

Resources for ELLs in International Schools: A Non-profit and For-profit Comparison

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ABSTRACT

The number of for-profit international schools is rising as the international school market continues to grow. While traditionally being non-profit and serving expatriates, international school enrollment now predominately consists of locally enrolled students, many of whom are English language learners (ELLs). As the industry becomes more and more profit-driven, there is mounting concern about how much money is being reinvested back into the schools. The purpose of this study was to explore differences in the provision of resources for working with ELLs between international schools in East Asia that are non-profit and for-profit. Areas explored include teacher preparation, digital media, instructional resources, library materials, and designated teaching space for working with ELLs. This quantitative survey-based study had 533 participants who were working in international schools in East Asia. The findings of this study revealed that instruction of ELLs in non-profit international schools tends to be less likely to be hindered due to a shortage or lack of resources for working with ELLs compared to for-profit international schools.

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Keywords:¹

International schools, ELLs, for-profit schools, non-profit schools

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the English-medium international school market in recent years has been incredible. While there were approximately 2,500 English-medium international schools worldwide in 2000, the number has now grown to more than 11,000 (ISC Research, 2019). International School Consultancy (ISC) data is specific to schools that implement a curriculum in English that is delivered to K-12 students outside of an English-speaking country (ISC Research, 2019). The growth of the English-medium international school market is continuing to expand, and according to Independent Education Today (2016), the number of international schools is projected to reach 16,000 by 2026.

Traditionally, international schools were created for the schooling of expatriate children; however, locally-enrolled students now account for more than 80% of international school enrollment (ISC Research, 2019). Therefore, many of the locally-enrolled students in international schools are English language learners (ELLs), some of whom have limited English proficiency (LEP). ELLs are learners of the English language who may benefit from receiving various types of language learning support (Squire, 2008) as they learn in an English-medium environment. There are many terms used in English-medium international schools to label students who are learning English but are not native English speakers. These terms include English as a Second Language (ESL), English as an Additional Language (EAL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The researcher has chosen to use ELLs since the students are studying the curriculum of an English-medium international school using the English language. Additionally, a primary driver for the growing number of local students enrolling in international schools is the desire of host country parents to provide their child or children with an English-medium education (Dearden, 2014). With the rise in the number of locally-enrolled students in international schools, a question arises on whether English-medium international schools are being adequately staffed and resourced for working with such a high percentage of ELLs.

The International School Market: Non-profit and For-profit

Over the years since the Second World War, the international school market has changed from primarily enrolling children of expatriates to enrolling children from the surrounding community. This change became more apparent in the 1990s and continues to escalate. Bunnell (2016) described this change as

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international schools moving from a traditional model to a non-traditional school model. With the shift from traditional to non-traditional, there has been an escalation in the number of schools seeking to offer instruction in English for monetary profits. Schools providing education for a profit may be owned by a single entrepreneur, groups of investors, businesses, or transnational corporations (Waterson, 2015).

As the number of schools increases, the amount received in tuition and fees also increases. In 2012, the amount of international school enrollment fees worldwide was placed at 26 billion dollars and was expected to reach 37 billion dollars in 2015 (Lewandowski, 2012). By 2022, the amount of tuition enrollment fees is predicted to reach 60 billion dollars (Bunnell, 2014; ICEF Monitor, 2013) and further increase to 89 billion dollars by 2026 (ISC Research, 2016). Economic growth continues to encourage an increase in the number of schools in East Asia (Emmett, 2017; Ward, 2017). While the number of for-profit schools is increasing, there is still a mixture of non-profit and for-profit schools in the region.

The international school market has become a lucrative investment that has the potential to provide hefty returns. At the 2012 International and Private Schools Education Forum (IPSEF) conference, it was reported that international schools as an investment have a rate of return of 20% (Khmeka, as cited by Machin, 2014). The international school landscape has changed so quickly that some agencies are reporting that two-thirds of international schools are for-profit (The Economist Staff, 2014). Custer (2016) discussed how investors are viewing international schools as being recession-proof because of the consistent revenue streams provided through tuition payments. While many international schools are independently owned, some schools are being acquired by transnational corporations such as GEMS Education, Nord Anglia Education, and Cognita. Sometimes corporations involved in international education are acquired by other entities. For example, in 2018, with 70 schools in its portfolio, Cognita was bought out by the Swiss investment firm Jacobs Holdings (Jimenez, 2018). Cognita was formed in 2004, and not long afterward began facing accusations of milking profits from its network of schools (Boffey, 2011; Warrell, 2017). In 2018 for a price that represented "26 times earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization as of August 2018," Cognita was bought for 2.5 billion dollars (Espinoza, 2018). Cognita currently has 73 schools in its portfolio, of which 11 are in East Asia.

