Equity and ELICOS: A case study

Ornella Teresa Rampal

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Abstract

The notion of “equity” has long been a concern for educational systems around the world. However, little attention has been paid to equity in transnational education settings such as Australia’s international education industry and its ELICOS sector. This is despite their significance as major sectors of education.

This mixed-method exploratory case study, situated in the critical research tradition, draws on secondary data (N = 425) from assessment records at an ELICOS institution, a survey (N = 28), teacher and student interviews and policy analysis, to unpack the construction of equity in ELICOS and to identify equity issues. In doing so, the extent to which there were differentiated and inequitable outcomes and experiences for different student groups at the case study site was investigated.

The study found significantly differentiated academic outcomes between social groups at the case study site. While gender and age did not have a strong relationship with academic outcomes, differences between world region groups were highly significant in the majority of language skills. The student groups “Europe” and “Latin America” ranked the highest in speaking, reading and writing skills, while “Western Asia and Northern Africa” and “South Asia and Other Nationalities” predominantly ranked the lowest. In contrast to the disparities found in academic outcomes, only slight differences were found in the experiences of the student groups. In addition to disparate outcomes, assessment practices and limitations in meeting the needs of disparate-level classes were also identified as equity issues at the case study site.

Drawing on a multiplicity of data sources, the study found that the notion of equity forms part of the assemblage of quality in ELICOS; however, policies such as the National ELICOS Standards (2011), the National Code (2007) and the case study site’s own policies, overlook the equity of outcomes and participation in their construction of quality, which consequently supports inequitable outcomes between different social groups to continue to exist and be obscured.

The study argues that current constructions of equity in ELICOS may have significant ramifications for the equity of access to tertiary education, permanent residency and employment for ELICOS students and that it may be supporting the
reproduction of social inequalities. Consequently, the study calls for ELICOS policy redress to promote the equity of outcomes and participation and it suggests avenues for research and theoretical development that are urgently needed to address equity and quality in international education.

Keywords: Equity, ELICOS, International Education, Transnational Education, Quality and Outcomes
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is less than 24,200 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices
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Abbreviations

AEI Australian Education International
AoA Age of Arrival
CLT Communicative Language Teaching
DIAC Department of Immigration and Citizenship
EA English Australia
ELICOS English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ELT English Language Teaching
ESL English as a Second Language
ESOS Educational Services for Overseas Students
GE3 General English 3 (Pre-intermediate)
GE4 General English 4 (Intermediate)
GE5 General English 5 (Upper-intermediate)
HE Higher Education
HIGs High Input Generators
IE International Education
IELTS International English Language Testing System
L1 First Language
L2 Second Language
LIGs Low Input Generators
NEAS National English Language Teaching (ELT) Accreditation Scheme
NESB Non-English speaking background
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTO Registered Training Organisation
SLA Second Language Acquisition
TEA The ELICOS Association
TESOL Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TL Target Language
VET Vocational Education and Training
# Table of Contents

## An Introduction to Equity and ELICOS
- What is ELICOS? ................................................................. 2
- The History of IE and ELICOS in Australia .......................... 3
- Equity in Education .......................................................... 4
- Statement of the Problem .................................................. 5
- Research Questions ......................................................... 7
- Significance of the Study .................................................. 7

## Literature Review: Investigating Equity in ELICOS
- Students At Risk in ELICOS ............................................. 10
- Gender ............................................................................. 11
- Sexuality ............................................................................ 13
- Ethnicity, Race, Culture and Religion ................................ 14
  - Whiteness and cultural framings. ..................................... 14
  - Culturally framed styles of learning. ................................ 16
  - Acculturation .................................................................... 16
  - Linguistic distance .......................................................... 18
  - Ethnicity/race, culture and religion: A summary .......... 19
- Age ...................................................................................... 19
- Level of Prior Education and Socioeconomic Status ....... 20
- Summary ............................................................................. 21

## Methodology
- Methodological approach .................................................. 22
- Methods .............................................................................. 23
  - City College records: Academic outcomes and attendance 23
  - Survey ................................................................. 24
  - Interviews ................................................................. 26
  - Policy analysis ............................................................... 27
- Sampling .............................................................................. 27
- Access to the Site and to Participants ................................ 28
- Data Analysis ........................................................................ 29
  - City College records and survey .................................. 29
  - Interviews ................................................................. 31
  - Policy analysis ............................................................... 33
- Ethics .................................................................................... 33
- Rigour and Trustworthiness .............................................. 34

## Analysis and Findings: The Construction of Equity in ELICOS
- Overview of Quality Assurance Policies: The ESOS Framework 36
  - Recent changes to policy .................................................. 36
  - National English language teaching accreditation scheme (NEAS) 37
  - Local policies and procedures at City College ................. 37
- Analysis of ELICOS Policies and Procedures ....................... 37
  - Inputs .............................................................................. 38
    - Prerequisite ELICOS teaching qualifications .................. 38
    - Financial inputs ............................................................ 38
    - Inputs for at risk students ............................................. 39
    - Curriculum ................................................................... 40
  - Processes ........................................................................... 41
    - Assessment ................................................................. 41
Students’ Outcomes and Experiences ................................................................. 42
Attendance ........................................................................................................ 44
Contribution to Knowledge and Future Research ........................................... 48
Importance and Significance of Findings ......................................................... 48
National policies. .............................................................................................. 48
City College ...................................................................................................... 50
Analysis and Findings: Outcomes and Attendance – City College Records 52
Overview ........................................................................................................ 52
Academic outcomes data ............................................................................... 52
Attendance data ............................................................................................. 53
The Significant Between-group Differences in Academic Outcomes and
Attendance ....................................................................................................... 53
Overall academic outcomes .......................................................................... 53
Attendance ....................................................................................................... 53
Speaking outcomes ......................................................................................... 55
Reading outcomes ........................................................................................... 55
Writing outcomes ............................................................................................. 55
Listening ........................................................................................................... 55
Grammar ........................................................................................................ 56
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 57
Gender. ............................................................................................................ 57
Age. ................................................................................................................ 57
World region. .................................................................................................. 57
Analysis and findings: ELICOS experiences at City College – survey data 60
Overview ........................................................................................................ 60
Students’ General Experiences and Perceptions of City College .................. 60
Exploring Disparities of Experience at City College ...................................... 62
Overall experience .......................................................................................... 62
Attendance ....................................................................................................... 62
Self-reports of academic outcomes. ................................................................. 62
Institutional aspects ......................................................................................... 63
Affective aspects. ............................................................................................. 63
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 66
Discussion and Conclusions .......................................................................... 68
Summary and Discussion of Findings in Light of Previous Scholarship:
Students’ Outcomes and Experiences ............................................................. 68
The Latin American and European advantage. .............................................. 70
Interpretation of Findings .............................................................................. 72
Importance and Significance of Findings ...................................................... 73
Suggestions for Improvements ....................................................................... 75
Pedagogy ......................................................................................................... 75
Assessment ...................................................................................................... 76
National policy ............................................................................................... 77
Contribution to Knowledge and Future Research ......................................... 80
References ...................................................................................................... 82
Appendix A .................................................................................................... 90
Appendix B ..................................................................................................... 98
An Introduction to Equity and ELICOS

The notion of equity has been of major concern in schooling since the latter half of the twentieth century (Graham, 1993) and a feature of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) for many years (Considine, Watson, & Hall, 2005; Henry, 2001; Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). It is well established that educational structures and policies can intensify discrepancies in achievement between social groups and that such discrepancies should be reduced (Perry, 2009). However, despite the centrality of equity concerns in the education of domestic students, equity discourse has not yet permeated transnational spaces of education (James, 2007; Rizvi, 2009), such as Australia’s international education (IE) sector.

I have worked in IE within the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) domain for a number of years as a teacher and manager. Prior to this, my professional experience was in the domestic secondary education field. Accustomed to the centrality of “equity” in the schooling sector, when adapting to the IE field for adults, I was confronted by the lack of concern in policy and scholarship for equity issues. As an ELICOS practitioner with a passion for social justice, I have often questioned whether I am part of a system that supports and reproduces social inequalities or—more desirably—whether I am part of a process that is transforming the fabric of our global society towards a more just world.

My experiences as an educator committed to social justice, the absence of concern for equity, and the interplay of education, power and social privilege in IE and ELICOS lead me to investigate equity in ELICOS. This chapter provides an overview of the significance and function of ELICOS and outlines the history of IE and ELICOS in Australia to provide the socio-historical context. The concept of equity is then explored; however, unable to draw on equity literature from the IE field as research of this nature is absent (James, 2007), I have turned to literature from the schooling sector. The challenges of bringing equity to ELICOS in empirical research are then explored and the research questions are shaped.
What is ELICOS?

IE and its ELICOS sector are a significant part of the Australian economy. In 2011-2012 IE was Australia’s fourth largest export with an economic impact of $15.3 billion (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012) of which ELICOS accounted for more than a quarter of international student commencements with 75,377 enrolments (Australian Trade Commission, 2013).

ELICOS plays two main roles. It functions as a pathway into other Australian education sectors and it supports those seeking to improve their English for career advancement, migration or work purposes in Australia, or for further studies abroad (Bundesen, 2011). Of the students completing ELICOS in 2010, two thirds continued to further education in Australia. 35 per cent moved to HE and 20 per cent to VET (Australian Education International, 2012b).

The History of IE and ELICOS in Australia

IE and its ELICOS sector have had a long history in Australian education. IE was formalised in the 1950s and 1960s under the Colombo Plan—a part of Australia’s aid program (Oakman, 2002). The 1970s, however, saw a temporary shift to an immigration agenda before a return to an aid motive in the 1980s (Meadows, 2011). From the mid-eighties full fees were introduced (Davis, 2009) and IE entered a trade phase where “commercial interests prevailed” (Gallagher, 2011, p. 122). From 1998 to 2009 IE re-entered a migration phase where IE provided pathways to migration; however, by 2010 ties to migration were loosened (Gallagher, 2011). Against such a whimsical policy backdrop, IE has been characterised by reaction to the shifting agendas of different governments and has not had the stability to reflect on its impact and trajectory as a major sector of Australian education. It is perhaps for this reason that the traditional concerns for educational equity have not permeated this field.

Today, it is recognised that Australian IE has entered “the next phase”, that new policy strategies with “a premium on quality” are needed, and that IE “ha[s] to renew its broader “cultural-strategic” purpose…” (Gallagher, 2011, p. 145). It thus appears a crucial time to bring equity—a common perspective on educational quality (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005)—to the construction
of quality in ELICOS and to commence thinking about IE and ELICOS in a reflective rather than reactive way.

**Equity in Education**

Historically, there have been a number of shifts in constructions of educational equity. In the United States across the twentieth century equity was first understood as raising attendance levels in schools (Graham, 1993). Thereafter, there was a shift to “equal opportunity education”, which aimed to increase access to education for different social groups (Valli, Cooper, & Frankes, 1997), and also to affirmative action to make access to quality education more equitable (Graham, 1993). In the 1990s, the equity focus shifted to achievement—on raising outcome levels for all students (Valli, et al., 1997). Constructions of educational equity in the United Kingdom also followed similar shifts, moving from “formal equality of access and provision” and “equality of circumstance” to “equity of participation” and “equity of outcomes” (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

Despite consensus around shifts in equity paradigms historically, there is no agreed definition of equity (Perry, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). The terms “social justice”, “equality” and “equity” are used without distinction (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997) and terms such as “inclusion”, “educational risk”, “difference” and “diversity” are also used to denote equity (Singh & Taylor, 2007). Furthermore, ideological complexities are apparent. Henry (2001) identifies two main facets to equity: the traditional economic aspect and the cultural. The economic aspect has been approached via three main ideologies: liberal-individualism, market-individualism and the social-democratic perspective (Taylor et al., 1997, as cited in Henry, 2001). These approaches are concerned with the redistribution of resources and also “address the inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality” (Henry, 2001, p. 29). The cultural aspect, however, focuses on the recognition of differences within social groups in addition to the economic facet. Given the ideological differences underpinning equity, Rizvi and Lingard (2011) argue it is more useful to rethink equity in combination with other values such as fairness, justice, quality and excellence by utilizing the Deleuzian concept of “assemblage”, rather than viewing equity as a stand-alone concept.
Statement of the Problem

In spite of the multiplicity of perspectives on equity, what the aforementioned approaches share is a frame of governmental responsibility for equity and education bound within nation-states (Rizvi, 2009). Thus, in empirical research when attempting to apply these understandings of equity to a transnational space of education such as ELICOS, numerous issues precipitate, which are aptly summarised by Rizvi (2009):

How do we …research spaces that do not have any clear boundaries and where social relations potentially span vast distances? …take into account the distribution and dynamics of power whose contours potentially involve the entire globe? …provide accounts of social meaning when these are not linked to any specific community? …study social inequalities when their causes do not necessarily reside within the community that is the object of our research? …address the conceptual difficulties that inevitably arise in research concerning social phenomena such as education, when the very construction of “the social” cannot be easily defined? (p. 277)

In order make empirical research into equity and ELICOS practicable, it is necessary to define “the social” and to select an approach to equity that can be operationalized, as several of the approaches to equity previously discussed are not compatible with ELICOS. For instance, the equity of attendance, which refers to keeping students in schools for longer, is not relevant in ELICOS where there is no mandatory length of study. Similarly, the equity of access and equality of circumstance in ELICOS would require investigations into economic imbalances internationally that cause ELICOS to be accessible only to the “privileged ESL student” (Vandrick, 1995), to those who have the financial means to access IE—a study beyond the scope of this thesis. Consequently, the equity of participation—the hidden curriculum or the structures of schooling that might support inequalities (Valli, et al., 1997)—and the equity of outcomes have been selected as a starting point for researching equity in ELICOS as they can be investigated within a clearer frame of social reference, such as a case study site, compared to other approaches to equity. This appears the most tenable boundary and appropriate starting point for beginning the inquiry into equity in
ELICOS and for laying the foundations for future research beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, even within a narrowed approach to equity, measuring and comparing participation and outcomes for different groups of ELICOS students is fraught with difficulties. Firstly, data on the ELICOS population are limited. English Australia (EA), Australian Education International (AEI) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) provide quantitative data on enrolments by nationality, lengths of study, visa categories, study pathways and the economic impact of the industry; however, no data are recorded on learning outcomes. In fact, it has been recognised that in Australia “there is no national framework for establishing and monitoring learning outcomes in ELT” (O'Loughlin & Murray, 2007). Consequently, the equity of outcomes in ELICOS has been impossible to investigate.

Secondly, conventional equity indicators are not always applicable or are difficult to apply to ELICOS. For instance, socioeconomic status (SES) which has been one of the strongest indicators of outcomes in schooling (Sirin, 2005) is not easily comparable across countries and moreover there are actually no SES data on international students in Australia (James, 2007), which largely eliminates SES as an avenue of investigation into equity and ELICOS. Other indicators such as geographical regions, indigenous Australian status, non-English speaking backgrounds and women in non-traditional areas of study have also been used as performance indicators to define equity groups in higher education (Martin, 1994) in addition to social class, gender, ethnicity, immigration status and sexuality, which are often used as achievement indicators in schooling (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Perry, 2009). Evidently, with the exception of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, these variables are not directly transferable to ELICOS where all students are foreign nationals from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Given the complexities of empirical research into equity in ELICOS and the limited scope of a minor thesis, this study explores the social variables that are transferable to ELICOS, such as gender and ethnicity, and frames the social in a single-site case study at City College (pseudonym), where I work. City College is a medium-sized Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that offers VET, ELICOS and
foundation courses and has direct-entry pathway arrangements with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and HE providers into Diploma, Bachelor and Masters programs.

**Research Questions**

The dearth of knowledge on equity and ELICOS signals an urgent need for research to explore potential issues, especially given the significance and function of the Australian IE industry and its ELICOS sector. The lack of data and literature, the ideological complexities underpinning equity, and my commitment to social justice precipitate the following questions:

- How is the notion of equity constructed in ELICOS?
- To what extent are there differentiated and inequitable learning outcomes and experiences of ELICOS for different learner groups?
- What are the factors contributing to these differences for different groups?
- How can the issues identified be addressed?

These questions are but the first step in bringing the lens of equity to ELICOS and IE and in uncovering and illuminating blind spots and blank spots (Wagner, 1993). The study is designed to paint an initial picture of equity and ELICOS, to provide direction for further research and to fulfil my personal interest in understanding and addressing the equity issues faced in the courses I teach and manage.

**Significance of the Study**

This project is significant to theory, policy and practice. Firstly, it forges a path for the application of equity to a transnational space of education, a space which Rizvi (2009) argues educational research must pay attention to. Additionally, it contributes to theory by enriching the fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), which have predominantly been framed by cognitive theories, with critical, sociological and educational perspectives. While in the schooling sector English as a Second language (ESL) has often formed part of equity discussions, in the adult sector it is only the area of critical applied linguistics, for instance scholars such as Pennycook (2007) and Benesch (2001), who have
investigated equity issues such as relations of power in the TESOL classroom. However, such investigations have involved the critical analysis of assumptions and some practices rather than empirical analysis of language outcomes for adult ESL learners. Thus, this study brings a new approach to the fields of SLA and TESOL and strengthens the bridge between educational theory and SLA theory. Additionally, it provides valuable data on a largely under-researched cohort of students, allowing a detailed sociological picture of ELICOS students to emerge.

