboration between library staff members from the five participating libraries. As many participants attended more than one ESOL programme at the libraries on separate days, the library staff members sometimes found out from their participants what other libraries were doing.

The problems arising from this lack of communication between libraries could be a feeling of isolation and duplications of effort. On the one hand, P5 mentioned the struggle of finding suitable topics and material. On the other hand, P1 shared the disappointment of having a

very successful lesson but had no one to share it to. M2 said, “Everyone is doing trial and error at their own branch”.

The ESOL programme at each library were quite different from each other and this made sharing of material or working together more difficult. M2 questioned the rationale of such practice.

“Really sitting down and rationalising why we are running thing differently. Is it because it is their expertise area of the staff running it or do our community really want something really different in each of the branches that we could rationalise the offering a little bit and maybe we have to duplicate so much of what we do.”

In addition, not all interviewees were keen on the idea of collaboration. P6 did not mind to share ideas but preferred to work on her own. P1 was worried that the ESOL programmes would lose their uniqueness and tended to target a specific group if they all worked as a team. However, M2 cautioned against keeping things local, “it is good to be completely local, but on the other hand, we lose a lot of perspectives.”

There could also be very little collaboration between staff from the same library. P7 said he just prepared for his own group as there was no connection between the four conversation groups in his library. When there was a lack of collaboration in the same library, some staff members might not buy into the idea; P6 said some staff complained that too many resources were being invested on one ethnicity.

#### **4.3.7 Looking for a workable model**

M2 was concerned about the sustainability of the ESOL programmes because of the labour intensive model her library adopted. She did not feel it was the productive way of doing it as she had to rely a lot on volunteers. She felt the libraries needed someone with expertise from outside who had an overall view across the libraries and able to look at research to come up with a model that had been proven to work elsewhere.

P1 faced another problem of running a big ESOL class; he was worried that his existing group of participants might exit the programme at the same time after all he could offer them but with no one to replace them. He was trying to have participants with varying English

levels to prevent this from happening. However, with a class of 30 to 40 participants, he found it quite challenging.

#### **4.3.8 Issues with volunteer management**

One of the main issues faced by libraries that made use of volunteers was their availability; they could leave in a day's notice and the programme would be in trouble if there was no backup. P4 said many of the volunteers also could not commit for a long time and she needed constantly looking for replacements. P7 also shared an unhappy experience of an unsuitable volunteer who had brought a lot of trouble and headache to the library.

M1 said volunteers helped to lighten the workload of staff running the programmes. However, volunteer management could be time-consuming and labour intensive. P4 had to spend a lot of time building relationships and motivating volunteers so that they felt valued and could perform at a reasonable level. She also needed to provide guidance and training as some of them did not have teaching backgrounds.

#### **4.4 Strategies used by the library staff to overcome the challenges that they face in the delivery of adult ESOL programmes**

##### **4.4.1 Competing with other English language providers**

Interviewees knew that the other language providers in the community had well-trained people to deliver formal ESOL programmes. They were sympathetic toward their cause and had no intention to compete with them for participants. They adopted a few strategies so that the programmes were not seen as a threat:

##### **i. Keeping the adult ESOL programmes informal**

One of the steps taken by the interviewees was to keep the programmes informal. They always pointed this out to the participants so that they would not have unrealistic expectations. They also avoided using the word 'ESOL' for their programmes. Some of the names they

used include 'Fun for English', 'Chinese-Kiwi connections', 'Conversation Corner' and 'XXX Chinese Club' to indicate that their emphasis was not purely language learning.

Two libraries also decided against running the programmes in big classes but only in small conversational groups. M2 thought offering a class could imply that they were qualified to do that and this made them competing against everyone else who was offering classes.

On the other hand, M1 usually passed on information on English language courses that are available in the community to the participants and encouraged them to attend if they were interested.

## **ii. Having a clear vision and purpose of running the programmes**

All the interviewees were very clear that their goals of running adult ESOL programmes were community building and integration, which were quite different from other language providers. They geared their programmes to achieve this aim by incorporating community events and happenings, Kiwi culture and tips for everyday living into their content. They also taught the participants practical skills to help them integrate into the community.