While almost all schools strive for a budget excess, non-profit schools tend to reinvest surpluses in the school (Scarborough, 2015). Contrarily, surpluses in for-profit schools are considered profits for the owner(s) or financial backers (Waterson, 2015). Although a school may claim non-profit status, this does not mean that non-profit schools always use excess money in ways that edify the school community as a whole. Further, many for-profit schools seek to provide an education befitting the tuition fees rendered.

Teachers and ELL Specialists

Because the number of locally-enrolled students continues to increase, all teachers are principally English language teachers (Crisfield, 2017). Unfortunately, a high number of teachers and administrators in international schools do not understand the difference between teaching in English and teaching English. Further, many schools have a culture that separates subject teaching from language teaching and places subject teaching in a superior position (Creese, 2005).

One way of providing ELLs with access to the curriculum is through sheltered instructional strategies. Sheltered instruction includes the use of modeling, pre-teaching vocabulary, manipulatives, metacognitive development, and cooperative learning strategies (Freeman & Freeman, 1988). Sheltered instruction aims to make content classes accessible to ELLs in the process of enabling them to develop proficiency in English (Echevarria & Graves, 1998). In essence, sheltered instruction provides comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981).

A large portion of teachers working with ELLs in international schools lack training in second language acquisition (SLA) and sheltered instructional strategies. Although there have been calls for international schools to hire qualified ELL specialist teachers (Carder, 1991; Kalinowski & Carder, 1990; Shoebottom, 2009), many international schools fill ELL specialist positions with trailing spouses and recent university graduates. Most of these people have little to no experience and training for working with ELLs. Arguably, it is in the best interests of ELL students and the school community to have ELL specialist teachers and classroom teachers with training and qualifications in SLA.

Resources, Library, and Space for Working with ELLs

The use of pictures and images are a vital component of sheltered instructional practice when working with language learners. Additionally, the use of recorded sound and the ability to manipulate, record, and embed sound is also extremely beneficial when working with language learners. In short, "the computer is the most powerful contextualization device ever known" (Harris, 2000, p. 242). Harris (2000) further proclaimed that the computer "offers not only the possibility of integrating a simultaneous presentation of written, auditory and pictorial information, but of linking that information across languages and cultures as well" (p. 242).

Although known as an expert in SLA, Stephen Krashen is also a leading advocate of increased reading in and out of school. According to Krashen (2004), "when children have access to more books at home, at school, or at the public library, they read more" (p. 58). Because of the linguistic gains made by ELLs during times of free reading, Krashen (2018) asserted that access to reading material that is of interest is an essential step in second language acquisition. In addition to providing time and space for reading, Krashen (2018) encouraged libraries to be staffed with qualified personnel who can guide ELLs to appropriate level reading material.

Kalinowski and Carder (1990) envisioned the ESL Department as being the hub of an international school. Viewed as a hub, the support of ELL specialist teachers would reach out to ELLs by liaising with teachers and other departments in support of ELLs. While the use of the push-in model for supporting ELL is increasing, there is still a demand for pull-out support; additionally, there is an increasing desire for intensive English language programs (IELP) in international schools (Lehman & Welch, 2020). The use of the pull-out and IELP instructional models for SLA requires a dedicated teaching space. Unfortunately, ELL departments are quickly subject to budgetary cuts (Carder, 2013) and subject classroom expansion. While the ELL department can be developed and resourced to be a hub of an international school, Holderness (2001) argued that the ELL Department is "often undervalued and under-resourced, [but] has the potential to be a centre of innovation with regard to teaching styles and to cross-cultural awareness" (p. 67).

Situation of the Problem and Aim of the Study

Overall, there is a shortage of studies explicitly devoted to international schools, and Bunnell (2019), stated that "the diverse arena of 'International School' is continuously growing yet still underreported" (p. 1). With the rising numbers of locally-enrolled students, stakeholders of English-medium international schools should question whether these schools are adequately staffed and resourced for working with such a high percentage of students who are ELLs. The purpose of this study was to explore differences in the provision of resources for working with ELLs between international schools in East Asia that are non-profit and for-profit. The researcher developed the following six research questions to guide the study.