The study also has implications for ELICOS policy. It makes recommendations for the development of richer notions of quality and provides recommendations for management and pedagogy to enable colleges to work towards more equitable and higher quality provision. The findings may also be applicable and useful to other English Language Teaching (ELT) settings and to tertiary education settings. The study opens avenues for future research and contributes to moving English language education for international students into a more equitable transnational space that is underpinned by educational theory.
Literature Review: Investigating Equity in ELICOS

This chapter turns to existing scholarship to investigate differentiated student outcomes and experiences in ELICOS. As a literature search of databases such as A+ and DELTAA, using combinations of the following search terms: ELICOS, equity, outcomes, achievement, at-risk and diversity, provides little insight into the equity of outcomes and participation in ELICOS—returning only one conference paper discussed below, it is necessary to turn to broader fields of scholarship to address the research questions.

As the only transferable equity indicators of achievement from mainstream education to ELICOS appear to be sexuality, gender and ethnicity, these aspects are explored from SLA, TESOL and schooling perspectives. Age is also explored as a social variable because in adult education it is not a constant variable, as students are not grouped into levels by age like in the schooling sector. The intersections of religion, level of prior education and SES with SLA experiences and outcomes are also explored as areas of potential between-group difference.

Whilst it is acknowledged that a structuralist approach struggles to capture the complexities of relations of power and that “in reality” different social facets are difficult to untangle from one another as “power can operate on any one of these or on all…” (Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998, p. 190), herein the social aspects are presented discretely in order to commence an investigation into this unchartered territory and offer the first broad brushstroke glimpses into the equity of outcomes and student experiences in ELICOS.

Students At Risk in ELICOS

Lowe and Rao (2006) provide the only instance of insight into factors influencing student outcomes in ELICOS. They identify delayed course commencement because of visa issues, mismatches in prior proficiency tests with the college’s in-house level test, overly high student expectations and medical problems as common issues placing the students “at risk” at their college. They define being at risk as students who are likely to fail in meeting the required English language proficiency level in time for
the start of their main course—their Bachelor or Masters degree. Vietnamese and Latin American students were identified as the main groups experiencing delayed starts, which caused the length of their preparatory English courses to be reduced and placed them at risk. Chinese and Thai students were the main groups vulnerable to mismatches in testing as their International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores were often incommensurate with the school’s proficiency assessment results. These students consequently required more time in ELICOS than planned to reach the prerequisite level of English for their main course.

While an introduction to potential equity issues in ELICOS is gleaned from Lowe and Rao (2006), as evidence is purely anecdotal, the reliability and credibility of their paper is weakened. Moreover, they fail to acknowledge the role of the institution in placing students at risk and in supporting groups to continue to be at risk as they only scrutinise factors external to the college. Nevertheless, what can be gained from this scholarship is that factors such as visa problems and level placement issues need to be considered as they may affect outcomes and experiences in ELICOS.

Gender

Gender has been a contentious area of interest in the field of SLA since the seventies (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). However, in understanding gendered outcomes and experiences, the literature presents a distinct epistemological disjuncture. From an essentialist perspective, gender is viewed as a discrete variable and from a post-structuralist view, gender is understood as “complex systems of social relations and discursive practices, differentially constructed in local contexts” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2004, p. 3).

Exploring essentialist perspectives in SLA on gendered proficiency outcomes, research shows females tend to outperform males. However, even within the essentialist paradigm, there are contradictions. Drawing on a sample of Hong Kong university students, Ho (1987) finds significant difference in favour of females for second language (L2) writing outcomes, whereas Ng (2010), investigating school-aged Hong Kong students, finds no significant difference. For speaking outcomes, Motallebzadeh and Nematizadeh (2011) from an Iranian EFL context found no statistically significant
gendered difference, while Ho (1987) found females to have a statistically significant advantage. For listening, Farhady (1982) found females outperformed males in his sample of international students an American university. The tendency for females to outperform males is paralleled in first language (L1) literacy outcomes in schooling contexts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009; U.S Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

In understanding why this tendency occurs, in the schooling context it was found that “constructions of masculinity influence boys’ behaviour and learning in literacy” (Alloway et al., 2002, as cited in Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010, p. 357) and that hegemonic masculinity plays a large role in disadvantaging boys in literacy (Martino & Kehler, 2007, as cited in Watson, et al., 2010). From an SLA perspective Ellis (1994), elaborating Labov’s (1991) principles of native-speaker speech, believes that women may be better at learning second languages because men deviate from standard forms more than women and because women use comparatively more “incoming forms” (Labov, 1991).

Research on gendered experiences of the L2 classroom, in contrast to outcomes, presents a different picture as females are found to be disadvantaged in interaction. Investigating primary schooled-aged ESL students from the same ethnic background, Julé (2002) found that boys occupied nine times as much “linguistic space”—the proportion of time students speak for—in the ESL classroom compared to girls and that to some extent the teacher contributed to girls’ silence through her comments. Consequently, Julé (2002) argues gender is a “significant linguistic variable in the ESL experience” (p. 37). Julé (2004) asserts that inequitable linguistic space in the classroom negatively affects SLA and hypotheses: “If ESL girls are not given or do not claim adequate access to classroom talk, this must impact on their learning of English” (p. 27). However, this hypothesis is disproved by the outcome-oriented gender research discussed earlier.

Essentialist views of gender, where individuals are placed into distinct categories, have been heavily critiqued for their propensity to hide or ignore other social and cultural forces on outcomes (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004). From a poststructuralist SLA perspective, Norton and Pavlenko (2004) underscore it should not...
be assumed “…that all women—or all men—have a lot in common with each other… Instead gender emerges as one of many important facets of social identity that interact with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age and social status.” (p. 3) They suggest a focus on gendered agency, access and interaction, instead of on gendered differences in processes and outcomes in SLA. They argue that gender discourses surrounding English, such as the link between English, feminism and empowerment, which has been noted as a motivating factor in several studies, can affect students’ agency in learning. In terms of access, this refers to gendered practices, such as primary childcare, that may limit access to L2 education.

Whilst post-structuralist perspectives such as Norton and Pavlenko (2004) have been valuable in exploring the subtleties of gendered experience, in exploring equity and ELICOS they do not offer a way to investigate the possibility of gender inequity in outcomes and in fact suggest gendered differences in outcomes be ignored. Such an approach fails to recognise the cultural capital tied to language achievement and the potential effects that gendered difference in achievement can have on relations of power beyond the classroom. As such, whilst the essentialist perspective is not without flaws, it is the only scholarship that offers a way of identifying and exploring differences in gendered outcomes, short of ignoring gendered outcome differences altogether.

Sexuality

The small body of literature on sexuality and education illustrates that queer students have more negative experiences than heterosexual students in schools (Robinson & Espelage, 2011) and that they tend to report lower GPAs than heterosexuals (Rostosky, Owens, Zimmerman, & Riggle, 2003; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Within TESOL, the dearth of literature has predominantly approached sexuality from a socio-critical identity perspective (See Nelson, 2010; O’ Mochin, 2004; Vandrick, 1997). Investigating queer experience of the adult language classroom, Nelson (2010) found, “it can be difficult for gay immigrant (and international) students to establish communicative legitimacy in the language classroom, which can restrict learning opportunities” (p. 441). As for outcomes in TESOL, no empirical research on queer students exists.
Ethnicity, Race, Culture and Religion

This section of the literature review explores the contrasting paradigms from which ethnicity, race, culture and religion have been investigated in order to shed light on the diversity of student experiences and outcomes in SLA and the reasons underlying disparities.

Whiteness and cultural framings. It is widely acknowledged that “whiteness” holds social advantages in education and beyond. For example, Kubota and Lin (2009) state, “Whiteness occupies a privileged position in a racial hierarchy of power” (p. 25) and similarly DiAngelo (2006) explains, “Whiteness refers to dimensions of racism that serve to elevate White people over people of color” (p. 1983). At least within the U.S, “White” refers to European-Americans, including southern and eastern Europeans (Henze, et al., 1998). However, Yancey (2003) argues race is more than a physical characteristic as it is socially constructed and that in fifty to a hundred years time in the U.S “many other racial groups may become ‘white’” (p. 4). Similarly, DiAngelo (2003) explains “…Whiteness not as a fixed and unified ‘thing’, but rather as a set of practices” (p. 1986).

A number of studies illustrate how classroom participation is linked to race and how some are privileged over others. From a U.S college classroom perspective, DiAngelo (2006) finds that White students accounted for approximately eighty-nine per cent of classroom participation compared to eleven per cent for the local and international Asian students, despite the class being comprised predominantly of Asians. From an ELICOS setting, through classroom observation, Shidong (1999) similarly finds that “Asian students are comparatively more passive in classroom participation patterns than the Western students” (p. ix); and similarly Sato (1981), reporting on a university L2 classroom, finds non-Asian students took considerably more “speaking turns” compared to Asian students and that “teacher solicitation” of student participation was less for Asian students than for non-Asian students.

The literature also reveals a tendency for teachers to have preconceptions of Asian and European students that parallel the above findings. In a study of an Australian university TESOL classroom, Ellwood (2009) finds that the teacher viewed
the European students in her class “as a homogeneous group, with the greater capability to do this work of critical thinking” (p. 107), whereas the Japanese students were viewed as “passive non-speakers” with lesser capability. Judgments about students’ abilities were made prior to ascertaining students’ actual language capabilities and getting to know students as individuals.

Framing students because of their race and positioning Asian students as passive has been criticised. DiAngelo argues these types of racial discourses have “consequences for educational opportunity” (DiAngelo, 2006, p. 1993). In her analysis of classroom participation, she found whiteness functioned to deny non-White students an equal learning opportunity and that it positioned non-White students as an audience to the “elevated” White students. In addition to her findings, DiAngelo (2006) argues that students who speak more in class can direct the discussion and thus shape the class to their learning needs which further augments their learning opportunities.

Ellwood (2009), also believes that racial framings affect learning. In her study, she finds that discourses of cultural identity predetermined student attributes and thus prevented them from taking on and developing alternative identities. She consequently deduced that it was because of such cultural framings that Japanese student participation decreased in the later weeks of the course. Citing McLaren and Torres (1999) Ellwood (2009) asserts, “in terms of pedagogy, and the communicative goals of language teaching, this exclusion can be seen as ‘a social reality with devastating effects’” (p. 109). In spite of these arguments, however, Ellwood (2009) reports that some Japanese students were outperforming European students “on paper” in the final week of the course, which undermines her argument for the “devastating effects” of limited participation.

Research around participation and SLA has long been debated. In the seventies in a study of adult ESL learners, Seliger (1977, as cited in Shidong, 1999) coined the terms “high input generators” (HIGs) and “low input generators” (LIGs) and found that HIGs had better language learning outcomes than LIGs. However, the results were questioned on the basis that it was not known whether higher language proficiency influenced participation or whether participation influenced proficiency (Allwright &
Bailey, 1994, as cited in Shidong, 1999). Furthermore, consequent studies failed to find supportive evidence of Seliger’s results (Day, 1984).

In summary, the literature shows a tendency for White students to dominate the linguistic space of the classroom while Asian students are underrepresented in participation. There is also evidence of teachers framing these groups of students accordingly, which is said to negatively affect outcomes for Asian students. Despite strong beliefs surrounding the correlation of participation and outcomes, empirical evidence fails to support such a theory. However, there is much evidence to suggest that the ethnicity or race of a student has a strong relationship with their experience of classroom participation.

**Culturally framed styles of learning.** The explanations underlying racialised participation disparities are largely attributed to cultural differences. Some scholars believe that Western Socratic styles of education take a critical individual approach (Scollon, 1999), whereas the Asian Confucian tradition “emphasizes the maintenance of social order and the strict structuring of human relationships…the teacher’s role is to impart knowledge to her students, who do not question the teacher under any circumstances” (Rusina, 2008, p. 2). Rusina (2008), who studied the experience of adult Korean ESL learners in Australia, and Shidong (1999) both argue that a Confucian heritage plays a large role in participation differences. Furthermore, Rusina (2008) argues that Confucian-style learning preferences are not highly compatible with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In addition to culture, Shidong (1999) finds through her survey that educational background, personality, L2 proficiency, motivation and the teaching style can influence participation differences. Interestingly, there is only one aspect external to the student—teaching style—that is found to influence participation. DiAngelo (2006), is critical of approaches that view the problem as residing in the students. She states, “In positioning the international students as culturally deficient rather than exploring how they might have been silenced, the problem is located with them.” (p. 1994)

**Acculturation.** Theories of acculturation posit that social distance, which is created by the incongruence of the learner’s culture and the target language (TL)
group’s culture (Schumann, 1976), influences SLA. A high level of congruence is said to facilitate acculturation and enhance SLA (Norton, 2000).

Rusina (2008) draws on the acculturation model to account for the low achievement in speaking outcomes of a group of Korean ESL students in Australia who live in insular Korean communities. Citing Brown’s (1994) stages of culture acquisition she explains that many Koreans fail to move through the third stage of cultural acquisition, where fluency is said to occur, as they retreat to the familiarity of their own culture within the host culture to escape culture shock. Brown (2000) states, “Adults who have achieved non-linguistic means of coping in the foreign culture will pass through Stage 3 and into Stage 4 with an undue number of fossilized forms of language, never achieving mastery” (p. 188).

Whilst the literature is sparse on the experiences of non-Asian and non-European ESL students, it suggests that students from collectivistic societies, such as Saudi Arabia, may also have difficulties in acculturating into an individualistic society and consequently have more negative experiences (Razek & Coyner, 2011). Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, Yeh (2003) found in a study of international university students in the U.S that European international students faced less “acculturative stress” than Asian, Latin American and African students. Despite the widespread acceptance of acculturation theory in SLA, the theory has been criticized for positioning the problem as residing in learners and for failing to recognize external forces on SLA, such as the TL community’s willingness to provide opportunities for L2 practice (Norton, 2000). Moreover, it assumes that all language learners desire acculturation into the TL culture, which may not be the case.

A lack of congruence in the religious practices of learner groups and the TL group is also thought to impede acculturation and thus SLA, especially if negative attitudes between the groups are present (Schumann, 1976). Rao (2008) illustrates these types of opposing attitudes between Saudi Arabian students and their teachers in ELICOS. For instance, while Islamic Saudi Arabian students feel their religious dietary requirements are not respected and that their need for prayer time is not understood nor accommodated, their teachers are frustrated by these students arriving late after prayer and feel they are democratic in respecting dietary needs of all students. Contrary to this
negative relationship of religion and TESOL, Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) find that when “divine call/vision, L2 learning vision, and a sacred text—are pooled, synchronized, and channeled meaningfully” faith can “generate an unusually high ‘jet stream’ of motivation” (p. 186). They recommend that teachers tap into these aspects of motivation to support SLA outcomes; however, their study focuses only on Christian students and it is thus questionable whether the same relationship would be found for other faiths and the English language. Despite the fact that religion clearly plays a part in TESOL and SLA for some learners, “the role of faith from the perspective of the learner's personal progress and motivation has been, by and large, ignored.” (Lepp-Kaethler & Dörnyei, p. 174).

**Linguistic distance.** An aspect of possible cultural advantage not illuminated by the studies previously discussed is the potential influence of linguistic distance; that is, how different to each other two languages are.

Given that “it is not possible to correlate linguistic difference and learning difficulty in any straightforward way” (Crystal, 1987, p. 371), Chiswick and Miller (2004) draw on Hart-Gonzalez and Lindemann (1993) and measure linguistic distance by the difficulty for English-speaking Americans to learn foreign languages. Inverting Hart-Gonzalez and Lindemann’s (1993) study and controlling for a host of variables, such as age and years of schooling, they measure the English proficiency of immigrants to the United States and Canada and find that the linguistic distance of the L1 from English is a significant determiner of spoken English proficiency. However, as demographic information for the original sample is not provided, it is difficult to compare the language learning ease of Americans in their home country to that of new immigrants.

Chiswick and Miller (2004) find European speakers of languages such as French, German, Spanish and Italian have greater ease in learning English than Asian speakers of languages such as Korean, Japanese or Vietnamese. However, acquiring English is not always easier for L1 European language speakers compared to L1 Asian language speakers. For example, Thai, Indonesian and Malay L1 speakers appear to have an advantage over Greek L1 speakers in acquiring spoken English proficiency.
Whilst linguistic distance may appear to be a strong factor in SLA outcomes, there are no other studies supporting Chiswick and Miller (2004), which weakens their findings. Moreover, it has been noted that if English is a third language, cross-linguistic influence is even more complex to evaluate as age, formality, recency, typology and the strategies used to acquire L2 can all influence language transfer (Cenoz, 2001), which weakens theories of linguistic distance.

**Ethnicity/race, culture and religion: A summary.** The literature suggests that “White” students in ELICOS, such as ethnic Europeans, might experience greater privilege in class participation and greater congruence in the teaching and learning style compared to other groups of students. Moreover, their overrepresentation in participation, perceived advantage in the ease of acculturation, and in many instances greater linguistic proximity to English may mean they are also advantaged in outcomes, although many of these underlying factors are highly debated.

**Age**

Whilst age is not an equity factor in schooling because children are grouped into levels by age, in the field of SLA it is an important social characteristic as the relationship of age and the effectiveness of language acquisition is widely acknowledged. Mackey and Sachs (2012) state, “research… has consistently uncovered inverse relationships between the ages at which people begin learning a second language (L2) and the proficiency levels they reach” (p. 705). Similarly, in a review of Age of Arrival (AoA) and SLA studies Birdsong (2006) explains, “a[n] [inverse] linear function captures the relationship between AoA and outcome over the span of AoA” (p.12).