### **4.4.2 Staffing, level of support and resources issues**

The managers used various strategies to overcome challenges with regards to staffing, level of support and resources.

#### **i. Recruitment**

M3 looked for the right person to do the job when her staff member in-charge left for another position. At the same time, she also recruited someone as backup for the programme. M1 said he would do the same if there was an opportunity to recruit a new staff member in future.

#### **ii. Volunteers management**

Both M1 and M2 used volunteers to help run adult ESOL programmes. M1 said using volunteers for a short time helped to give his staff a needed break without putting strain on their limited resources. However, M1 made sure he only got the right volunteer for the programme; he would screen them before giving them the opportunities as he said "they are representing us, their behaviour representing us so we need to be careful."

P4 spent a lot of time making sure her volunteers were genuinely interested. She also provided guidance and motivated them. After background check, she would talk to them and invited them to observe the activities before they committed themselves to the programme. M2 was full of praise for her staff's dedication in volunteer management and she believed that was the only reason they could retain the volunteers.

### **iii. Training up backups**

M1 had the foresight of training up a backup from the very beginning and the effort paid off when the staff member in-charge left for another job. Another library also had other staff appointed and trained up when it was made known that the staff member in-charge was leaving the library.

### **iv. Plan around the programmes**

P5 planned her leave around the ESOL programme so that the activity would not be disrupted. She took leave between the scheduled activities and if she needed to take longer leave, she would plan ahead and invite someone from a local health organisation to do a health presentation in lieu of ESOL programme.

### **v. Teamwork and support from managers**

Some managers made up for the lack of support from the organisation by providing them with personal guidance. They also formed teams to support the staff in-charge as P4 said "so we can discuss how to run the programme". M3 encouraged discussion relating to ESOL programme delivery among her staff. M1 was very pleased that all his staff members supported each other and together they contributed to the success of the ESOL programme.

P7 thought his manager showed him support and trust by giving him the freedom to run the programme without any unnecessary interference. M3 gave the same support to her staff in-charge, "I trust him to do that job without my intervention. I have to give him the right to do it his way".

### **v. On the job training**

One interviewee had an ESOL teaching qualification and two other interviewees had some teaching or training backgrounds which helped them greatly in their programme delivery. P4 was a teacher previously so she tried to give on-the-job training to volunteers and team



members. P5 had the experience of teaching customers how to use computers and tablets and she applied what she had learned in her job to her role

#### **vi. Collaboration**

P5 invited a local health organisation to give health presentations to the elderly participants in the programme three times a year. She would involve the customers to decide on the topics and she normally planned the presentation to coincide with her leave. The interviewees also made use of staff members from the same library or other branches to do special events like Matariki, Christmas or Diwali.

Two other libraries also invited staff from Council to give presentations on voting prior to the local body elections. Sometimes, the local health organisation approached the libraries and asked to be given the opportunity to speak to the participants on certain health topics.

Some of the interviewees looked forward to better collaboration opportunities in future. P3 and P5 hoped to be able to learn from other libraries and get to know of diverse ways of doing things. P7 thought it would be good for libraries to exchange ideas. On the other hand, P1 hoped there would be more opportunities for relationship building between libraries and other English language providers in future so that their services could complement each other.

#### **4.4.3 Different expectations and outcomes**

Two libraries had made efforts to know from participants what they wanted from the programmes. M1 attributed the popularity of the ESOL programme in his library to knowing what the customers wanted and delivering it. M2 also attributed the success of the ESOL programme to her staff's efforts in getting a good understanding of what her customers wanted.

#### **4.5 Attitudes of library staff involved in the adult ESOL programmes towards the programmes**

There was a mix of reaction from the interviewees regarding the importance of adult ESOL programmes. Two interviewees said that it was a core library service because there was a high demand for it in the community and one pointed out that the programme brought a lot of

customers into the library. M2 stated that adult ESOL programme was all about community engagement which was a core library service. However, P6 thought differently.

“I think if there is not enough staffing ESOL will be the first programme to go because definitely you can't cut the children programme.”