- What is the difference in teacher preparedness in teaching ELLs between non-profit and for-profit international schools?
- What is the difference in access to digital media for working with ELLs between non-profit and for-profit international schools?
- What is the difference in the number of instructional resources for working with ELLs between non-profit and for-profit international?
- What is the difference in the availability of library materials for ELLs between non-profit and for-profit international schools?
- What is the difference in the provision of a designated space for working with ELLs between non-profit and for-profit international schools?
- What is the difference in the rate of language acquisition that ELLs experience between non-profit and for-profit international schools?

METHOD

The researcher used an observational quantitative research design to gather data that employed a cross-sectional survey (Creswell, 2012). A cross-sectional survey captures data at a single point in time and does not seek to manipulate a variable. The researcher used an online survey because the participants were scattered across fifteen different countries and city-states in East Asia. The Data for the current study was acquired as part of a more extensive study that explored language policy and various aspects of language acquisition in English-medium international schools in East Asia. The researcher used the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) questionnaire developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a template for the survey. According to He and Kubacka (2015), the TALIS questionnaire had already passed rigorous validation proceedings. Additionally, the researcher used experts in the field to establish content validity (Creswell, 2012; Salkind, 2013). The original research study received IRB approval through the university, where the researcher was working towards completing a doctoral degree in educational leadership. The data in this study was not reported in the original research study.

Sample

The researcher used the Internet to acquire contact information for potential participants. Potential participants in more than 500 international schools received a single email with an introduction and a web link to a survey of which none of the questions were mandatory. Participating in the study were 154 administrators and 379 teachers (N=533), all of whom were working in international schools in East Asia during May, June, and July of 2018. Participants were in the countries and city-states of Cambodia, China, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam (See Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Country or City-state	Non-profit	For-profit	Total
Cambodia	2	5	7
China	61	106	167
East Timor	1	1	2
Hong Kong	12	9	21
Indonesia	16	10	26
Japan	20	12	32
Laos	1	0	1
Malaysia	13	15	28
Mongolia	3	8	11
Philippines	16	4	20
Singapore	8	13	21
South Korea	20	26	46
Taiwan	21	11	32
Thailand	17	46	63
Vietnam	13	43	56
Total	224	309	533

Data Analyses

None of the survey questions were mandatory, so participants were able to decide whether they would provide an answer or not for each item. The questions in the survey were nominal and categorical. For the Likert type questions, the researcher primarily used a forced four-point scale. SPSS software (v. 22) was used to perform Pearson chi-square tests (χ^2) with an alpha level of .05. The Pearson chi-square test is a nonparametric test that can evaluate categorical data and measure the distribution of frequencies (Creswell, 2012; Salkind, 2013). All data met the assumptions for Pearson chi-square as specified by McHugh (2013).

FINDINGS

Within the survey, participants were asked if teacher subject knowledge preempted teacher experience in working with language learners during the hiring process. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in whether subject knowledge preempts teacher

experience in working with ELLs in the hiring process between non-profit (Group 1: $n = 221$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 304$) international schools, $X^2(1, N = 525) = 0.494, p = 0.482$; using Fisher's Exact Test, $p = 0.526$.

Intending to identify the level of training required to be an ESL/EAL teacher in the schools that had an ESL/EAL department, Participants were asked to specify the minimum criterion set for being an ESL/EAL/ELD/TESOL teacher in their school. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the minimum criterion to be an ESL/EAL/ELD/TESOL teacher between non-profit (Group 1: $n = 204$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 285$) international schools, $X^2(5, N = 489) = 12.357, p = 0.030$ (see Table 2).

Table 2. ELL Specialist Teacher Qualification

School model	None	TEFL cert. no degree	University degree	University degree and TEFL cert.	Education degree or PGCE	Master's degree or above in TESOL/ESL/linguistics
Non-profit	9 4.4%	8 3.9%	39 47.1%	52 25.5%	85 41.7%	11 5.4%
Expected count	7.1	10.8	47.1	59.7	70.5	8.8
For-profit	8 2.8%	18 6.3%	74 26.0%	91 31.9%	84 29.5%	10 3.5%
Expected count	9.9	15.2	65.9	83.3	98.5	12.2
Total	17 3.5%	26 5.3%	113 23.1%	143 29.2%	169 34.6%	21 4.3%

Because the use of digital media for projecting visual images during lessons with ELLs is a vital component of sheltered instruction, the researcher asked participants if their school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as ELLs was hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of digital media equipment. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the availability of digital media for working with ELLs between non-profit (Group 1: $n = 223$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 310$) international schools, $X^2(3, N = 533) = 30.790, p = 0.000$. Figure 1 displays the data by percentage.