There are a number of speculations about why SLA performance decreases with age. Ehrman and Oxford (1990), drawing on Ehrman (1987) and Schleppegreig (1987), believe that age differences in success are attributable to pedagogical practices that are more suited to the needs of younger students. In contrast, Mackey and Sachs (2012) illustrate in their study of “working memory” and SLA that the cognitive decrease of post “prime-of-life” students is an important factor in SLA decline. However, drawing on DeKeyser, Alfi-Shabtay, & Ravid (2010), they believe that reasons underlying
success rates for different ages would be different for each age group, stating, “it is therefore necessary to conduct separate analyses for different age groups.” (p.705)

The literature surrounding age and SLA outcomes strongly suggests that we can expect to find the oldest students achieving the least and perhaps facing more challenges in their ELICOS experience. However, why this might be is as yet uncertain. Importantly, in order to identify the underlying factors influencing the relationship of age and outcomes, age as a factor should be investigated by age groups rather than only as a continuous variable.

**Level of Prior Education and Socioeconomic Status**

The scholarship has shown for some time that levels of prior L1 schooling are positively correlated with the effectiveness of English Language Teaching (ELT) and SLA gains (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). In a mixed-method observational study of community college language classes with over 700 students and 4000 hours of recordings, Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2012) find that slower progress through proficiency levels for low-education learners may be related to the difficulties these students face in socio-interactive practices such as starting activities, and asking for help. Furthermore, they find that for introverted low-education students, slower progress is even more apparent. Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2012) bring new insight into this aspect of SLA, which is yet to be confirmed or refuted by other studies.

Whilst a body of literature exists surrounding prior education and SLA, correlations between socioeconomic status and language outcomes are not widespread in TESOL beyond the discourse surrounding school-aged ESL learners in English language settings. This is despite the prevalence of research on SES and L1 outcomes in the schooling sector. Rare empirical insight into SES and SLA is provided by Bidin and Samsiah (2009)—although not a rigorous study—who research the L2 outcomes of boarding school students in Malaysia. They find that children who come from wealthier families attain higher English language grades than those with low-income parents and that children of highly educated parents also fared better in their English language grades than those with parents of less education. While significant $p$ values were reported for the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), post-hoc tests were not carried out.
enable the significance of between-group differences to be evaluated. Nevertheless, their study implies that SES has a strong relationship with SLA, which needs to be investigated further.

Summary

In addressing the research questions, the literature offered very little on the direct experiences and outcomes of groups of students in ELICOS. However, it highlighted that major differences in the experiences and outcomes of social groups can be expected. Whether or not such differences are inequitable in an instructed SLA setting has not been of major concern in the scholarship, although critics of “white privilege” in the classroom hint at this potential equity issue.

Additionally, the literature provides insight into how social groups might be organised for the purpose of this study and presents various facets for exploration in the analysis. For instance, regarding ethnicity/race and culture, the clear European-Asian framings in the literature suggests an investigation by world region to illuminate differences in the outcomes and experiences of such groups. For age, the scholarship indicates it would be more meaningful to categorise students into groups, rather than investigate as a continuous variable, so as to better understand underlying factors affecting outcomes. The literature review also prompts an exploration of student outcomes and experiences by religion, as early research in this area indicates potentially significant between-group differences; it precipitates a need to investigate outcomes and experiences by prior education given the clear trends that exist and to better understand underlying factors. Furthermore, the scarcity of literature on adult language learning and SES begs for creative ways to capture the relationship of these variables. The literature also guides the investigation of equity towards particular aspects such as visa issues, level placement, teachers’ framings of students and the congruence of teaching and learning styles and encourages investigation beyond strict structural categories of social facets. The insights gained from this literature review shape the methodology, which is discussed in the following chapter.
Methodology

A number of methodological approaches could have been adopted in investigating the research questions. A broad statistical study may have been best for uncovering systematic inequity across the ELICOS industry; however, as student outcome data are not readily available across ELICOS, such an approach would have posed significant data access issues. A smaller scale study, such as a single-site case study, that still enables social patterns to be investigated minimises data access issues and is more amenable to the scope of the Master’s thesis. A smaller data set also provides opportunity within the scope of the project to explore what lies behind statistical measures and offers a depth of insight. Thus, to address the research questions, a socially critical, mixed-method case study of City College was undertaken. This chapter explains the methodological choices made in choosing and designing the case study.

Methodological approach

As equity is fundamentally concerned with relations of power, a critical research approach was adopted. Critical research in education is concerned with school structures which persevere or exacerbate inequity (Merriam, 2009) and with reducing inequality (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The approach offers opportunity to challenge and transform, in addition to understanding (Merriam, 2009). The research questions follow Smyth’s (1989, as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) stages of critical inquiry: “description, information, confrontation, and reconstruction”.

An “instrumental case study” approach where “a particular case is examined to give insight into an issue” (Punch, 2009, p. 119) was chosen as it suits the exploratory nature of this project and enabled initial investigation into equity in ELICOS to commence. Whilst the case study is viewed neither as a “methodology” (Beckett & O'Toole, 2010) nor as a “method” (Punch, 2009), the approach permits a “deep understanding” (Woodside, 2010) and is useful in exploring areas of “shallow” or “non-existent” knowledge (Punch, 2009). It is acknowledged, however, that the specificity of case studies can impose limitations on the generalisation of findings (Beckett & O'Toole, 2010; Punch, 2009; Walliman, 2006). Nevertheless, through the development
of abstract concepts, propositions or hypotheses, “a case study can contribute potentially generalizable findings.” (Punch, 2009, p. 122)

A mixed-method approach was adopted as it offers two main advantages: “complementarity” and “development” (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Different types and sources of data can complement each other and permit a “fuller understanding” (Hesse-Biber, 2010). For instance, student assessment records could be illuminated by qualitative interview data to add meaning to the quantitative data (Hesse-Biber, 2010) and to “uncover the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

Mixed-methods also enable a study to develop through a “synergetic effect” (Hesse-Biber, 2010) as “results from one method … help develop or inform the other method” (Green et al., 1989 as cited in Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 5). Through an “explanatory sequential design” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) the two strands of the study were mixed during data collection. While the quantitative phase of the study addresses the research questions regarding differentiated outcomes and experiences, it also informed sampling and interview questions for the qualitative interview phase.

Additionally, mixed-methods also lend themselves to data triangulation (Patton, 1990, as cited in Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003), which can strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Mixed-methods also allow stronger inferences to be made compared to single method studies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, as cited in Kemper, et al., 2003).

Methods

The study utilised City College records (secondary data), a survey, semi-structured interviews and policy analysis to gather data.

City College records: Academic outcomes and attendance. Current and archived City College records, which form part of the college’s record keeping database, were used. The data included students’ gender, age, nationality, test scores and overall attendance. Data on prior education and religion were not available. Students’ test outcomes, recorded as a percentage, were aggregated for each language
skill and for grammar. Test outcomes reflect “how well an individual has mastered the knowledge and skills learned” (O’Loughlin, 2000, p. 13) in their course, as the college uses achievement assessments rather than proficiency tests.

The school records were advantageous as they provided a large quantity of data that otherwise could not have been collected within the study’s timeframe and because the data are “grounded in the local setting” (Johnson & Turner, 2003, p. 317). The assessment outcomes are a product of classroom assessments, which were designed and evaluated by the college. Thus, the school records also help to understand how equity is constructed in ELICOS in addition to insight into student group outcomes. The school records data were also useful in triangulating results of self-reported academic achievement in the student survey. Furthermore, as the school records data were used in the project’s first phase, results were able to inform sampling for the qualitative phase.

Survey. The quantitative survey was selected as it is relatively time efficient in its administration and analysis and offers respondents a degree of anonymity (Munn & Drever, 1995). It can also provide high response rates, especially for teacher-researchers conducting research at their own school (Munn & Drever, 1995). Thus, the survey lent itself well to collecting data from a moderate-size sample over a short timeframe in my role as a teacher-researcher.

A cross-sectional correlational survey was used, which focused on the relationships between variables from data collected at one point in time (Punch, 2005), to provide insight into differences in student experiences and learning outcomes and to help understand social group variance. Data were collected on students’ gender, age, nationality, L1, religion and prior education, as informed by the literature review, and data on students’ work status in Australia were also collected to attempt to provide insight into SES. Moreover, data on whether or not students were continuing to further education after ELICOS were captured, given the importance of ELICOS as a further education pathway. Furthermore, informed by the literature review, respondents were categorised into the independent variable, “visa issues”, by whether or not they had had visa problems that delayed course commencement.
Data on affective, institutional and behavioural aspects of being an ELICOS student were also collected. Punch (2003) summarises this survey design approach as: “social properties → affective variables → behavioural variables” and argues, “it provides a ready made general conceptual framework” (p. 15). The dependant aspects, informed by the literature review and my own experience of issues at the college, were further broken down into 13 exploratory concept variables, listed in Table 3.1, and were operationalized into thirty survey items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Aggregating items to form a score for concept variables increases the measurement’s reliability and validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Moreover, a fully-anchored scale with verbal descriptions was used as this can significantly improve reliability and validity (Krosnick & Berent, 1993; Peters & McCormick, 1996, as cited in Krosnick, 1999). Data generated from the survey enabled differentiations in the experiences and reported outcomes of different groups to be illuminated and informed sampling and key questions for the qualitative phase.

Before dissemination, the survey was piloted on a non-ELICOS cohort at the case study site who were also studying ESL. The survey’s discriminatory power was evaluated and feedback discussions were held with pilot participants, to improve the final survey version presented in Appendix A1.
Table 3.1: Dependent survey variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept variables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-reports of attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reports of academic outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University preparedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equitable teacher treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with curriculum and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style congruence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of start level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling valued as a class member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort in class participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of peer relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feelings while at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of belonging to the school community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews.** Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used in the qualitative data collection phase. The semi-structured interview provides a systematic approach whilst still being conversational and situational (Cohen, et al., 2007), which was useful in guiding second language learners and a novice researcher through a one-hour speaking episode. Moreover, interviews have been noted for their ability to “get at more layers of meaning” (Cousin, 2009, p. 72), to produce clearer and more detailed information in comparison to the survey (Johnson & Turner, 2003), and to “offer meanings to the patterns and variation found in statistical evidence” (Cousin, 2009, p. 72). Thus, the semi-structured interview was selected for its effectiveness in getting at the heart of the participant’s experience from their perspective and for the flexible structure it provides.

Student interview questions were tested on a past student at the college. A recorded “double interview”, where the interviewee provides insight into their understanding of the questions (Foddy, 1994), was used to test and refine the final questions in Appendix A2. Teacher interview questions are presented in Appendix A3.
Policy analysis. Policy analysis was used as a data collection method, as opposed to a methodology, to situate the research within the broader political context and to understand how equity is constructed in ELICOS. The type of analysis conducted leans towards the academic rather than the applied pole of the “education policy studies continuum” (Cibulka, 1994, as cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The National ELICOS Standards (2011), the National Code (2007) and the college’s own policies were analysed. This strand was mixed with other methods during the interpretation phase.

Sampling

The study utilises four levels of “multilevel sampling” (Kemper, et al., 2003), also known as “mixed purposeful sampling” (Patton, 2002). Firstly, the particular college was selected via “theory-based sampling” (Patton, 2002). As discussed earlier, there appear to be two major tensions in constructions of equity—the socio-democratic perspective and the market-individualist view. It was assumed this tension would be most evident in a private institution, rather than government, where profit making is of primary concern; thus, a private ELICOS institution with highly competitive course fees was selected. This college was also selected for its diversity of student nationalities, which is valuable in investigating equity, and for my insider knowledge as a staff member at this college, which enabled a deeper understanding of the subtleties of the site and a unique opportunity to generate knowledge around equity and ELICOS. Stake (1995) notes opportunity to learn from a site is the most important factor in case study sampling.

The next level of sampling concerned the school records data. To maximise sample size, current and archived student enrolment records were used. The sample is a census of ELICOS students enrolled in General English from the 3rd of January 2011, when outcomes began to be recorded as a percentage, to the 27th of July 2012, when data collection commenced ($N = 425$). This larger sample was not selected for its generalizability, but for its power to increase reliability and to generate a richer description of the site.

For the survey, “criterion sampling” (Patton, 2002) was utilised. A sampling frame of current General English students in pre-intermediate level classes and above
was produced from the school records data (N = 93). Past students and elementary level students were excluded because current contact details were not held for past students and because elementary level students would have had insufficient English proficiency to complete the survey. The response rate was 30 per cent (N = 28).

Criterion sampling was also used to draw the student interview sample (N = 7) from the student population. Cases were chosen based on the quantitative findings to capture illustrative and informative cases of student experiences and outcomes and to achieve a level of heterogeneity in participants’ social characteristics. For staff interviews, “maximum variation sampling” (Patton, 2002) was used to draw a small sample (N = 3) from the sampling frame, which consisted of all ELICOS teachers and managers at the college.

**Access to the Site and to Participants**

Written approval was obtained from the college confirming permission to collect, use and disclose de-identified student data and to invite staff and students to partake in the voluntary student survey and staff and student interviews. However, given that a teacher/student dependent relationship existed between myself and the students, care was taken to ensure students were free from pressure to participate. The voluntary nature of participation was made explicit in the plain language statement (Appendix A4).

Students were invited to participate in the study by receiving a plain language statement and survey from their class teacher. The class teacher explained the voluntary nature of the survey and ensured it was not completed during class time. Survey respondents providing contact details went in the draw to win a $100 shopping voucher. The survey was also used to recruit student participants for interviews. Students could nominate to be contacted by the researcher for an interview and were informed they would receive a $20 voucher if selected for an interview. Recruitment for student interviews also occurred via advertising on the student notice board and Facebook. All surveys were returned to a drop-box at the school’s reception or could have been completed online.
Staff were recruited for the interviews via an e-mail which informed ELICOS staff that plain language statements (Appendix A5) had been placed in their pigeonholes. The e-mail invited staff to contact the researcher if willing to participate.

**Data Analysis**

**City College records and survey.** Guided by the literature review, social information was first categorised into broader groups to reduce the number of variables and to make analysis more meaningful. Student nationality was classified into world region groups, listed in Table 3.2, based on the United Nations’ classifications (United Nations, 2012) and age was grouped according to life stages (Table 3.3).
### Table 3.2: Student nationalities within each world region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Region</th>
<th>Student nationalities in world region group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Mongolia, China and Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia</td>
<td>Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and East Timor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia and Other Nationalities</td>
<td>Pakistan, India, Nepal, Australia and Mauritius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Italy, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Macedonia, Albania, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Asia and Northern Africa</td>
<td>Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.3: Age groups and descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Age span</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14-22</td>
<td>Engaged in school, post-compulsory education, and or minimal work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23-27</td>
<td>Early career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28-34</td>
<td>Establishing career and parents with young children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Experienced workers and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>Established career, mature parents and early retirees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the quantitative data had been cleaned and entered—the survey responses proofread and aggregated into concept variables, and missing and ambiguous data dealt with—both the survey data and the college data were subjected to statistical analysis. As Punch (2005) recommends, a “simple descriptive analysis” was firstly carried out, followed by an analysis of “two-variable relationships”.

Firstly, to establish the general characteristics of each sample, the frequency distribution for the social variables were found as this “helps the researcher to stay close to the data” (Punch, 2005, p. 112) and the means and standard deviations for each dependent variable were established. Secondly, t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used to investigate and describe between-group differences for each independent variable in both the college data and the survey data. An ANOVA is a suitable method of analysis as the data recorded for each social variable are independent of one another and are ratio data (Mitchell & Jolley, 2007). Moreover, while it is recommend that when using one-way ANOVAs each group “should have approximately the same variance” and that “scores should be normally distributed” (Mitchell & Jolley, 2007, p. 552), when the sample size is over 200, as is the case for the college data, the risk of skewness is reduced (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), making the analysis more reliable. It is recognised that the one-way ANOVA is less reliable for the survey sample. However, as all quantitative analysis in this study is descriptive rather than inferential, a one-way ANOVA still provides valuable insight into between-group difference for the survey sample. Post-hoc Least Significant Difference (Post-hoc LSD) tests were also used on the secondary data when ANOVAs revealed significant between-group differences to further evaluate the significance of the difference between social groups in the secondary data. Two-way ANOVAs were also used in particular cases to test interactions and the Pearson $r$ was used to test for linear relationships between dependent and independent variables when both are continuous.

**Interviews.** An “inductive thematic approach” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was undertaken in analysing interview data and emergent themes were investigated. For student interviews the analysis leans towards the “within-case” rather than “across-case” end of the analysis spectrum (King & Horrocks, 2010), as the sample is small and the study is interested in understanding differentiated student experiences.
The recursive process of analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) “phases of thematic analysis”. Firstly, data were transcribed based on King and Horrock’s (2010) “basic system of transcription” (Table 3.4). Codes were then generated and the data coded before being collated into themes. After moving back and forth between these iterative phases in order to familiarise myself with the data, key interview episodes were used to add depth to the survey and policy analyses.