Both the library staff members and the managers interviewed were positive and enthusiastic about adult ESOL programmes. Their passion for the programmes was plain to see in many of the interviewees: M5 said she normally spent time outside work preparing material for the programme as there were a lot of other things she needed to do at work, P7 said he felt happy delivering the programme because the participants enjoyed it.

In fact, most interviewees ranked passion as the most important requirement for staff to get involved in adult ESOL programmes. P1 thought only those who enjoyed doing it should get involved and M5 even thought that it was possible for a non-Mandarin speaking staff member to take over her Chinese Club if that person had a passion for it. M2 commented, “Because there are so many huddles, they are so difficult, you need to be passionate to do it.”

However, the positive feeling of the interviewees towards the programme was overshadowed by some uncertainties. There was a feeling that adult programmes in Auckland Libraries were not given the same emphasis and priority as children and youth programmes. Hence, there was not any training or guidance coming from the organisation like those given to the library staff who were involved in children and youth programmes.

Arising from a lack of training opportunity from the organisation was some interviewees' feeling of doubt about their own ability to deliver the programme. P2 questioned whether she was professional enough, trained enough and confident enough to deliver the programme.

In terms of roles, all the library staff members interviewed saw themselves as library staff holding multiple roles; they were facilitators, educators and organisers rolled into one. P5 said she considered herself a bridge, connecting the Chinese community to the local community.

Most of the interviewees would like to go for training. P2 said training would generate new ideas for him and help him build relationship with people training with him. P3 thought it would improve her skill set. P4 would like further training on volunteer management. P2 would love the opportunity to observe a class in action led by a professional. However, she

said any training provided should be free and participation should be voluntary. She also suggested only using work days for training.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The discussion of this research study is done in accordance to the purpose of the study and the research questions listed below and in reference to the findings from existing research.

### **Purpose of the study and research questions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the opportunities and challenges of providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland Libraries. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges facing Auckland Libraries' staff in providing adult ESOL programmes?
2. What are the strategies used by the library staff to overcome any challenges that they face in the delivery of adult ESOL programmes?
3. What are the attitudes of library staff involved in the adult ESOL programmes toward the adult ESOL programmes run by Auckland libraries?

### **5.1 Opportunities and challenges facing Auckland Libraries' staff in providing adult ESOL programmes**

Research Question 1 was answered under two major themes: **opportunities** and **challenges**.

#### **i. Opportunities**

The five participating libraries started non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners because they identified gaps not being filled by other language providers in their communities. The programmes are hugely popular because they are free, accessible, and flexible. The perceived participants' views of libraries as places that are safe, trusted and

convenient are mentioned in various studies (Eve, de Groot & Schmidt, 2007; Goodman, 2015; Nielsen & Borlund, 2014; Spacey & Goulding, 2004; Witteveen, 2015).

The adult ESOL programme participants prefer non-formal classes that are conducted in a friendly and relaxed environment support the findings of McNichol and Dalton (2003). In addition, the programmes meet the social needs of the participants by creating opportunities for participants to meet each other (Kong, 2013). At the same time, the ability of the programmes to draw more customers into the libraries and increase the usage of other library services is also mentioned by Falkowitz (2013) and Teshuba (2012).

The fact that the interviewees are able to see beyond serving the immediate needs of the participants to achieve a greater purpose of community building is commendable. They show strong conviction of the key role libraries play in the community, that is to serve the people and the community (Gill, 2001; Hoyer, 2011). They embrace the social role of connecting people and investing in community integration by reaching out to marginalised people (Krolak, 2005; Mi, 2015).

What the libraries want to achieve from the programmes aligns well with the mission of Auckland Libraries; to connect the diverse communities and to provide opportunities for growth and enjoyment (Sutherland, 2012). The libraries' effort of creating a space for immigrants so that they can be seen as participating members of the community is a working out of the belief held by Edwards, Robinson and Unger (2013) who stated that community-centred libraries should strengthen community asset by creating interacting opportunities for the communities.

## **ii. Challenges**

The results from this study mirror findings of Spacey and Goulding (2004) and Anderson et al. (2013) that staff resources and skill levels are deciding factors in the delivery of adult learning programmes. Even though the main aim of the ESOL programmes is not on language learning but community building, it still requires library staff to have some form of pedagogical knowledge to help with running of the programmes. The results show that a lack of pedagogy competency can greatly affect the confidence level of library staff in programme delivery (Nielsen and Borlund, 2015).