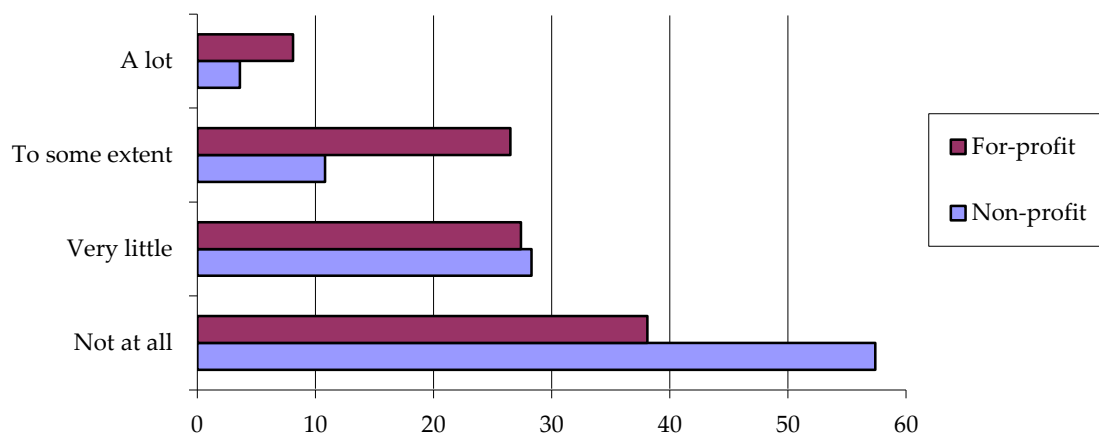


Figure 1. ELL instruction hindered by the shortage or inadequacy of digital media equipment.

Intending to examine the overall difference in the provision of instructional materials for working with ELLs between non-profit and for-profit schools, the researcher asked participants if their school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as ELLs was hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the availability of instructional materials for working with ELLs between non-profit

(Group 1: $n = 223$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 306$) international schools, $X^2(3, N = 529) = 30.063, p = 0.000$. Figure 2 displays the data by percentage.

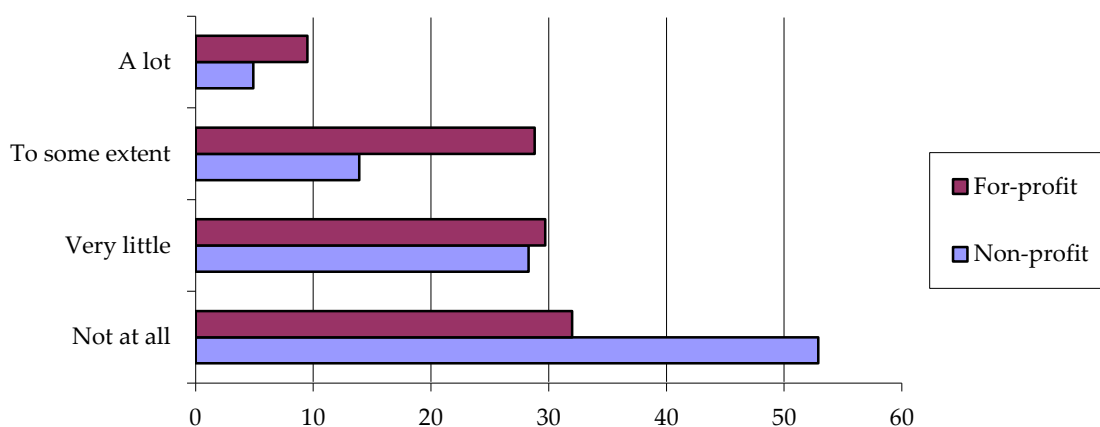


Figure 2. ELL instruction hindered by the shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials.

Seeking to identify the level of investment schools make in developing a school library that provides resources for ELLs, the researcher asked participants if their school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners was hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of library materials. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the availability of library materials for ELLs between non-profit (Group 1: $n = 223$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 308$) international schools, $X^2(3, N = 531) = 29.370, p = 0.000$. Figure 3 displays the data by percentage.