Table 3.4: Transcription conventions based on King and Horrock (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview feature</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short pause</td>
<td>(p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non verbal communication</td>
<td>In parenthesis ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct speech</td>
<td>Between speech marks ‘ ’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of voice</td>
<td>In parenthesis ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughing and similar features</td>
<td>In parenthesis ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Ellipses (…) are used to indicate truncation of the original transcript; (p. xx) refers to paragraph numbers in the original transcript; square brackets [ ] are used to indicate identifiable data have been replaced.
**Policy analysis.** The policy analysis of various texts takes a critical “analysis of policy” approach (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009), where understanding the values underpinning the policy texts is paramount. The analysis is guided by a selection of Rizvi and Lingard’s (2009) “analysis of policy key questions” as an initial framework and is also informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of assemblage, which is frequently used for understanding how different and/or competing values are emergent in the present moment to produce a structure (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). The notion of assemblage is consequently useful in understanding how the structure of equity is shaped in policy texts and performed at the case study site.

**Ethics**

A standard project application (Appendix A6) was approved by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Human Ethics Advisory Groups (MGSE HEAG) and the Human Ethics Sub-committee (HESC). Care was taken to ensure the traditional ethical concerns of informed consent, protection from harm and right to privacy (Fontana & Frey, 2008) were addressed.

Given the demographic data collected and the fact that I work at the college, respondents were potentially identifiable to me. Additionally, as the college population is small, there was a chance student and staff participants could be identified by others, despite the use of pseudonyms, and information provided by staff could possibility influence employment. Such risks were made clear in the plain language statement.

To protect participant identity, student names were removed from the college records data prior to release and a pseudonym was used for the college and for interview participants, unless advised otherwise. Additionally, participants were invited to check interview transcripts and delete identifying data.

Finally, informed consent was obtained via the return of a completed survey or a signed consent form in the case of interviews. All research data will be stored securely for five years after the completion of this thesis at MGSE.
Rigour and Trustworthiness

Rigour and trustworthiness are maintained in a number of ways guided by Guba and Lincoln’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness.

Firstly, “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is established through an extended data collection and analysis phase spanning nearly four months, which enables a breadth and accuracy of data to be obtained. Furthermore, as I am a teacher at the college, I have had a prolonged engagement with the case study site and have thus developed trust and rapport with staff and student participants, which allows for a greater depth of data. Prolonged engagement coupled with a case study approach provides a breadth and depth of data that enables a thick description to precipitate, which is invaluable in evaluating transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Secondly, an “audit trail” is maintained which strengthens the dependability and confirmability of the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Interview recordings, transcripts, notes, completed surveys, and college records were systematically filed. Furthermore, “data reduction and analysis products” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 319), such as preliminary statistical analyses, transcript coding, and policy analysis records, were also stored in an easily retrievable manner and for interviews, member checks, “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314), were carried out. Participants had the opportunity to check and amend interview transcripts and discuss the accuracy of preliminary analysis. Internal validity measures for the survey have been discussed earlier.

Finally, the multiplicity of data sources permitted a variety of triangulation, which increases credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, in understanding how equity is constructed, staff and students provided varied perspectives on the same issue, which enables “data triangulation” (Denzin, 1978, as cited in King & Horrocks, 2010). “Methodological triangulation” (Denzin, 1978, as cited in King & Horrocks, 2010) was also possible. The college records, survey and student interviews permitted the triangulation of trends in student outcomes; the survey and student interviews triangulated student experience; and policy analysis and interviews were triangulated in understanding how equity is constructed. The study design permitted ample “between-
method triangulation”, which is preferable to “within-method triangulation” (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

While this chapter has outlined the study design and rationale, the following chapters present the analysis and findings. A discussion of the results ensues in the final chapter.
Analysis and Findings: The Construction of Equity in ELICOS

This chapter investigates the assemblage of equity in ELICOS by analysing national and local ELICOS quality assurance policies as well as interview data from the case study site.

Overview of Quality Assurance Policies: The ESOS Framework

All ELICOS providers are governed by the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Framework comprising of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000, its regulations and charges, and its legislative instruments: the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students (The National Code 2007) and the ELICOS National Standards: National standards for ELICOS providers—herein referred to respectively as the Code and Standards. Additionally, City College subscribes to the NEAS Standards and Criteria for ELT Centres, which is a voluntary accreditation scheme.

To maintain ELICOS quality, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) audit and accredit courses against the criteria of the Code and Standards. It is an approach to quality that can be described as a “disjointed view” where “the success of the education system is judged upon whether or not specified elements of the education system are performing in an acceptable way or at an acceptable level” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, p. 14). Additionally, student satisfaction surveys are regularly carried out by AEI to assess quality from the students’ perspective. This quality maintenance approach aligns with the “satisfaction model” of educational quality where “the performance of an educational institution can satisfy the needs and expectations of its powerful constituencies” (Cheng & Tam, 1997, p. 26)—in this case, the full-fee paying students.

Recent changes to policy. In 2007 the Code became a legislative instrument with the objective of maintaining Australia’s international reputation for high quality education through national consistency and the protection of international students.
introduced national consistency in student welfare, in support services and complaints and appeals processes and established mandatory consumer protection mechanisms.

In 2009-2010, the ESOS Act underwent a major review, the Baird Review 2010, after there was further concern for improving quality. “Supporting the interests of students; delivering quality as the cornerstone of Australian education; effective regulation; and sustainability of the international education sector” (Australian Education International, 2012a) were identified as areas needing improvement. Consequently, in 2011-2012, stricter business registration, sustainability and transparency requirements and the Tuition Protection Service (TPS) were introduced to protect students financially. In 2011 the Standards were also made a legislative instrument, with its objectives being: “consumer protection and student wellbeing; delivery of quality English language teaching; protection of Australia’s reputation as a provider of quality English language teaching to international students” (Australian Education International, 2011, pp. 3-4).

National English language teaching accreditation scheme (NEAS). NEAS’ role in the industry is as an independent and voluntary accreditation scheme. Its main aim is “the maintenance of high levels of quality in the provision of English Language Teaching programs and services by ELT centres to the benefit of the industry as a whole and especially for students.” (NEAS, 2012). The NEAS Standards were not included in the analysis, as they are a voluntary scheme.

Local policies and procedures at City College. In addition to national policies, City College operates under its own local level policies and procedures, namely the English Course Guide, which aims “to enable the formation of a system which is unbiased, flexible, fair and streamlined”. Additionally, it is guided by its Equity and Access policy, which recognises that discrimination can be direct, indirect and systemic. The policy aims to “remove barriers and to open up developmental opportunities for all students by creating a workplace and training environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, bigotry, prejudice, racism and offensive behaviour.”

Analysis of ELICOS Policies and Procedures

To shed light on how equity is assembled in ELICOS’ quality construct, the
OECD’s definition of educational quality from an equity perspective, “an equal or fair distribution of inputs, processes and outcomes among participants in education with different characteristics” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, p. 14), was used to unpack the Code, Standards, and local polices and procedures. The inputs, processes and outcomes were evaluated for equal or fair distributions between colleges and within City College for different student groups and were illuminated by interview data.

**Inputs.** Through the enforcement of the Code and Standards, with their aims of national consistency, it can be seen that equality in educational provision is valued in ELICOS. All colleges are equally required by law to provide the minimum inputs set down, such as twenty hours of face-to-face teaching, a set maximum student-to-teacher ratio and staff members in the roles of academic manager and counsellor, for instance. Thus, all students, regardless of their individual characteristics or the college they attend, are provided with such inputs when enrolled in ELICOS.

Similarly, at the case study level, one of the principles listed in City College’s Access and Equity policy states, “Equity for all people through the fair and appropriate allocation of resources”. In practice, it was the view of teachers interviewed at City College that inputs at the college were indeed fairly distributed to all students. One teacher stated that as “everyone’s got access to the same facilities” (Teacher C, p. 138), inputs were fair.

**Prerequisite ELICOS teaching qualifications.** In other ways the Code and Standards foster unequal inputs across and within colleges. For instance, there is a large span of acceptable minimum qualifications for ELICOS teachers, ranging from four years in an Education degree, to a non-education degree with a one-month teaching certificate, such as the CELTA. The interview data revealed considerable difference in the amount of pre-service teacher training of staff at the college. Some teachers only had four weeks training, while others had a postgraduate degree in TESOL.

**Financial inputs.** Through the Code and Standards, financial inputs also have the potential to be unequally distributed across colleges and within colleges as neither the Code nor the Standards set a minimum expenditure per student. As such, student fees can differ significantly between colleges. For instance, North Sydney English
College charges $150 per week while a college in Adelaide charges $290 (Ross, 2013); in contrast again, Hawthorn-Melbourne’s website lists its fees at $408 per week. In addition to financial access issues for students, differences in financial inputs create the potential for the unequal distribution of resources between colleges. According to Ross (2013), who questions the feasibility of a centre’s operation at such discounted costs, discounted prices are also threatening the viability of the industry as a whole. ELICOS Standard P5 simply requires resources and equipment to be “sufficient” and the Code states that resources be “adequate” and “appropriate” and that there be library resources. The interpretation of these standards, however, is left to the college.

**Inputs for at risk students.** There is evidence both within and between colleges of differentiated inputs between students who are making satisfactory course progress and those identified as at risk. The Explanatory Guide for Standard 10 of the Code highlights a variety of possible intervention strategies for at risk students, ranging from mentoring students, to running study groups, tutorials or special skills programs.

At the case study site, the local Course Monitoring Progress Policy dictates that on a regular basis, “Students must be made aware of their achievement levels and be given feedback or remedial work if they are experiencing difficulty with an activity.” Furthermore, at risk students and those making unsatisfactory academic progress receive academic counselling from teachers where they are “given some advice as to how to improve”. If students breach course progress rules a second time, they must enter into an intervention program; however, the details of this program are not recorded in the policies.

Interview data also highlighted the presence of additional inputs for weaker students at City College. Weaker students received extra attention and time in class and additional services like having extra homework tasks marked by teachers:

Teacher A: I’m very aware that, of the students who are perhaps lagging behind, so I will concept check with them, you know, I don’t automatically expect them to tell me they don’t understand because it’s quite embarrassing for some people. So I will concept check, while the others are working, I often go up to them and just make sure they understand. Or on their way out I will ask them. (p. 104)
Teacher B: I would say to that Sudanese student, ‘do the work at home, take your time, bring it in tomorrow, I’ll correct it for you’. And then you know they know that you’re looking after them and you’re interested and it’s like a private sort of thing they are doing on the side. (p. 684)

The Code, local policies and teaching practices evidently support differentiated inputs, particularly in providing additional input for weaker students. Additionally, through the variety of remedial academic interventions possible, the Code also creates the potential for vastly different inputs across colleges in supporting at risk students.

**Curriculum.** The Standards do not prescribe curricula for ELICOS and neither do they defer to a prescribed curriculum authority body. Consequently, the richness of curriculum and proficiency level benchmarks may vary significantly across colleges. A student deemed at an advanced level by curriculum progress at one institution might be assessed as intermediate by another’s curricular framework. The only requirements relating to curriculum, found in Standard P3, are that courses be outcome based and that they be continuously reviewed and revised. The focus is solely on course delivery the processes, while the content or the actual input is completely overlooked.

Similarly, City College policies and procedures did not address curriculum content. There was no reference to course content requirements other than, “Course Outlines will need to reflect the 12 key learning outcomes selected. Course outlines will also contain sufficient information to allow teachers to plan highly stimulating and engaging lessons”. Despite a lack of curriculum policies, teachers felt curricula at the college did not advantage or disadvantage particular groups of students: “Well everyone’s using it so, I guess that’s fair” (Teacher C, p. 148) and that it was “as equal as it will ever be” (Teacher A, p. 148).

In summary, a lack of focus on curricular input in the Code and Standards means that the richness of curricula has the potential to vary significantly across institutions and that a nationally recognised proficiency framework is completely absent. Moreover, at City College the lack of attention to curricular input in its policies also provides potential for variation in the richness of curricula between its courses within the college.
Processes.

Assessment. As with curriculum, specific assessments or an assessment framework are not prescribed by the Standards, which encourages proficiency level difference between providers. However, the Standards do necessitate that assessment be both formative and summative and also “valid, reliable, fair, flexible and clearly referenced to criteria” (Standard P4.1c, p.8). The Standards also show a concern for the appropriateness of assessment for student groups stating, “Assessment of courses is continuously improved by: monitoring appropriateness of assessment for student groups” (Standard P4.4c). However, whether “student groups” refers to social groups or simply classes at a college is unclear.

At the college level, local policies reflect a notable concern for fairness in assessment practices. The College’s Access and Equity policy states: “All prospective and enrolled students will receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of training, assessment and support services. This is without regard to political affiliation, race, colour, religion, national origin, sex, marital status or disability.” The English Course Guide further displays commitment to fairness in assessment practices, requiring teachers’ feedback on assessments to be “checked for diversity and inclusiveness”.

The interview data, however, showed that in practice there were varied views on the fairness of assessment practices. On the one hand, assessments were perceived to be for the most part fair:

Teacher A: I don’t think they, they favour anyone in particular…There are always, you know marking criteria to follow but I mean, there’s always human (p) a human element to it. Some people can be stricter than others…it’s never 100% fair, but there are definitely marking criteria to all the assessment we have. (p. 158)

However, it was also felt assessments became unfair when weaker students, who had not managed to articulate into the next level, were forced to repeat a course and its assessments:
Teacher B: If a student had to repeat the curriculum, they’ll already have done the test before, we don’t have enough provision for students re-sitting and if say week two they’re doing writing a letter home, they just (p) it’s a memory thing. And it’s not fair that they haven’t (p) they’ve already done the test, whereas another student hasn’t done it before, so the first student has obviously got a huge advantage. (p. 535)

From the students’ perspective, interview data also showed evidence of a lack of fairness in assessment practices between different groups of students. When asked about cheating in tests, Jessica stated: “Just a few people do by themselves. But another way, and they speak their language, and I don’t know if they’re cheating or not. So I don’t think it’s fair” (Jessica, p. 519). Jessica, belonging to a minority nationality in a class consisting primarily of Greek students, was not privy to the student collusion that went on during assessments and thus felt the majority group students were unfairly advantaged.

In summary, it was apparent that at the policy level—both local and national—there was a concern for fairness in assessment practices, particularly in regards to the diversity of student groups. However, in practice while there were tools in place like assessment rubrics to reduce marker bias, there was also evidence that particular groups of students were advantaged over others in assessment such as repeating students who had previously attempted assessments and majority group students who used L1 to collude.

Placement of new students. Standard P3.1 ensures that all ELICOS providers have “policies and procedures in place to ensure that: a) students are placed in a class appropriate to their current language proficiency level…” However, neither the Standards nor the Code mandate the use of a particular English language proficiency test. Colleges can design or purchase their own placement tests, which promotes inconsistencies in proficiency levels between colleges. Furthermore, at some institutions, placement tests might be more reliable than others in determining a students’ level. Thus, there may be differences in the appropriateness of initial student placement at different institutions, which may in turn affect students’ SLA and ELICOS experience if placed in an inappropriate class. At City College, local policies and
procedures do not discuss the nature of the placement test, only that, “The placement of a new student must be informed by a placement test”.

**Determining course progress.** The Code, which governs the VET sector as well as ELICOS, states that unsatisfactory progress is, “where the student has failed or is deemed not yet competent in 50% or more of the units attempted in any study period”. However, in ELICOS unlike VET, courses are not broken into different units. Moreover, the length of “study periods” is highly variable as there is no prescribed number of weeks for terms in ELICOS. At one college a study period could be 5 weeks long, while at another it could be 15. This lack of clarity creates inconsistency between ELICOS providers in monitoring students’ course progress.

To further complicate the assessment of course progress, many colleges like City College have continuous enrollments where new students can commence at any point of a study period. Consequently, when course progress monitoring is carried out according to the college’s Course Monitoring Progress Policy at the mid point and end of a 10-week term, students have completed different numbers of assessments depending on how long they have been enrolled in the course. According to the college’s policies, satisfactory progress is where “students achieve or pass at least 50% of the learning outcomes evaluated”. With running enrolments, this means that a student who has joined the course in week 5 and has failed the one and only learning outcome attempted would be deemed to be making unsatisfactory progress as they have failed 100 per cent of “the learning outcomes evaluated”, while a student who has been enrolled from week 1 may have failed 2 out of the 5 outcomes attempted and be making satisfactory progress. According to the college’s policies, the first student would receive their first academic intervention letter while the second would not. Following a second intervention letter and intervention plan students can be reported to DIAC and this can lead to visa cancelation.

Evidently, both external and internal polices as well as running enrolments in ELICOS promote a non-uniform system of determining satisfactory course progress, which can be unfair to students who are evidently assessed differently within and between institutions. Students can be advantaged or disadvantaged by systemic factors
when monitored for academic progress producing an inaccurate evaluation of their actual academic progress.

**Pedagogy.** In terms of pedagogical processes, there is little to guide or mandate what qualities should underpin teaching in ELICOS and there is no teacher registration process or body. The only direct references to teaching are Standards 3.2a and 5.1d, which respectively state that teachers should be enabled by college policies and procedures to “customise teaching to student needs”, and that resources should “enable varied learning activities and teaching methodologies”. Overall, the intended outcome of Standard P3 “Teaching ELICOS” is that policies and procedures “provide students with optimal opportunities for achieving successful outcomes from their courses.” However, again there is much leeway for colleges in interpretation as “optimal”, “successful” and “outcomes” are measures decided by individual colleges, as is the actual content of ELICOS courses.

In comparison, in the schooling sector The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which is in the process of taking over teacher registration from state-based authorities, sets out numerous standards and elements for teacher knowledge and practice and there is specific reference to “teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.” The Victorian Institute of Teaching’s (VIT) Standards, preceding AITSL in Victoria, made specific reference to equity: “Teachers are aware of the social, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the students they teach, and treat students equitably” (VIT, 2010). Evidently, such concern for equitable practice is overlooked in ELICOS’ quality mandates.