Unlike libraries in the UK and USA where they usually seek funding and sponsorship for their initiatives and community projects, Auckland Libraries is fully funded by Auckland Council and normally operate within the allocated budgets. The impact of the proposed budget cut and reduced number of library staff (Edmundson, 2017) under the current Fit for the Future organisation-wide restructuring on ESOL programmes is yet to be seen. However, the interviewees' concern and worry about its possible adverse effects on the running of the programme are not unfounded (Awcock, 2001; Hall, 2009; Kong, 2013).

One of the main challenges faced by the existing staff is the feeling of isolation; staff members in every branch run the programmes on their own without any guidelines and practical help they can resort to. The pressure on staff who sole-charge the programmes can be tremendous as they need to come out with ideas and prepare for the programmes on top of their daily work routine. The workload and pressure are even greater for staff who are also responsible for volunteer management at the same time.

A contributing factor to the feeling of isolation for staff is a lack of coordination and collaboration between branches even though some are located in the same local board area. There are some patchy and isolated cases of idea sharing between staff from different branches with unsatisfactory outcomes. In addition, the programmes are run quite differently in each branch and some staff are determined to keep the programmes local and unique.

This lack of collaboration effort between library branches and partnership opportunities with local organisations leads to duplications of effort, which wastes time and resources. Auckland Libraries drastically needs someone with the expertise and an overview of the libraries to develop a workable model for the programmes.

The model should allow sharing of resources across the board and partnership with relevant organisations, taking advantage of the scale of the organisation and the collaborative power of different branches. It should be flexible enough to be adapted for use in different library contexts and resilient enough to withstand impacts from a challenging environment. There is also a real need for different branches in Auckland Libraries to come together, to be open minded about new ways of doing things and working together to ensure the sustainability of the programmes (Train, 2003; Norman, 2012).

## **5.2 Strategies used by the library staff to overcome any challenges that they face in the delivery of adult ESOL programmes**

The results show that while some challenges are faced by all the library branches, some are context specific such as the constraint of space and not having enough bilingual staff, in line with the findings of Anderson et al. (2013). Similarly, the strategies each branch adopts to overcome the challenges that they face can be different from each other.

The libraries have a very clear understanding that they are not competing with the other English language providers in the community. Instead, they want to complement their work by reaching out to a specific group of the community that prefers a more informal form of learning. At the same time, the libraries make use of this opportunity of providing language learning to strengthen community connections as mentioned by various authors (Falkowitz, 2013; Kong, 2013; Teshuba, 2012).

The results show that Auckland Libraries is able to attract a big group of participants by providing a friendly atmosphere and incorporating relevant life skills and local information into ESOL programmes. As a majority of the participants are older adults, the use of real-life contexts, familiar topics and skills that can meet the participants' immediate needs also fits the principles of andragogy theory (Duay and Bryan, 2008; Gold, 2015; White, Watts and Trlin, 2001).

Some libraries have made a conscientious effort to get to know what the participants want from the programmes by involving them during planning and constantly interacting with them. However, there are not any developed or systematic strategies on needs analysis and evaluation as mentioned by Train (2003). The library staff members gather such information informally through spending time and conversing with the participants. In this way, the library staff are also able to build personal relationships with the participants (Shrestha and Krolak, 2015).

The practice of recruiting staff with the correct skill set and personality traits suitable for the job has been carried out by some libraries in UK (Spacey and Goulding, 2003). This can be a good way of appointing the right staff with the required pedagogy skills if the ESOL programmes have strong language teaching elements. The results also show that most libraries involve staff members who already have some teaching experience or other related

skills to run the programmes. As mentioned in Ashcroft et al. (2007), this is one way for libraries to minimize the needs to retrain staff as there is hardly any such opportunity available to the libraries.

The results show libraries try to work around the constraint of staffing and a lack of training opportunities by involving more library staff and even mobilizing the whole library to brainstorm ideas, fill in for roles and provide practical support when needed. Library staff who do not have proper pedagogy training also make use of teaching skills that they have acquired on the job to help them run the programmes.