Despite being overlooked in policy, teachers showed that to some extent the equitable treatment of students was a conscious part of their practice at City College:

Teacher A: It’s very hard to treat students equally, I think each student is an individual and has to be treated, you know, as an individual… if somebody needs less assistance, then they need less assistance, I can’t treat them the same as somebody who needs more assistance. So I treat them fairly as possible, but differently. (p.132)
Moreover, it was evident that teachers were very considered in managing classroom interaction to foster equitable student participation. They carefully chose groups to balance student participation, constantly monitored groups to promote equitable group participation and used techniques to bring quieter students into the class discussion:

Teacher C: There’s some students who are louder than others, if I feel that there’s like (p) like someone’s being too quiet then I try to point, I use (p) it’s not very subtle but, you know silent ways of getting that person involved or just whisper if, if Christina’s going to ask a question, then I’ll just point out and mouth (demonstrates pointing and mouthing to a student) to bring them in. (p. 124)

Teachers also used techniques to silence particular students who dominated the linguistic space:

Teacher B: While they are talking, no one else can talk, a student, normally European will butt in and say, (mimicking student) ‘ah but Michael’. (Mimicking himself) ‘That student’s talking shut up’. And they need to be told, it’s their time and that’s the only way they’ll develop. (p. 326)

Teacher A: If a student is very loud and speaks over another student, I will politely tell them that I wasn’t asking them. (p.100)

Evidently, at City College, balancing student participation to make it more equitable was highly valued by all teachers interviewed. The interview data also revealed other aspects to teaching practices at City College which were pertinent to understanding the construction of equity.

Firstly, while teachers explained that they should not generalise, it was apparent that to varying degrees there were pre-conceived cultural framings and generalisations about the ability, needs and intentions of particular groups of students.

One teacher in particular made several generalisations about the reasons why groups of students were studying English. For instance, without referring to a particular student, it was explained that the Taiwanese and Japanese were studying to increase
their work prospects in their home country and that the Japanese were interested in advancing their English for marketing purposes in the import and export business or simply for personal academic interest. In addition to this teacher’s generalised preconceptions of Japanese students, particular pedagogical needs of Japanese students were also anticipated and addressed based on preconceived cultural frames:

Teacher B: If they’re Japanese, more often than not they won’t ask me there and then in front of everyone because of the public shame so to speak. I set the task for everyone, I know that, ah I don’t know, Hiroko in the corner over there from Japan doesn’t understand and I know that, I’ll store it away, and when I set the task, I’ll go over to her and say, ‘question?’ And then she’ll ask me there and then and I’ll set it like that. (p. 386)

Moreover, this teacher viewed learning styles not as an individualised phenomenon, but as a generalised cultural way of learning:

Teacher B: The Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese are used to um, they’ve got this philosophy called fill the pot, so that the student’s an empty vessel and the teacher’s job is to pour in knowledge and it’s a reproductive process, whereas with the Europeans, it’s more analytical, it’s more speculative where there’s this thing called, light the fire, where they’re kind of, it’s known that they are expected to argue, they’re expected to give their opinion. (p. 571)

This teacher also had very strong preconceptions of the particular learning needs of different nationality groups based on his cultural generalisations:

Teacher B: Just because they’re from Japan doesn’t mean they can’t have a conversation, they can be trained and they can be encouraged to do that. And on the other hand, an Italian can be trained to do grammar tests and they can be trained to do gap fill, whereas a Korean student can be trained to hold their opinion, to give examples, to agree, disagree. (p. 593)

While this teacher was of the view that a students’ nationality was not a limiting or determining factor on SLA because students could be helped to change, it was
apparent that he saw students from the countries mentioned lacking in particular skills before even getting to know individual students and their particular needs. Similarly, this teacher had preconceived generalisations about Sudanese and Somali students:

Teacher B: Because straight away, you know almost 100% they haven’t done much writing of English, you’ll know and that will arm you, before you get into the class. You know that they’re going to struggle with writing, you know, you tell them this. (p. 671)

The other teachers interviewed also made cultural generalisations; however to a lesser degree and with less conviction than the aforementioned teacher. For instance one teacher held the view that Thais were weaker in writing than the Japanese and that Middle Eastern students were poor in spelling. Another teacher expressed that Vietnamese students were lacking in general knowledge compared to other nationalities; that “European people are generally louder and less afraid to, to you know be forceful with their opinion” (Teacher A, p. 146) and that “a lot of male Middle Eastern students tend to be lazy” (Teacher A, p. 206). However, this teacher did not develop his understanding of students’ needs on these preconceptions. He preferred his students to tell him what their needs were and to understand their needs on a highly individualised basis:

Teacher A: I think every student (p) students’ needs vary greatly… every student has a different expectation and a different need…I don’t like to assume what a student needs, you know, why they should be here and why they should be learning English. (p. 34)

It is apparent at City College that for some teachers cultural generalisations and pre-conceptions influence teachers’ understanding of students’ needs and their consequent teaching practices, while for others, their prejudices are not translated into actions. In terms of the equity implications, discourses of cultural identity such as these are thought to be highly limiting. Finding similar discourses in her study at an ELICOS institution, Ellwood (2009) argues, “Whoever the students were capable of being was thus foreclosed by discourses of cultural identity that predetermined the characteristics of all students in the class.” (p. 108)
With such college autonomy in teaching practices and with a lack of thorough teacher standards and a teacher registration process, there is much potential for teaching quality and equitable teaching practices to vary significantly across and within colleges, especially when pre-requisite teaching qualifications are already so different.

**Outcomes.** Whilst it is mandatory to record, monitor and assess course progress, to have policies in place to identify at risk students (Standard 10, National Code) and to “regularly evaluat[e] course outcomes achieved” (Standard P4.4c), concern for discrepancies in achievement between social groups or between colleges does not appear to be encouraged or valued, as policy does not require systems to be in place to enable this. In fact, in terms of cross-college comparisons, the Standards and the Code make it difficult to compare students’ language proficiency gains, as they promote college-based systems.

At City College no ELICOS policies and procedures exist for evaluating student outcomes between different social groups despite the school’s Equity and Access policy stating: “Equity focuses on outcomes. Equity is not concerned with treating people in the same way; it is concerned with ensuring that all groups of people receive the same level of benefits and opportunities.”

**Conclusion: Equity Discourse in ELICOS**

**National policies.** It is apparent that considerations of equity are not completely absent from the quality assurance policies mandating the ELICOS industry. The values of fairness and equality, which are synonymous with equity from the OECD’s equity perspective on quality, are enmeshed in the Code and Standards’ assemblage of quality.

The policies protect students financially as consumers and ensure they get a “fair go” through nationally consistent standards of educational quality wherever they choose to study. Furthermore, there is evidence of redistributive justice where underachieving students are provided additional inputs through intervention strategies to help them attain outcomes on par with satisfactory academic progress students.

The equality of provision—an early approach to equity in schooling—also appears to be valued through the stated objective of national consistency. However, the
policies also significantly encourage differentiation between ELICOS providers; firstly through the substantial autonomy they bestow on colleges in controlling curriculum, assessment, course progress, pedagogy and consequently outcomes, and secondly through the voluntary accreditation scheme, NEAS, which creates a two-tiered system. Moreover, such autonomy and the lack of a national English proficiency framework contribute to proficiency level inconsistencies between colleges.

In allowing a great deal of autonomy, competition between ELICOS providers is fostered as providers can differentiate their products from other colleges. In the schooling sector, from a market-individualist perspective on equity, rivalry between schools to raise achievement outcomes and attract clients is seen as a way of fostering equity (Henry, 2001). However, in ELICOS, quality assurance policies focus on protecting students as consumers and on inputs and processes and largely overlook outcomes, which means that market forces do not actually address equity.

National ELICOS policies are completely lacking in a socio-democratic approach to equity. Socio-democratic approaches are primarily concerned with achieving equitable outcomes amongst different groups in society to address unequal economic distributions (Henry, 2001) and they recognise that educational inequality is “linked to the way society is structured” (Henry, 2001, p. 30). Under the current quality assurance policies, social group outcomes do not need to be considered. Furthermore, the values of fairness and equality are limited in scope to the empirical frame of ELICOS as ELICOS’ role in access to privileges outside of ELICOS, such as further education, is not considered.

The approach to equity is distinctively individualist. The focus is on individual students and overlooks the system as a whole. Policies encourage an individualist approach to identifying and supporting students at risk and learning needs are approached on a case-by-case basis. This approach to equity can be construed as a liberal-individualist approach, which has been criticized for constructing under-achieving students as “deficient” (Henry, 2001). However, on the other hand, focusing on individuals can be seen to incorporate the cultural facet of equity—“the recognition of difference” (Henry, 2001)—as it recognises that everyone has different needs and cannot be grouped into one social category.
In conclusion, the notion of equity embedded in the ELICOS policies can be compared to the “formal equality of access and provision” and “equality of circumstance” (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) common in early approaches to educational equity in the schooling sector. Policies clearly aim to equalise the “circumstances” of education, such as the contact hours and teacher-student ratio. However, equity of participation and equity of outcomes—contemporary approaches to equity—do not form part of the policies’ assemblage of quality.

City College. At the college level, it can be seen that City College’s policies explicitly value fairness and impartiality. Redistributive justice is also valued in its policies and in practice with particular pedagogical strategies used to aid struggling students to attain successful outcomes. In practice, it is also evident that teachers are committed to aspects of social justice like equitable participation, even if discourses of cultural stereotypes underlie and inform practice for some teachers. Moreover, the school’s Access and Equity Policy addresses equity from a social-democratic perspective through its concern for indirect and systemic discrimination and in its concern for equitable outcomes. However, policies and procedures to evaluate the fairness of outcomes between different social groups are not evident, making this policy to some extent tokenistic. Furthermore, the quantitative findings in the following chapters will bear evidence that in practice, through the assessments designed by the college and the evaluations made by its teachers, achievement is not equally distributed between different social groups.

In summary, in ELICOS, the notion of equity sits in a unique way in the assemblage of educational quality. It is transformed into an alternative kind of social justice to suit a free market international education industry; it has a strong individualist approach, which recognises individual difference and incorporates some social-democratic gestures in practice. However, as quality does not focus on academic outcomes, equity overlooks differences in social group outcomes and thus fails to encompass the role of ELICOS in access to further social advantages. In effect, ELICOS’ construction of equity is short-sighted and does not consider broader paradigms of equity within which ELICOS operates.
Whilst this chapter has investigated legislative and rhetorical dimensions in order to provide breadth to the picture of equity and ELICOS, a detailed analysis of ELICOS outcomes and student perceptions of the students situated within this policy climate is needed to add depth. To this end, the following chapters explore the outcomes and experiences of different groups of students at City College.
Analysis and Findings: Outcomes and Attendance – City College Records

Overview

This chapter analyses secondary data—City College records, to identify significant between-group differences in assessment outcomes and attendance. Firstly, a description of the data sets are provided, followed by an analysis of overall outcomes, attendance, speaking, reading, writing, listening and grammar outcomes by gender, world region and age. A summary of findings, organised by social variables, concludes the chapter and the findings are later discussed in the discussion chapter.

Academic outcomes data. The sample (N = 425) consisted of students from 38 nationalities as seen in Figure 5.1. There was an age span of 14-65 years with a mean age of 30 (SD = 8.6). Appendix B1 shows a cross-distribution of the social groups and Appendix B3 shows the average outcome for each skill and the overall average outcome. Students had completed between one and forty-five assessments each, with the average number of assessments undertaken being eight.

Figure 5.1: Distribution of student nationalities - Academic outcomes data
**Attendance data.** The sample characteristics for the attendance data (N = 430) varied slightly to the academic outcomes data. This is most likely because some students did not sit any assessments during their enrolment or were only enrolled briefly before moving out of the ELICOS stream. For this sample, 39 nationalities were found, with a mean age of 29.8. Appendix B2 shows the distributions of students across social categories and Appendix B3 shows mean attendance was 80.4 per cent.

**The Significant Between-group Differences in Academic Outcomes and Attendance**

**Overall academic outcomes.** A one-way ANOVA found no significant differences between social groups. Females performed only 1.2 per cent ahead of males; the oldest groups were the lowest scoring age groups; and Latin America and Europe were the highest achieving world region groups.

**Attendance.** Significant between-group differences were found in attendance for age and world region (p = .00), while none were found for gender. Post-hoc LSD tests revealed that attendance for Age Group 5 was significantly higher than attendance for Age Group 2 and Age Group 3 (p < .01) and that the student group Europe attended significantly more than East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia and Other Nationalities, and Western Asia and Northern Africa (p < .05), with its average attendance at 86.1 per cent. The groups with the lowest rate of attendance were South Asia and Other Nationalities and Western Asia and Northern Africa.

The interaction of world region and age group was not significant for attendance, although the interaction of world region and gender displayed a strong interaction (p = .01), with the main effect of world region being highly significant (p = .00). This interaction can be seen in Figure 5.2 which shows that within some world region groups there were large differences in attendance for males and females. Notably, Western Asia and Northern Africa females attended 10.9 per cent more than their male counterparts. This was similar for South East Asian females who attended 8.6 per cent more than males in their world region. Showing the opposite tendency, East Asian males attended 10.4 per cent more than East Asian females, and males in the group South Asia and Other Nationalities also attended more than their female
counterparts by 4.7 per cent. For Europe and Latin America, gendered differences were much smaller with only 1.8 and 1.9 per cent difference between the genders respectively. It can also be seen from Figure 4.2 that the groups with the lowest level of attendance were females from South Asia and Other Nationalities with 71.9 per cent attendance and East Asian females with 72.3 per cent attendance, while European females and females from Western Asia and Northern Africa had the highest levels of attendance at 87.2 per cent and 84.4 per cent respectively. Furthermore, males belonging to the groups South East Asia and Western Asia and Northern Africa had very different attendance rates to European males and East Asian males.

Figure 5.2: Interaction of gender and world region for attendance
Speaking outcomes. The only significant between-group difference was found between world region groups ($p = .00$). Post-hoc LSD tests showed Europeans and Latin Americans performed significantly above the majority of other world groups ($p < .05$). Latin Americans achieved a mean speaking outcome of 74.5 per cent and Europeans achieved 71.2 per cent. Western Asia and Northern Africa scored the lowest (61.9%) and were closely followed by South Asia and Other Nationalities (62.4%). No significant interactions were found for world region and gender and nor for world region and age groups.

Reading outcomes. Significant between-group difference was only found for world region ($p = .03$). Post-hoc LSD tests showed Europe outperformed South East Asia and Western and Northern Africa at a significant level ($p < .05$). Again, Western Asia and North Africa and South Asia and Other Nationalities appeared in the bottom two groups, with respective averages of 59.1 per cent and 58.1 per cent, while Latin America and Europe were in the top position, both averaging 70.1 per cent. The interactions of gender and world region and age group and world region were not significant.

Writing outcomes. Significant differences were also found between the world region groups ($p = .02$). Western Asia and Northern Africa and South Asia and Other Nationalities had means of 60.6 per cent and 65.8 per cent respectively, while Latin America and Europe had respective means of 72.9 per cent and 72.2 per cent. Post-hoc LSD tests revealed that all world region groups, except for South Asia and Other Nationalities, performed above Western Asia and Northern Africa at significant levels ($p < .01$). A two-way ANOVA found no significant interaction for world region and gender and nor for world region and age. However, there was a large difference in writing achievement for females from Western Asia and Northern Africa in comparison to their counterpart males; these females scored the highest for the whole sample (77.83%) while the males scored the lowest (57.61%).

Listening outcomes. No significant between-group differences were found for listening outcomes. Females were only slightly ahead of males by 0.7 per cent. For age there was a difference of six per cent between the top group—Group 3—and the bottom
group—Group 4. For world region the difference was 12.1 per cent between the highest scoring group—Latin America—and the lowest scoring—South East Asia.

**Grammar outcomes.** Significant between-group differences were found for grammar outcomes in gender \((p = .01)\) and world region groups \((p = .02)\). Females performed ahead of males by 4.6 per cent. Post-hoc LSD tests showed East Asia performed above Europe and Western Asia and Northern Africa at a significant level \((p < .01)\). Tests of interaction for gender and world region were not significant; however, they showed that for most world regions, apart from East Asia and Western Asia and Northern Africa, females performed ahead of their male counterparts in grammar.

The interaction of world region and age group was significant \((p = .02)\), as was the main effect of world region \((p = .02)\). Figure 5.3 shows the lowest achieving group in grammar was South East Asia for Age Groups 4 \((n = 10)\) and 5 \((n = 1)\), whereas high achievement was more equally distributed across the other world regions and age groups. Figure 5.3 also shows that as age increased for South East Asia, grammar achievement decreased, while for South Asia and Other Nationalities the opposite was true.

**Figure 5.3:** Interaction of age groups and world region groups for grammar outcomes
Conclusion

The analysis shows there were significant differences between social groups in outcomes and attendance for this ELICOS cohort. The major differences for each social variable are summarised below and discussed in light of previous scholarship in the discussion chapter.

Gender. With the exception of grammar, where gender was found to have a significant relationship with outcomes, gender had a statistically non-significant relationship with academic achievement and attendance for this ELICOS cohort. However, females tended to perform slightly above males in the majority of language areas.

Furthermore, while overall the difference in attendance between males and females was marginal, when looking at particular world region groups there were large gender disparities. Gendered access to City College was much more equitable for Latin Americans and Europeans in comparison to other world region groups, particularly Western Asia and Northern Africa and East Asia who had the largest disparities in gendered attendance.

Age. Age was not found to be a substantial factor in academic outcomes. The oldest group tended to have slightly lower levels of academic achievement, despite having the highest levels of attendance. In terms of grammar outcomes, some interesting interactions presented very different relationships between world region and age groups. Age did, however, present significant differences in the level of attendance for different age groups.

World region. It was highly apparent that world region had a stronger relationship with outcomes and attendance than the other social variables. The groups Europe and Latin America had significant advantages over other world region groups in many language areas, attaining the highest levels of achievement in speaking, reading and writing. Furthermore, they had the highest levels of attendance for the cohort and the least within-group gendered difference in attendance.
In contrast, Western Asia and Northern Africa and South Asia and Other Nationalities consistently appeared in the bottom two groups for all learning outcomes. These groups also had the lowest rates of attendance, particularly South Asia and Other Nationalities females who had the lowest attendance for the cohort. South East Asia also had much less positive outcomes than Europe and Latin America. East Asia, on the other hand, predominantly occupied the middle bands for outcomes and attendance, with the exception of grammar where they achieved higher than all other world regions.

Whilst this chapter has found significant differences between student groups at City College in their outcomes on a variety of language skills and in their attendance, the student experience of ELICOS still remains untold. In painting a fuller picture of equity and ELICOS, the following chapter explores students’ City College experiences from their perspectives.
Analysis and findings: ELICOS experiences at City College – survey data

Overview

This chapter analyses the student survey data (N = 28) and student interview data to explore the differences in students’ experiences of City College. However, as the survey sample is small, the reliability of the statistical findings is weakened. Nonetheless, the survey data and interview data provide deeper insight and allow exploration of potential issues. The findings are supported, where applicable, by triangulation to increase their trustworthiness.

Survey respondents were from 16 countries and 14 first languages were identified. The mean age was 30.4 years. Appendix B4 shows the social group distributions and concept variable means. The independent variable “visa issues” was removed from the analysis as only one respondent reported having visa problems, which rendered between-group comparisons meaningless. World region distributions for the survey sample paralleled that of the secondary data sets. However, the least populous groups, Western Asia and Northern Africa and South Asia and Other Nationalities, were absent form the survey data. This is likely because there were very few students from these groups enrolled at the time of survey distribution.

Students’ General Experiences and Perceptions of City College

Appendix B4 shows satisfaction with overall school experience was rated at 74.1 per cent. The affective aspect of college experience scored most highly (78.1%), followed by self-reports of attendance (77.7%). The area of least satisfaction was in overall academic outcomes (63.5%).

The interview data similarly found students’ experiences of affective aspects of the college were much more positive than their experiences of academic outcomes. Students described their school as “friendly”, “funny”, “laid-back”, “relax[ed]”, “not stress[ed]”, “enjoy[able]”, “helpful” and “comfortable” and several students described the school “like a family” stating: “It’s more like a family and friendly school” (Tatiana,
p. 91); “It’s like family, like (p) like real friends” (Jessica, p. 185); “like a community, like a family in the class” (Abdul, p. 413).

Regarding academic outcomes, satisfaction was a lot more muted. Tatiana and Oil were the only students to express contentment:

Tatiana: I can’t complain because um, I started five weeks ago and we did the mock exam today, you’re meant to do it in ten weeks, but I started in week five, I had 75% in most of them so, I can’t complain that much. (p. 195)

Oil: Yeah improved. I can understand listening, but maybe sometimes when I want to talkative I can’t make sentence, but I understand everything when someone talk with me. (p. 121)

In contrast, even though Jessica described herself as at the top of her class, she was not overly confident when asked about her preparedness for her upcoming IELTS exam: “Uh, I, I think yes, but when I get IELTS it’s really hard to writing for me. So need to practice more. Yeah. Otherwise it’s, can’t get it”. (Jessica, p. 60)

For Abdul, while he felt he would be ready for his next course, when asked about whether he had progressed sufficiently, his outcomes did not satisfy his initial expectations of what he thought he would achieve in his time at the college: “I plan to speak English very well, but now when I speak English, I sometimes, I am hesitation and I can’t express very well about some ideas, about some things, I cant express very well”. (Abdul, p. 168)

Angela also commented negatively on her learning outcomes. When asked about taking tests Angela was quick to answer that the tests themselves were good, but that she was not good at them, “It’s good yes, but I doing not good (we laugh)” (Angela, p. 408). Jhun and Tino’s responses were similarly negative when asked about their satisfaction with their test outcomes:

Jhun: Ah no (chuckles) because I didn’t study too much when after school. So I think that is my problem not the test or teachers. (p. 551)
Tino: Learn, but not much. Slowly (p) I have 10 month and my English must very very better than before. Like the first time they can hear it’s better, but not much. I think not much. (p. 613)

Through the survey and the interview data it was apparent that while students were quite positive about affective aspects of their experience at City College, in contrast they felt dissatisfied with their language learning outcomes.

Exploring Disparities of Experience at City College

Overall experience. The survey data showed no significant between-group differences for students’ overall experience of the college. The independent variable displaying the greatest between-group difference was “post-ELICOS study” (p = .24). It showed that students intending to continue to another course of study after ELICOS had a slightly more positive experience of the college than those who were ELICOS only students.

Attendance. The only significant between-group difference in students’ reports of attendance was in “post-ELICOS study”. Students intending to continue to tertiary education after ELICOS reported attendance significantly above others (p = .00; 85.0% and 59.4% respectively). Additionally, the interview data transpired that work was a major obstacle to attendance. Tatiana, Oll, Tino and Jhun all cited work or work related fatigue as reasons for absence.

Self-reports of academic outcomes. There were two significant between-group differences in students’ reports of overall outcomes in the survey data. As with the school records data, the survey found world region had a highly significant relationship with academic outcomes (p = .01). While self-reports of outcomes might have been skewed as students’ expectations of their language achievement may have influence how they rated their learning, the survey showed—similar to the secondary data—that Latin American and European students felt the most satisfied with their outcomes (76.7% and 73.7% respectively), while East Asia and South East Asia felt the least satisfied (54.8% and 37.8% respectively).
Significant differences in overall academic outcomes ($p = .01$) were also found between prior education groups. Students holding post-secondary qualifications were the most satisfied with their outcomes (73.3%), followed by students with postgraduate qualifications (55.2%). The group with level of lowest prior education felt the most dissatisfied with their learning (50.6%).

Significant gendered differences were also found. However, differences were only found in the variable of preparedness for tertiary education ($p = .04$) and not in the overall academic outcomes variable. For the subset of students planning to continue to tertiary education ($n = 20$), females appeared to feel significantly more prepared for their tertiary studies than males. They scored 73.7 per cent while males scored 48.1 per cent.

**Institutional aspects.** No significant between-group differences were found for the overall experience of institutional aspects and nor were significant differences found for individual variables within institutional aspects. The area of greatest between-group difference was in “teaching style congruence” ($p = .09$). East Asia reported the greatest congruence (84.7%), while Europe reported the least (70.2%).

Notably, the survey revealed that 35.7 per cent of respondents felt they had been placed in a level not well-suited to their proficiency needs. The interview data similarly transpired numerous instances of dissatisfaction with level appropriateness. For instance, Oil had a highly negative experience in her initial weeks related to being a weaker student in the class and associated with her entrance point mid-way through the course:

Oil: The first time I here, I to GE4 and maybe they learn 2, 4 or 5 subject and I come in the first time I can’t speak and I can’t listen everything and my friend in the class different country, difficult for me, for me speaking. Two week very difficult for me…(laughing as she speaks) I feel I want to go back home. I feel upset and home alone, homeless. I want to go back. (p. 115)

In contrast, Tatiana expressed shock at how much lower in proficiency students in her upper-intermediate class were compared to her and explained how her learning
was impeded by lower level students: “It won’t be so easy for me to learn because we were always stopping for them to understand better” (Tatiana, p. 48).

Similarly, Abdul and Jhun felt they had been placed in classes below their proficiency level:

Abdul: It was boring because the other student they’re bad, their pronunciation was bad…and the teacher, asked, asked, repeat, repeat, repeat, you know and that spent more time. (p. 85)

Jhun: I want to talk too much, I want to use other words, but people (p) when I using other different word of hard word and my friend doesn’t understand so it’s make me a little bit boring. And when I speak too fast, they can’t understand and I can’t understand they pronunciation. (p. 110)

Moreover, during his placement assessment with the Director of Studies, Jhun had been told that he would move out of the class he had been placed in—pre-intermediate (GE3)—within five weeks and into a higher level. However, after five weeks, he was not able to move up:

Jhun: …when I start [City College], I was test, grammar test and the [Jane] is very highest point and I got second highest point and he said, I think five weeks later you can go GE4, but after four weeks, he said I think you stay little bit more in GE3 then move. I think two or three weeks later you can go up GE4, but later he doesn’t say anything. (p. 609)

This inability to move to the next level was not a result of Jhun’s English proficiency, but rather of school procedures, which I had played a role in implementing:

Jhun: When I was GE3, I wanted to move up but teachers never allowed me to GE4.
Interviewer: Yeah I know, I was in there, but we had some –
Jhun: and I know there’s many students in GE4. (p. 604)
Being one of Jhun’s teachers at the time, I was aware that what prevented Jhun from moving to the intermediate class (GE4) was that it was at full capacity.

For Jhun, institutional factors like the level placement assessment and articulation procedures within ELICOS had broader consequences on his educational goals. In order to articulate into his VET course, Jhun needed to graduate at upper-intermediate (GE5), which he was unable to achieve in his 17-week enrolment:

Jhun: …because if I can’t move up GE5 I can’t continue the cookery class. So I have to move other, other school to language school.
Interviewer: Why do you need to move to another language school?
Jhun: Because I have a working visa so I can stay [City College] just 17 months (correcting himself) ah 17 weeks… So this week is 17 week… So I finish, I still GE4 and I can’t go university. So I think I can’t because of my English so I was disagree. (p. 130)

At the time of the interviews, Jhun was waiting to speak to management to find out whether he would be accepted into the VET course or not.

The interview data also precipitated that there was leniency in the articulation procedures and policies within ELICOS, which resulted in students being in inappropriate levels. For instance, Angela was permitted to move to a higher level, which was timetabled more suitably to her needs, because of her work commitments rather than her English language ability: “In GE3 I say Josh,…. I up?... I up class GE4 because I go work in the morning (correcting herself) in the evening. I want study in morning” (Angela, p. 533).

On the contrary, Jessica, who was in a class that had become too easy, was permitted to remain there as she was unable to change to a more suitable class because of work commitments: “I am top now. Yeah so sometimes teacher say you should move another class… but now, suddenly I got another job so I don’t have any choice to move in the morning class” (Jessica, p. 496).
While overall the survey showed that the institutional aspect of ELICOS experience displayed hardly any between-group difference, the high proportion of students reporting placement in an inappropriate level in the survey data and the episodes gleaned from the interview data revealed other aspects which might have had equity implications. It was evident that there were significant issues in meeting the proficiency needs of individuals—particularly of stronger students, and that there were highly disparate-level classes. These issues may have been attributable to a lack of reliability in the initial placement test, to ununiformed articulation policies and procedures, or to teachers’ inability to differentiate teaching and satisfy the proficiency needs of all students in a class.

**Affective aspects.** There were no significant between-group differences in the overall affective aspects of students’ experiences. However, when looking more closely at individual variables there were two significant differences.

The variable of religion had a significant relationship ($p = .02$) with students’ reports of developing peer relationships; however, for some subcategories such as Muslims and Buddhists, $n \leq 2$. Christians and those reporting no religious affiliation scored the highest (81.3% and 77.3% respectively) on reports of having developed peer relationships, while Buddhists and Muslims scored 50.0 per cent and 75.0 per cent respectively.

Whilst not at a significant level ($p = .07$), the variable “comfort in class participation” showed between-group differences which paralleled world region trends in outcomes. Latin America and Europe reported the greatest level of comfort in class participation (100.0% and 92.3% respectively), while East Asia and South East Asia reported much lower levels of comfort (68.1% and 83.3% respectively).

**Conclusion**

Overall, the survey data and interview data showed that students were largely satisfied with their experience of City College and that they did not have significantly differentiated experiences as a result of belonging to particular social groups. It was also found that, compared to institutional and affective aspects, academic outcomes was the
area of school experience which displayed the greatest between-group variance and was rated most poorly. World region affiliation, a student’s level of prior education, as well as gender to some extent, had strong relationships with self-reports of outcomes for the survey cohort.

The analysis also found evidence of inadequacies in meeting students’ proficiency needs, which may have been attributable to a number of causes. It found religious affiliation had a powerful association with developing peer relationships and that the intention of further study played a strong role in students’ attendance habits.

This chapter has provided insight into the ELICOS experience from the student’s perspective to provide depth and nuances to the picture of equity and ELICOS. The following chapter brings the pieces of the picture together; it considers and interprets the findings of the analysis chapters and critiques the whole picture of equity and ELICOS that has emerged throughout the study.
Discussion and Conclusions

The study’s findings are firstly summarised, examined and interpreted in light of previous scholarship. The significance and implications of the findings are then discussed later in the chapter; recommendations are made and finally, directions for future research are shaped.

Summary and Discussion of Findings in Light of Previous Scholarship: Students’ Outcomes and Experiences

This study has found significantly differentiated academic outcomes between social groups but only slight differences in students’ experiences of City College. Additionally, the study found issues in meeting the proficiency needs of disparate-level classes and revealed that while equity forms part of the assemblage of quality in ELICOS, the equity of outcomes and equity of participation—current perspectives on equity in education—are absent from the National Code and ELICOS Standards.

To a large extent, the predictions made in the literature review regarding achievement and experience for particular groups of students were supported by the findings. For instance, while females did not perform significantly above males, apart from in grammar outcomes, consistent with other studies mentioned in the literature review, they performed slightly ahead in most language skills. Moreover, as Norton and Pavlenko (2004) warned, gendered experiences were quite different, particularly for attendance, depending on other social group affiliations, in this case world region. Reasons underlying gendered world region attendance disparities, however, remained hidden. Furthermore, consistent with the existing scholarship (DiAngelo, 2006; Julé 2002; Sato 1981; Shidong, 1999), the survey showed, although not at a significant level, that females were less comfortable in classroom participation than males, as were Asian students compared to Europeans.

Regarding ethnicity/race, culture and religion, as predicted, Europeans were one of the top performers in outcomes. Latin Americans also ranked highly in the majority of language skills while Western Asia and Northern Africa and South Asia and Other Nationalities appeared in the bottom two groups for most language areas. Whilst
significant differences in language outcomes between world region groups were clearly identified in this study, between-group world region variance for students’ experiences were minimal. The variable of religion, did however, indicate that religious affiliation had a significant relationship with students’ experiences of friendships, showing as the literature suggests that religion may play an important part in students’ language learning experience, which is yet to be thoroughly explored.

For the variable of age, while findings showed the oldest groups performed slightly below other age groups consistent with Mackey and Sachs (2012) and Birdsong (2006), unlike the existing scholarship, it was found that age did not have a strong relationship with SLA achievement for this cohort. Age did, however, play a role in attendance. Dealing with age as a categorical variable rather than as a continuous one, as recommended by DeKeyser, Alfi-Shabtay, & Ravid (2010), revealed significant disparities in attendance for different age groups with the oldest group (45+) attending the most and 28 to 34 year olds attending the least. Whilst reasons underlying attendance disparities did not transpire, it could be hypothesised that child care might be an issue affecting attendance for 28 to 34 year olds who are more likely to have young children compared to other groups.

In line with Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2012), this study showed that a students’ level of prior education had a strong relationship with their outcomes, in as far as self-reported outcomes are reliable. However, while the literature shows a positive correlation, this study found that students holding post-secondary qualifications reported outcomes higher than post-graduates and those with no post-secondary qualifications, which challenges the linearity of the relationship. Nevertheless, the group with the lowest level of self-reported outcomes also had the lowest level of formal education.

Regarding SES—which I attempted to capture through students’ work status in Australia—no between-group differences were found, even though Bidin and Samsiah’s (2009) study suggested significant differences could be expected. The incongruence may be a result of a lack of validity in the variable “work status” measuring students’ SES.
Other aspects of the literature did not corroborate with findings. For instance, visa issues and mismatches in students’ expectations of outcomes—issues highlighted by Lowe and Rao (2006) as placing students at risk—did not transpire and neither were mismatches in IELTS scores with internal placement tests an issue at City College; however, placement issues did arise.

**The Latin American and European advantage.** The area of greatest between-group variance was clearly found in the variable of world region. With trends putting Latin American and European students ahead in the secondary data and the survey data, it was apparent that this advantage was not occurring by chance, but rather as a result of underlying factors.

The existing literature indicates that the linguistic proximity of European and Latin American languages such as Spanish, Portuguese French, and Italian to English may be one such underlying factor, making proficiency gains easier for these speakers. In contrast, Arabic—the main language spoken in Western Asia and Northern Africa—is thought to present greater linguistic distance to English. Accordingly, outcomes for this group were much lower. However, researchers in this field have not agreed upon theories of linguistic proximity, which weakens such a claim.