This study also shows that support from the manager plays a key role in the success of the programme. While some are directly involved by providing personal guidance and support, others give the staff a free hand to run the programme. They try their best in providing on the job training opportunities for the staff involved and help vet the volunteers before appointing them.

### **5.3 The attitudes of library staff involved in the adult ESOL programmes toward the adult ESOL programmes**

The results show that interviewees generally have very positive attitudes toward the adult ESOL programme. Unlike the findings of Kong (2013) and Spacey and Goulding (2014), the research participants have a clear vision and purpose of running the programmes and consider them core library services. Despite the many hurdles and hard work they need to put into them, they reap great satisfaction and enjoyment from seeing participants enjoy the programmes and become active participating members of the community.

The results also show that passion is the foremost success factor for the delivery of adult ESOL programmes beside skills and personality traits. Most of the interviewees possess a service-oriented attitude and an engaging personality as mentioned by Shrestha and Krolak (2015); they go above and beyond what are required of them by putting in extra effort and time to ensure a smooth running of the programmes. Though considering themselves foremost library staff, they willingly take up multiple roles and extra responsibilities as organisers, educators and facilitators based on the needs and situations (Hallberg and Sipos-Zackrisson, 2010; Hoyer, 2001).

This study supports the findings of Nielsen and Borlund (2015) on staff's view toward training. Interviewees, especially those who have no pedagogy competencies, hope there are training opportunities available to them. While most welcome opportunities to observe programmes in action, some also ask for other related training such as volunteer management. There is a perceived view that training will improve their skills and boost their confidence level in programme delivery.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study explores the opportunities and challenges of providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland Libraries. Ten library staff members including three managers from five community libraries were interviewed.

The findings show that participating libraries use the opportunity of providing ESOL programmes to invest on community building; they provide a safe and welcoming space for the participants to interact with one another and give them practical skills and information to integrate them into the local communities. The libraries face many challenges in terms of staffing, funding cut, change in organisation structure and other practical issues. However, they are able to use various strategies to overcome or work around the challenges because of the positive attitudes and passion of the library staff who are involved in the running of the programmes.

The findings show that there is much room for improvement in the area of collaboration and partnership. It is hoped the new organisation structure Fit for the Future will create more opportunities for different branches to work together and to share resources. It is also hoped that it will create more partnership opportunities between libraries and different governing bodies, organisations and other language providers to ensure the sustainability of the ESOL programmes in the long run.



## **6.1 Implications**

Auckland Libraries' Fit for the Future organisation-wide restructuring intends to create more collaboration opportunities by grouping libraries into clusters based on local board areas. It also focuses more on community engagement by creating new positions that specialize in this area. It is hoped that libraries, especially those in the same local board, make use of this opportunity to create more partnerships between library branches and local organisations.

Library branches should work together to come up with plans and models to serve as a blueprint for the programme implementation and development. They should minimise duplications of effort by sharing resources, expertise and even the pool of volunteers. Library staff from different libraries who are involved in the running of the programme should be encouraged to share ideas and to support one another.

Library managers play a major role in instilling the mission of using ESOL programmes to achieve the aim of community building in every library staff whether one is directly or indirectly involved in the programmes. They are also very important in setting a healthy work culture in the organisation whereby every staff is willing to step in and help out one another. In addition, managers can come together and collectively look for more training options for their library staff.

## **6.2 Suggestions for future research**

- The findings from this study are based on the perceptions of library staff members who are involved in the running of the adult ESOL programmes. Hence, they may not truly reflect the perceptions of the ESOL programme participants. Future research could look at investigating the attitudes of adult ESOL learners in the community libraries towards the programmes.
- There could also be research on the attitudes and perceptions of the other library staff in general towards the adult ESOL programmes
- Future research could look at the effect and outcomes of Fit for the Future new service model on the implementation and development of adult ESOL programmes in the community libraries especially in the areas of collaboration and partnerships

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## **Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet**

**Research Project Title: A study of the opportunities and challenges of providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland libraries**

**Researcher: Annie Nyok Moi Chong, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

As part of the completion of my Master of Information Studies, this study is designed to investigate the challenges of providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland Libraries. It is hoped that the findings can guide libraries offering adult ESOL programmes with better planning and management of the services and also pave the way for them to work together and find innovative ways to ensure the sustainability of the programmes. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School of Information Management Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting Auckland Libraries staff who are involved in adult ESOL programmes to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in a 30-45 minute interview which will be held at a place and time convenient to the participant. In addition, participants do not need to answer any question if they prefer not to. Permission will be asked to record the interview, and a transcript of the interview will be sent to participants for checking.