From a poststructuralist perspective, differences in achievement between the world region groups could be accounted for by theories of whiteness. Insofar as the European students are concerned and assuming they are ethnically European, the literature suggests that they could be privileged in classroom interaction, which in turn allows them to direct class discussion, tailor it to their learning needs and thus increase learning opportunities. The survey findings do in fact show that both Europeans and Latin Americans—the groups with the best outcomes—were much more comfortable in class participation than Asian students. The teacher interview data similarly showed that one teacher felt European students were more likely to speak out of turn.

Similarly, Ellwood (2009) posits that cultural framings, such as the views held by one of the teachers interviewed, can limit students’ ability to learn and affects their participation as it prevents students from taking on cultural identities different to
teachers’ preconceptions. Ellwood (2009), also implies that limited participation means reduced language gains.

Despite these different perspectives implying that the more a student participates, the more language they acquire, research on participation and outcomes in SLA is inconclusive. It is not known whether increased participation equates to increases in language gains.

Differences in outcomes might also be accounted for by greater congruence in the learning and teaching style for European and Latin American students who are reportedly more accustomed to the Western Socratic style of education found in Australia compared to Asian students who are said to come from a Confucian style of education. However, contrary to this theory, the survey data showed that East Asian students at City College reported greater congruence in the learning and teaching style than Europeans and Latin Americans.

Others yet might attribute the additional language gains made by the European students to theories of acculturation, which have shown that Europeans face less acculturative stress than a number of other world region groups when in an English-speaking environment and thus experience enhanced English language learning. Similarly, it is said students from collectivist societies such as Saudi Arabia—the nationality forming the bulk of the world region group Western Asia and Northern Africa in this study—would have more difficulties in acculturating to an individualistic society like Australia. Thus it could be expected that their language gains would be much less than that of European students, which is the case in this study.

Thus far these socially critical theories of SLA, whilst going beyond learners’ individual characteristics and looking at societal roles in SLA, fail to recognise the role of language education institutions in influencing language gains for different social groups. The only theory that touches on an institutional aspect is the learning and teaching styles theory; however, as discussed, survey findings did not corroborate with such a theory.
Interpretation of Findings

Another way to interpret the advantages held by Europeans and Latin America students is through Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of cultural capital which “refers to language use, skills, and orientations, dispositions, attitudes, and schemes of perception…that children are endowed with by virtue of socialization” (Lin, 1999, p. 394). While cultural capital is usually connected to SES and the schooling of children, it can be seen here that Europeans and Latin Americans appear to have the right cultural capital—a combination of the previously discussed perceived advantages and possibly other unrecognised privileges—for succeeding in ELICOS. Teese (2007) citing Lareau (2000) states, “It is the mobilisation or ‘activation’ of cultural capital which underlies the earliest manifestations of social inequalities in achievement” (Teese, 2007, p. 3). In the schooling sector, mismatches in students’ cultural capital and the cultural capital required for successful education are said to give particular groups advantages over others, which functions to reproduce social stratification and inequalities rather than challenge the status quo (Bourdieu, 1991).

The findings indicate that academic outcomes, and to some extent, students’ experiences of City College, are inequitable as they “are due to factors over which students have no control” (Perry, 2009, p. 80). Whilst not necessarily a causal factor, belonging to a particular world region group at City College—something which a student has no control over—means that some groups of students are more likely to experience high levels of academic outcomes compared to others, as outcomes are clearly demarcated by world region lines.

Some would argue that this inequitable achievement of the different world region groups is “evidence of discrimination” (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). It can be viewed as a form of indirect discrimination—“the inequality caused where everyone is apparently treated the same but the negative impact of the treatment falls particularly on members of society distinguishable by their racial or ethnic origin” (De Plevitz, 2007, p. 55). What this means is that there are hidden barriers limiting particular groups from achieving equitable outcomes.
This study, however, did not locate significant barriers to achievement beyond the cultural and linguistic differences or cultural capital students carried into ELICOS, such as whiteness, linguistic distance and acculturation, which are said to affect SLA. It did find, however, that national and local polices overlook outcomes and the equity of outcomes and participation in their construction of quality, which consequently supports inequitable outcomes between different social groups to continue to exist and be obscured and, according to theories of cultural capital, potentially reproduces social inequalities.

**Importance and Significance of Findings**

If we are committed to social justice in education, any social group differences in academic outcomes caused by unknown factors should be alarming.

In practice it means that European and Latin American students require less time in ELICOS and hence less financial investment to attain their English language goals. Moreover, attaining a higher level of English outcomes means these groups have access to more highly regarded tertiary institutions that tend to set their English language requirements above lower-ranking institutions. As two thirds of ELICOS students continued to tertiary education in Australia post ELICOS in 2010, inequitable ELICOS outcomes have a significant impact on the equity of access to tertiary education.

One way for international students to enter tertiary education after ELICOS is through “pathway programs” which “provide a diverse, flexible and some would argue an equitable” way to tertiary education (O’Loughlin & Murray, 2007, p. 7). Through pathway programs, students are able to enter tertiary education without necessarily undertaking a formal English test, such as IELTS, but can be granted entry based on ELICOS outcomes from courses such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) completed at a pathway institution. O’Loughlin and Murray (2007) assert that as pathway programs satisfy the needs of students with diverse educational backgrounds and enable them to “move through the system”, equity is a strength of pathway programs. However, the findings of this study indicate that, at least within City College, which has pathway programs to VET courses and HE degrees, particular groups of students are advantaged over others in their access to such courses if articulation is
based on their ELICOS outcomes. Moreover, as there are no systems in place to audit or foster the equity of outcomes in ELICOS and as policy encourages differentiation between providers, pathway programs could actually be exacerbating the inequality of access to further education by relying on ELICOS outcomes. In addition to access, inequitable ELICOS outcomes can also contribute to inequitable experiences in further education as it is argued that lower levels of English proficiency reduce the ability for students to participate in further study (Hawthorne, 2007).

Inequitable outcomes in ELICOS could also have consequences for access to Permanent Residency (PR) in Australia. Whilst data are not available on the number of students who applied for PR in 2011/2012, in 2010 94 to 96 per cent of international graduates in the tertiary sector applied or intended to apply for PR (Australian Education International, 2010). When IE is linked to immigration in this way, the English language outcomes from ELICOS courses have very high stakes. Firstly, as discussed, they enable access to Australian further education courses, which in turn enables students to score more highly on the Points Test for Certain Skilled Migration Visas (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). Secondly, ELICOS courses such as IELTS preparation courses prepare students for the IELTS test, which is also a requirement of the Points Test. The higher the IELTS band, the more points are awarded. Thus, if ELICOS outcomes are inequitable and affect the ability of particular groups to gain access to tertiary education and to obtain the IELTS results needed, inequitable ELICOS outcomes may have serious implications for access to Australian PR.

Inequitable outcomes in ELICOS could also have ramifications on equitable employment in Australia for former international students. Hawthorne (2007) argues “there is now compelling evidence to suggest that international students’ English ability affects the perceived calibre of their training, accreditation status, employment, and remuneration outcomes.” (p.24). Conducting a review of several Australian studies, Hawthorne (2007) highlights that being a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) immigrant with a low level of English increases the risk of unemployment by two to three fold, whereas NESB immigrants with the highest level of English are much more likely to be employed at a professional level. Evidently, if particular groups are
disadvantaged in their ELICOS outcomes, this may have flow on social and financial implications when students try to gain PR and secure employment.

Whilst unto themselves ELICOS outcomes may not seem significant, when we consider the access to privilege that success in ELICOS can bestow, the equity of outcomes in ELICOS requires urgent attention in order to limit the furthering of social inequality.

**Suggestions for Improvements**

To minimise inequitable outcomes in ELICOS and their potential effects, City College practices and policies, national policy and theoretical issues require address.

**Pedagogy.** At the chalk face, teachers’ capacity to address the needs of disparate-level learners in a class needs to be improved, especially at City College, to ameliorate the equity of access to high-quality teaching and learning. Whilst the teachers interviewed reported strategies in managing disparate level classes, particularly in addressing the needs of weaker students, the survey data showed that a large proportion of students were in classes they felt were not matched to their proficiency needs. Moreover, the interview data illuminated how the stronger students in a class were often the ones who felt their needs were not met.

In the schooling sector, equity programs had similarly been criticised for failing to address the needs of “gifted” learners (Gross, 1999). In fact, a Senate Committee report proposed that “If priorities for resources must be determined among educationally disadvantaged groups, it could be argued that gifted children are currently among the most disadvantaged of these groups. (Senate Select Committee, 1988, p.5 as cited in Gross, 1999). While in schooling “giftedness” refers to a students’ “capacity to perform at a level significantly beyond what might be expected at one’s age” (Gangé, 1985, 1995 as cited in Gross, 1999) and is thus a difficult concept to apply to adult education, it is useful for investigating equity in ELICOS if we take gifted to mean the higher-proficiency students in a class or students who make progress at a faster rate than most. The interview data and policy analysis showed that, while weaker students received additional inputs in the form of “intervention strategies” and additional
attention from teachers, stronger students were not provided such inputs to extend their language capacity. Gross (1999) states that, “equal opportunity requires that all students, regardless of their level of ability, should be encouraged and facilitated to develop their potential to the fullest” (p. 94). Similarly, Tomlinson et al. (2003) highlight the connection between the equity of access to quality education and differentiated teaching to meet the needs of each student. Citing McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) they state “equality of opportunity becomes a reality only when students receive instruction suited to their varied readiness levels, interests, and learning preferences, thus enabling them to maximize the opportunity for growth.” (p. 120)

In considering equity in ELICOS, if we are to learn from other educational sectors, the needs of both stronger and weaker students must be attended to in addressing equity and teachers must be better prepared to meet the needs of disparate level classes so that no proficiency group is overlooked within a class. When we turn to the TESOL literature, there is a dearth of scholarship on differentiated teaching in an Adult ESL environment, despite mixed-ability classes being identified as an issue in ELICOS at least since the early nineties (Mitchell, 1992). Consequently, there is a need for professional development in ELICOS to address differentiated teaching methods, particularly at City College, and for pre-service teacher education to better prepare teachers for the reality of mixed proficiency classes.

To ensure such issues are addressed, a national standard for professional practice needs to be mandated for ELICOS teachers with a teacher registration process, much like what is done in the schooling sector through AITSL. In fact, Standard 1.5 of the VIT’s Standards at the Proficient Teacher Level states that teachers know how to “differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities”. Introducing a mandatory professional standard and registration process would not only address the need for teacher expertise in differentiated teaching methods, but would also create greater cohesion in teaching quality, which is particularly needed given the varied and numerous teaching qualifications for ELICOS.

**Assessment.** This study has identified numerous areas where assessment practices could be improved, particularly at City College, to foster equity.
Firstly, given so many students reported being placed in an inappropriate class, the placement test used at City College requires review for its validity and reliability in determining proficiency levels. An efficient way of ensuring valid and reliable tests in ELICOS would be to mandate the use of a commercial placement test that has been rigorously evaluated for bias. Not only would this reduce test bias and increase the reliability of placing students into the most appropriate level class, it would also contribute to industry consistency in proficiency levels.

At City College other areas of assessment requiring redress are inter-rater reliability on class tests and the need for alternative assessments for students who are repeating courses. Moreover, in-class collusion requires scrutiny to address the possible advantage that majority language-group students have in helping each other on tests.

In terms of City College policies, to increase equity, academic progress monitoring procedures need to be reviewed so that they work consistently and fairly with the practice of running enrolment. In this way, the evaluation of course progress will not be biased by procedural inconsistencies. Moreover, to go beyond a tokenistic commitment to equity, City College needs procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating its Equity and Access policy.

**National policy.** To address equity in ELICOS, what is needed is holistic policy reform. Firstly, Australia needs to decide what its long-term objective for IE is and to stick to its vision so that IE can cease to be continuously reactive to changing policy agendas and can instead mature into a more reflective and considered era, developing a richer notion of educational quality that encompasses more socio-democratic approaches to equity and considers student outcomes—an aspect of student experience identified in this study as the area of least satisfaction. Secondly, the role of ELICOS within IE needs to be more clearly understood, such as its instrumentality in access to tertiary education, so that it can function with greater quality to this end.

To bring a socio-democratic approach to equity in ELICOS’ assemblage of quality, policy firstly needs to create greater industry-wide cohesion. Whilst consistency is currently one of the main policy aims, this study shows policies actually encourage differentiation between providers through the autonomy they grant institutions in
regulating curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and consequently the quality of outcomes. Moreover, with NEAS as a voluntary quality assurance scheme, industry uniformity is further discouraged. Dismantling NEAS would mean the current two-tiered system of quality, with providers who are NEAS accredited and those who are not, would be abolished and there would be one quality standard which would increase the equity of provision.

Additionally, mandating a national English language proficiency framework for ELICOS and introducing a standard to the Code that ensured social group outcomes and attendance were evaluated and reported would be highly beneficial in promoting equity and fostering industry consistency. It would mean language outcomes could be compared across colleges, which would have a number of implications for equity. For instance, the equity of outcomes for different social groups could be investigated on a larger scale and thus potentially inequitable outcomes for particular social groups—concealed by current policies—could be uncovered and addressed. Moreover, because proficiency would be measured by the same yardstick, meaning that upper-intermediate achievement at one college would equal the same level of proficiency at another, in terms of the equity of access to tertiary education through pathway programs, a national framework would ensure that access was more equitable as individual college bias in assessing proficiency would be decreased.

A proficiency framework has previously been considered for ELICOS, however Elder and O’Loughlin (2007) found that it would not be feasible due to its “inflexibility, homogenisation, impracticality and redundancy”. This was despite 76 per cent of respondents in their study being positive about the use of a framework. Positive aspects included: “transparency, portability, objectivity, professionalism, quality and credibility”. Whilst “objectivity” was seen as an advantage, beyond this view, the use of a common framework was not considered in terms of its benefits to educational equity.

Alternatives to a national framework have also been put forward to address pathway program inconsistencies. O’Loughlin and Murray (2007) suggest a national EAP certificate with nationally moderated end-of-course assessments to address the incommensurability of outcomes, arguing that this approach is “less ambitious and more concrete” (p. 6) than a national framework. Whilst a nationally recognised EAP
certificate may address equity issues for students attempting to gain entrance to higher education, for the numerous pathway programs from General English, IELTS Preparation and English for Specific Purposes courses which articulate into VET courses—that often do not require the EAP prerequisite—national consistency and thus equity issues are still overlooked.

There are a number of other ways to increase industry consistency through policy changes. For instance, by mandating closed-enrolment courses and thus ceasing the practice of continuous enrolments, by decreeing the length of a study period in ELICOS, and by including a course progress provision in the Code specifically for ELICOS—rather than one that is applicable to various IE sectors. These provisions would enable the academic progress of individuals and groups to be tracked more consistently and fairly within and between ELICOS institutions.

With outcomes comparable across colleges because they are based on one proficiency framework and one quality standard, which incorporate a reliable and valid system of monitoring academic progress and take into account social group outcomes, this improved ELICOS system would enable market competition to focus on the academic outcomes of groups and individuals. In this way, as has been done in the schooling sector, market forces can contribute to raising academic outcomes for all students which is viewed from the market-individualist perspective as a way of promoting equity (Henry, 2001).

By introducing these aspects of equity to the assemblage of quality, a richer notion of quality is constructed. Educational quality can go beyond the satisfaction model and its disjointed view on quality, which has been critiqued as the most arbitrary approach to educational quality (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). By bringing alternative notions of equity to the quality construct in ELICOS, a more holistic and higher quality system can be created that focuses on inputs, processes and ELICOS outputs. From this new assemblage of quality, ELICOS can take responsibility for the potentially inequitable outcomes it produces and for its instrumentality in access to power, to the doors it opens or fails to open in preparing students for the use of English in gaining employment, PR or access to tertiary education. As Pennycook (1999) argues, “It is not enough, therefore, just to try to
connect TESOL to the world in which it occurs; this connection must focus…on questions of power, inequality, discrimination, resistance and struggle.” (p. 332)

**Contribution to Knowledge and Future Research**

This preliminary study has revealed numerous “blind spots” in TESOL research—“areas in which existing theories, methods, and perceptions actually keep us from seeing phenomena as clearly as we might” (Wagner, 1993, p. 16)—by beginning to expose how little we know about equity in transnational spaces of education such as ELICOS. The study brings us a new awareness of issues in TESOL, “awareness” being “an initial step in the process of change” (Pennycook, 1999, p. 336). As Pennycook (1999) reminds us, “nothing will change unless people know things need to” (p. 336). Moreover, this study has opened new “blank spots”—gaps in our knowledge and scholarship that need to be filled.

Most pressingly this study begs us to ask whether the localised trends discovered hold true industry wide and, if so, why this might be the case. To this end, a large-scale study or multiple-site case study on the outcomes and experiences of ELICOS students is required as well as analyses of currently collected data, such as AEI’s International Student Survey, by social categories.

Moreover, this study prompts us to inquire further into how ELICOS influences access to power and privilege for its participants and how privilege is reproduced. We need to know not only about the number of students who follow course pathways and what those pathways are, but also about the experiences of those whose ambitions are thwarted by the lack of success in ELICOS and the differences in post-ELICOS experience between those who are highly successful in ELICOS and those who are not. Mixed-method longitudinal research is consequently needed for this under-researched population to know if ELICOS is contributing to widespread inequity. Such research would equip us to take social responsibility for our multi-billion dollar international education system that had humble beginnings as an aid program and address the fact that “practice has run ahead of theorisation and empirical research” (Marginson, 2007, p. 7).
In addition to these overarching approaches to understanding equity, this study also invites a depth of sociological, TESOL and SLA studies to ensue. Some questions raised but unanswered include the following: Are gendered attendance disparities within world region groups in ELICOS a broader phenomenon and what are the barriers to access for these specific gender groups? Is decreased attendance common for 28-34 year olds in IE and, if so, what are the barriers and how can they be addressed? What is the role of religion in the international student experience and in their SLA? How does prior education interact with SLA in instructed settings for adults? Answers to the latter question may be useful in understanding the hidden barriers to ELICOS success for particular groups.