Participation is voluntary, and you will not be identified personally in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor, Anne Goulding (Professor of Library and Information Management). The research report will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Should any participant wish to withdraw from the project, they may do so until two weeks after the interview and the data collected up to that point will be destroyed. All data collected from participants will be destroyed within 2 years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at [chongnyok@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:chongnyok@myvuw.ac.nz) or telephone 022 1944 120, or you may contact my supervisor Anne Goulding at [anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone 04 463 5887.

Annie Nyok Moi Chong



## **Appendix B: Participant Consent Form**

**Research Project Title: A study of the opportunities and challenges of providing non-formal ESOL programmes for adult learners in Auckland libraries**

**Researcher: Annie Nyok Moi Chong, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project, without having to give reasons, by e-mailing chongnyok@myvuw.ac.nz until two weeks after the interview.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.

I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others.

I understand that, if this interview is audio recorded, the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be erased within 2 years after the conclusion of the project. Furthermore, I will have an opportunity to check the transcripts of the interview.

Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:

- I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.
- I agree to this interview being audio recorded.

Signed:

Name of participant:

Date:

Email address:

### **Appendix C: Interview questions for library staff members**

1. Can you please tell me your present post in the library and how long you have been working in the library?
2. How long have you been involved in the adult ESOL programmes?
3. Can you briefly tell me what you do at the adult ESOL programmes?
4. Considering there are other English language providers in Auckland, what do you think are the advantages of providing adult ESOL programmes in the library?
5. Do you work closely with any other library staff or outside parties in running the ESOL programmes?
6. What are the major challenges you face in facilitating the ESOL programmes?
7. What are the strategies you use to overcome the challenges you face in running the ESOL programmes?
8. What do you think will be the impact of the current 'Fit for the future' organisation-wide restructuring on adult ESOL programmes?
9. How do you see your role in the delivery of adult ESOL programmes? Do you consider yourself an educator, a facilitator or just a library staff running one of the many library activities?
10. In your opinion, what are the skills and qualities a staff needs to ensure a smooth running of the programmes?
11. Do you think every library staff can get involved in the delivery of the ESOL programmes or it should only be assigned to staff that meet certain criteria? What is the practice in your library?
12. How do you go about learning the trade of the job in facilitating ESOL programmes?
13. What are the support and training that you get to help you provide a good service to the participants?
14. Do you think you will go for additional training if there are opportunities? Can you please elaborate on your answer?
15. Is there any other comment which you like to add?

## **Appendix D: Interview questions for library managers**

1. Can you briefly tell me about the adult ESOL programme at your library?
2. What are the main purposes of running adult ESOL programmes at your library?
3. Considering there are other English language providers in Auckland, what do you think are the advantages of providing adult ESOL programmes in the library?
4. Do you consider adult ESOL programme a core library service? What do you think are the main hindrances that can prevent libraries from running adult ESOL programmes?
5. What do you think are the major challenges faced by your library in running the ESOL programmes?
6. What strategies does your library use to overcome the challenges?
7. What do you think will be the impact of the current 'Fit for the future' organisation-wide restructuring on adult ESOL programmes?
8. In your opinion, do you think every library staff can get involved in the delivery of the ESOL programmes or it should only be assigned to staff that meet certain criteria? What is the practice in your library?
9. How do you delegate task to staff in running the ESOL programmes? Do you look for specific characteristics and skills in your delegation?
10. Do you think staff should go for additional training to equip themselves for the task? Why do you say so?
11. How do you provide your staff with the necessary training and support needed in the delivery of the ESOL programmes?
12. Is there any other comment which you like to add?