Methodological and theoretical aspects to equity in a transnational space also require address. For instance, constructs for comparing SES for international students are needed given the significance of SES in predicting educational outcomes and the current incomparability across nations. Such a development would enable much research into equity in transnational spaces of education to be carried out. Moreover, theoretical development is needed to further push the boundaries of the notion of “quality” in IE.

More applied research into how a proficiency framework can be established and the consistency of proficiency levels across ELICOS institutions improved is also needed as is research into teacher professional development in ELICOS and how a national teaching standard could be implemented to improve teaching quality and consistency.

Evidently, much work remains to be carried out in understanding and addressing the concept of equity in ELICOS, IE and transnational education more broadly. This study has only scratched the surface of the issues presented, but has revealed limitations to our knowledge that require further investigation in the pursuit of social justice through equitable education.
References


# Appendix A

**Appendix A1: Student survey**

## EQUITY AND ELICOS

**STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY**

By completing this questionnaire you are agreeing to participate in the research project “Equity and ELICOS: A case study”, which is explained in the letter, “plain language statement”.

*Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Your responses are confidential. Only the researchers will see your answers.*

### Background information

| Gender: | □ Male | □ Female |
| Year of birth: | 19 ____ |
| Nationality: *(Please print)* |  |
| First language: |  |

### Religion: *(Please tick one)*

- □ I'm not religious
- □ Christian
- □ Muslim
- □ Buddhist
- □ Hindu
- □ Jewish
- □ Other (please specify) _______________________

### Highest level of education completed: *(Please tick one)*

- □ I did not go to high school
- □ Junior School (Grade 7-8)
- □ Middle school (Grade 9-11)
- □ Graduated from high school
- □ Certificate or Diploma
- □ Bachelor degree
- □ Graduate certificate
- □ Master's degree
- □ PhD or Doctorate

### I have to work in Australia to pay for my English course *(Please circle)*

Yes / No

### I had visa problems that made me start my course late. *(Please circle)*

Yes / No

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*Melbourne Graduate School of Education*

The University of Melbourne Victoria 3010 Australia

T: +61 3 8344 8285  F: +61 3 8344 8529  W: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au*
Below is a list of opinions. Please tick one opinion that is closest to your experience of learning English at your language school or tick ‘I’m not sure’ if you are unsure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My classroom experiences</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>I’m not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My teachers know a lot about me and my culture.</td>
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<td>2. I feel I am one of my teachers’ favourite students.</td>
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<td>3. I have made new friends in my class.</td>
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<td>4. My teachers and classmates listen to what I have to say.</td>
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<td>5. My teachers don’t make me feel welcome in class.</td>
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<td>6. My teachers help other students more than they help me.</td>
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<td>7. My teachers are friendly to me.</td>
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<td>8. I feel comfortable to speak in class discussions.</td>
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<td>9. I feel comfortable to ask questions in front of the class.</td>
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<td>10. I feel I am an equal member of my class.</td>
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<td>11. My teachers don’t know me very well.</td>
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<td>12. In general, I like the teaching style at my school.</td>
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<td>13. My teachers don’t help me very much in class.</td>
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<td>14. I think that other students in my class like to work with me.</td>
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<td>15. The teaching style matches my learning style.</td>
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<td>16. My teachers never choose me to answer questions.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Other aspects of school experience</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>I’m not sure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. In one week, I only come to about half of my classes.</td>
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<td>18. My course is interesting.</td>
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<td>19. I feel relaxed at school.</td>
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<td>20. I have enough information about the courses at my school.</td>
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<td>21. I come late to class or leave early.</td>
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<td>22. I don’t like my school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. I am unhappy with my test results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. I feel like I am learning English slower than other students in my class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Class tests are too difficult for me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. I am learning English as fast as other students in my class.</td>
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<td>27. I like my textbook/course book.</td>
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<td>28. I feel I am part of a school community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. If I need some information about my school I can easily speak to someone for help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. I feel stressed at school.</td>
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</table>
Please circle or tick one answer that is closest to your experience of learning English at your language school.

Further information

31. In general my test scores are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Neither good nor bad</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Very bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

32. I think I will be ready to start my university/TAFE course by the planned date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>I'm not going to TAFE or Uni</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

33. When I first started at this school I felt my class was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Too difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>A good level</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Too easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

34. I have felt uncomfortable or unwelcomed in my class because of my:

(Please tick one or more)

- Age
- Gender
- Religion or faith
- Sexuality
- Culture
- Disability
- Other (please specify) ____________________________________________
- I always feel comfortable in my class
- I don’t want to answer this question

We would like to reward you for your time in completing this survey by giving you the chance to win a $100 Coles/Myer voucher. Please provide your contact details if you would like to go in the draw so that we can contact you if you win.

Contact details

E-mail: ________________________________
Phone no. ______________________________

We would also like to invite you to be interviewed as part of the research project. If you are chosen as an interview participant, you will receive a $20 Coles/Myer voucher for one hour of your time.

Interview invitation

I am happy to be interviewed (Please circle) Yes / No

When you have finished this survey please put it in the box on the student reception desk

Thank you
Appendix A2: Student interview schedule

Interview Questions
(Students)

Project title: Equity and ELICOS: A case study

The following provides a guide to the types of interview questions that will be asked of students who are enrolled in an ELICOS course at pre-intermediate level or higher.

Semi-structured Interview Topic Guide

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT:
This interview is part of a research project that is trying to understand the different experiences of international students learning English in ELICOS courses. In this interview we will talk about your classroom experiences and your opinion of your school in general. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

1. PERSONAL DETAILS AND REASON FOR STUDY:
   a. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, like where you come from, your age, what you do?
   b. Can you tell me about your education in your home country?
   c. What are your reasons for studying English in Australia?
   d. How long have you been at the school for?

2. LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS
   a. How would you describe yourself as a language learner?
   b. Can you describe any changes in yourself or in the way that you think since you started learning English?
   c. What is your class attendance and punctuality like?
   d. Do you think you are learning English fast enough?

3. SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND GENERAL EXPERIENCE OF THE SCHOOL:
   a. How would you explain your experience at this school to someone from your country who wanted to study here?
   b. What kind of relationships do you have with non-teaching staff at the school?
   c. Do you feel you are a part of a school community? Why/why not?

4. CLASS DYNAMICS
   a. Tell me about the relationships you have with other students in your class.
   b. Can you tell me about any students who don’t fit in well with the class?

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH CLASS TEACHERS:
   a. Can you tell me about the relationships you have with your teachers here?
   b. What kind of relationships do you think other students in your class have with teachers?

6. MATERIALS, RESOURCES AND ASSESSMENTS
   a. What do you think about your course book and the other papers your teachers give you?
   b. How could your school improve the weekly tests?

7. PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION
   a. Can you remember any time in your class that you felt uncomfortable because of your culture or for other reasons?
   b. How fair do you think your class is to all students?

8. AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE
   a. What has been your experience of being an English language learner in Australia in general?
Appendix A3: Teacher interview schedule

**Interview Questions**
( Teachers)

**Project title: Equity and ELICOS: A case study**

The following provides a guide to the types of interview questions that will be asked of ELICOS teachers.

**Semi-structured Interview Topic Guide**

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT:**
This interview is part of a research project that is trying to understand the different experiences of international students learning English in ELICOS courses and how equity and quality are constructed in the ELICOS industry. In this interview we will talk about your teaching practices, your school relationships and your opinion of your school in general. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

1. **TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE:**
   a. Can you tell me a bit about your teaching qualifications and experience in teaching ELICOS classes?
   b. Can you tell me about your role at the school?

2. **STUDENT DIVERSITY**
   a. Can you tell me about the ELICOS classes and students you’re currently teaching?
   b. How would you describe the student diversity in your classes?

3. **TEACHER-STUDENT RAPPORT**
   a. How would you describe the rapport or relationships you have with your students?
   b. Can you describe particular students who you have a stronger sense of rapport with compared to other students?
   c. What are some reasons for developing more or less rapport with students?

4. **ADDRESSING STUDENT NEEDS**
   a. What is your approach to addressing student needs?
   b. Can you talk about the curriculum and assessments in terms of student needs?

5. **AT-RISK STUDENTS**
   a. How would you define ‘at-risk’ students?
   b. Can you tell me about students who tend to be “at-risk”?
   c. How are these students supported?

6. **EQUITY**
   a. Can you tell me what you think educational equity means in terms of ELICOS?
   b. How do you go about trying to make your class fair for all students?
   c. Do you think that for some students their ELICOS experience of their classroom and the school is unfair? How so?

7. **SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING**
   a. Can you describe the decision making-process relating to ELICOS courses?
   b. How much influence do you have over curriculum and assessment?
   c. What kind of relationships do you have with your colleagues?

8. **QUALITY IN ELICOS**
   a. What would a higher level of educational quality look like at this school?
   b. How could a higher level of educational quality be provided in the ELICOS industry in general?
Dear students,

It’s Ornella here. I teach GE3 and GE4 at your school, but I am also a student at the University of Melbourne. I am doing a research project for my Master’s of Education to understand what kind of experiences international students have learning English in full-time English courses and if these courses are fair for all groups of students. This project has been approved by the Human Ethics Research Committee. My supervisor, Dr Alan Brunton Williams will be helping me with this project. We are both from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) at the University of Melbourne.

The Director of Studies at your school has given me permission to give you this letter and to tell you about my project. When you have finished reading this letter, you can choose if you want to be part of the project or not.

**What will you ask me to do?**
If you would like to be part of the project, I will ask you to complete a ten-minute questionnaire about your student experience. Completed questionnaires will go into the draw to win a $100 Coles/Myer voucher. You can return the questionnaire by mailing it for free in the envelope I have given you or you can put it in the envelope and return it to the box at your school’s reception desk. If you prefer you can also do the questionnaire online at [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N9QLRGV](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N9QLRGV).

The questionnaire will also invite you to do an interview with me about your student experience. If you agree to be interviewed and you are selected (there are only six places and we need a mix of people), you will get a $20 Coles/Myer voucher for your time in a one-hour audio-recorded interview. After the interview, I will give you a written copy of what we said in the interview and you can check if you want to change or delete anything.

**Will the information I give be private?**
You do not have to put your name on the questionnaire, but if you would like to have the chance to win the $100 voucher you will need to give your contact details, like your e-mail address and/or telephone number, so we can contact you if you win. Dr Alan Williams and I will be the only people who see your answers. We will keep any contact details you give us in a password-protected computer file away from other information you give us in the questionnaire, so your information will be safe and private. However, because the questionnaire will ask you your age, first language, gender, and level of prior education and because your school is small, it might be possible that we can guess who you are.

Also, for the interviews, I will not use your real name in my project, unless you want me to and I will not use the real name of your school. I will give you and your school a false name so people do not know who you are. However, because your language school is small there is a small chance that someone may identify you even if I change your name and your school’s name in my final report.

**Can I see the final project?**
When the whole project is finished, you can read about the project by asking me or the MGSE. The results from the project will be used in my Master’s thesis and might be published in a journal or presented at a conference. The MGSE will keep the information from the questionnaires locked away for five years after publication and then it will be deleted or destroyed.

**Will there be any problems for me if I don’t want to be in the project?**
You don’t have to do the questionnaire or be interviewed if you don’t want to - it’s your choice. If you decide at any time that you do not want to be part of the project or that after the questionnaire or interview you do not want me to use your information in my project, that’s OK. Whatever you choose, your student/teacher relationships will not change and your grades will not be affected in any way.

**Where can I get more information?**
If you need help understanding this letter you should ask your friends, family or teacher for advice before you decide to participate. You can also ring my supervisor or myself for more information or call the Research Ethics Office at the University on ph: 8344 2073 or fax: 9347 6739 for extra information.

**How can I be part of the project?**
Please make sure you have understood this letter then complete and return the attached questionnaire or go online and complete the questionnaire at [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N9QLRGV](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N9QLRGV).

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours faithfully,

Ornella Rampal (Master’s Student)
Ph: 0402 924 878
e-mail: orlampal@student.unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne Victoria 3010 Australia
T: +61 3 8344 8285  F: +61 3 8344 8529  W: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au

Dr Alan Brunton Williams (Supervisor)
Ph: 8344 8377
e-mail: alanw@unimelb.edu.au

HRREC: 123 7911; Date: 29/05/12; Version: 2
Appendix A5: Teacher plain language statement

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT
Project: “Equity and ELICOS: A case study”

Dear staff,

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Dr Alan Williams (Supervisor) and Ornella Rampal (Master’s student) of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. The project forms part of Ms. Rampal’s Master’s thesis and has been approved by the Human Ethics Advisory Group. As someone who is currently teaching or managing ELICOS classes, we would like to invite you to participate in our project. The aim of the study is to understand how the concept of ‘equity’ is constructed and enacted in the ELICOS industry and to investigate differences in student outcomes and experiences.

What will I be asked to do?
Should you agree to participate, you would take part in a face-to-face interview carried out by Ms. Rampal. The interview would last for up to an hour and, with your permission, would be audio-recorded to ensure we make an accurate record of what you say. You would be asked questions about aspects of being an ELICOS practitioner. Questions will focus on teaching practice, teacher-student rapport, decision-making and ideas about ‘quality’ and ‘equity’ in the industry. After the interview has been transcribed, you would be provided with a copy of the transcript so that you can verify the information is correct and/or request deletions.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password protected computer file away from any data that you supply. Only the researchers named will have access to your contact details and raw data. Furthermore, in the final report, you and your school will be referred to by a pseudonym. However, you should note that as the number of staff we seek to interview is very small and as the staff body at the school is small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you. However, you will have the opportunity to remove identifying characteristics from the interview transcripts if you wish to do so. The data from the interviews will be kept securely in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

How will I receive feedback?
Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to you upon request at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education or by contacting the researchers. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences or in a journal.

Will participation prejudice me in any way?
Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

Where can I get further information?
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of the researchers on the numbers provided. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

How do I agree to participate?
If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and then return it to Ms. Rampal either in person or by mail, using the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope. The researchers will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and location for the interview.

Yours faithfully,

Ornella Rampal (Master’s Student)           Dr Alan Brunton Williams (Supervisor)
Ph: 0402 924 878                                    Ph: 8344 8377
e-mail: orampal@student.unimelb.edu.au              e-mail: alanw@unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne Victoria 3010 Australia
T: +61 3 8344 8285 F: +61 3 8344 8529 W: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au

HREC: 1237911; Date: 29/05/12; Version: 2
27 June 2012

Dr A.B. Williams
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne

Dear Dr Williams

I am pleased to advise that the Humanities and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee approved the following Project:

Project title: Equity and ELICOS: A case study
Researchers: Dr A B Williams, O Rampal
Ethics ID: 1237911

The Project has been approved for the period: 19-Jun-2012 to 31-Dec-2012.

It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has actually been approved.

Research projects are normally approved to 31 December of the year of approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of five years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond five years a new application will normally need to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

(a) Limit of Approval: Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.

(b) Variation to Project: Any subsequent variations or modifications you might wish to make to the Project must be notified formally to the Human Ethics Sub-Committee for further consideration and approval. If the Sub-Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised Project.

(c) Incidents or adverse affects: Researchers must report immediately to the Sub-Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptance of the protocol including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the Project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.

(d) Monitoring: All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

(e) Annual Report: Please be aware that the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers submit an annual report on each of their projects at the end of the year, or at the conclusion of a project if it continues for less than this time. Failure to submit an annual report will mean that ethics approval will lapse.

(f) Auditing: All projects may be subject to audit by members of the Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below.

Please quote the ethics registration number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

On behalf of the Sub-Committee I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

Ms Jacky Angus
Humanities and Applied Sciences HESC
Phone: 83442074, Email: jsa@unimelb.edu.au

cc: HEAG Chair - Melbourne Graduate School of Education
### Appendix B

**Appendix B1: Distribution of social variables - College records: Outcomes data**

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### Appendix B2: Distribution of social groups - College records: Attendance data

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Appendix B3: Academic outcomes and attendance means for social groups and ANOVA results - College records: Outcomes data and attendance data

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<td>Western Asia and Northern Africa</td>
<td>60.5</td>
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<td>24</td>
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## Appendix B4: Survey Results

**Overall experience**

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**Attendance**

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**Learning outcomes**

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**University preparedness**

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**Total**

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**Teacher treatment**

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**Curriculum and Resources**

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**Access to information**

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**Teaching style**

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** Appropriateness of start level**

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**Total**

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**Institutional aspects**

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**Value Member**

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**Class Participation**

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**Peer Relationships**

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**Feeling**

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**School Community**

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**Total**

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**Affective aspects**

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**Relationships**

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**Feelings**

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**Community**

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**Notes:**

- For university preparedness it is a subset of N.
- Yes indicates that the variable is present or true.

---

101
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Author/s:
Rampal, Ornella Teresa

Title:
Equity and ELICOS: a case study

Date:
2013

Citation:

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File Description:
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