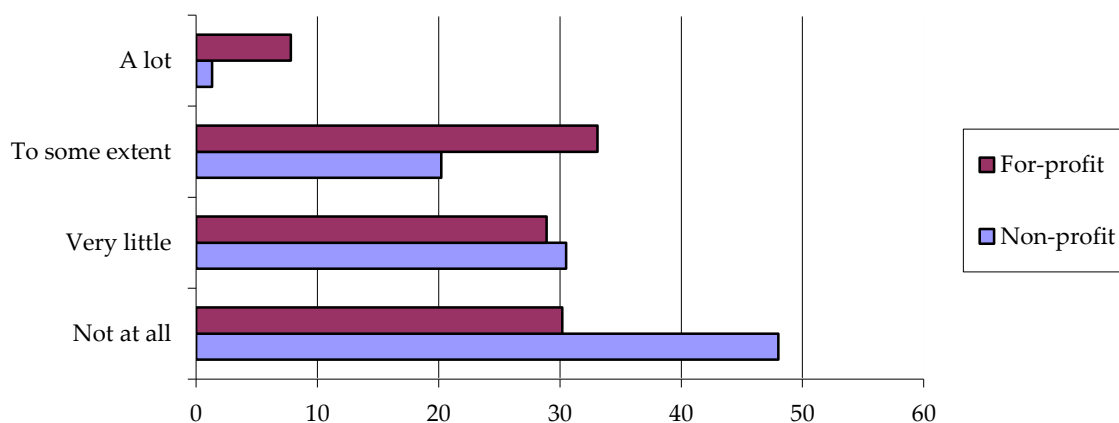


Figure 3. ELL instruction hindered by the shortage or inadequacy of library materials.

Wanting to examine the provision by schools for providing a dedicated space for working with ELLs, the researcher asked participants if their school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners was hindered by a shortage of a designated space or spaces for working with language learners. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in designated space for working with ELLs between non-profit (Group 1: $n = 223$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 308$) international schools, $X^2(3, N = 531) = 10.459, p = 0.015$. Figure 4 displays the data by percentage.

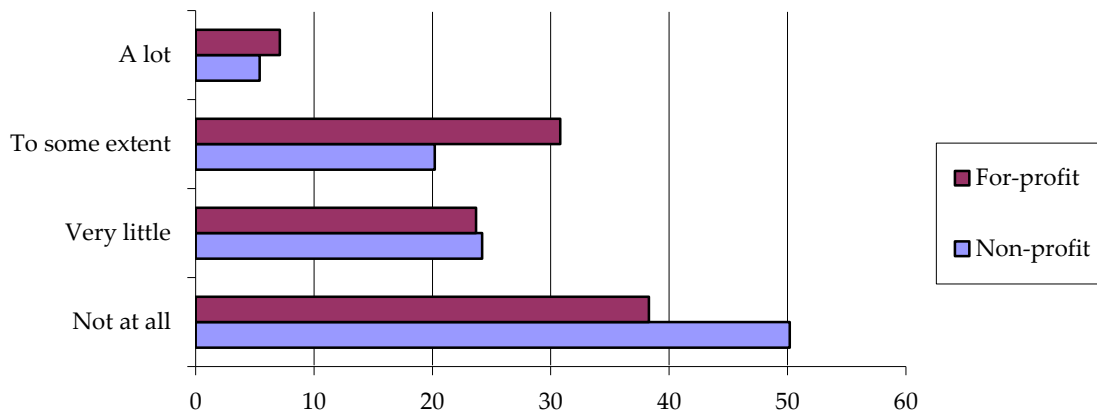


Figure 4. ELL instruction hindered by the shortage of a designated space(s).

Seeking to explore the difference in the rate of language acquisition experienced by ELLs between non-profit and for-profit international schools provision by schools for providing a dedicated space for working with ELLs, the researcher asked participants to answer a five-point Likert scale question revealing their opinion of the rate of language acquisition in their school. The results of a Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the rate of second language acquisition experienced by ELLs between non-profit (Group 1: $n = 223$) and for-profit (Group 2: $n = 308$) international schools, $X^2(4, N = 531) = 10.238, p = 0.037$. Table 3 displays the expected counts and percentages, and Figure 5 displays the data by percentage.

Table 3. Rate of language acquisition experienced by ELLs

School model	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Total
Non-profit	3	8	89	99	24	223
	1.3%	3.6%	39.9%	44.4%	10.8%	100.0%
Expected count	3.4	14.7	96.6	89.0	19.3	223.0
For-profit	5	27	141	113	22	308
	1.6%	8.8%	45.8%	36.7%	7.1%	100%
Expected count	4.6	20.3	133.4	123.0	26.7	308.0
Total	8	35	230	212	46	531
	1.5%	6.6%	43.3%	39.9%	8.7%	100.0%

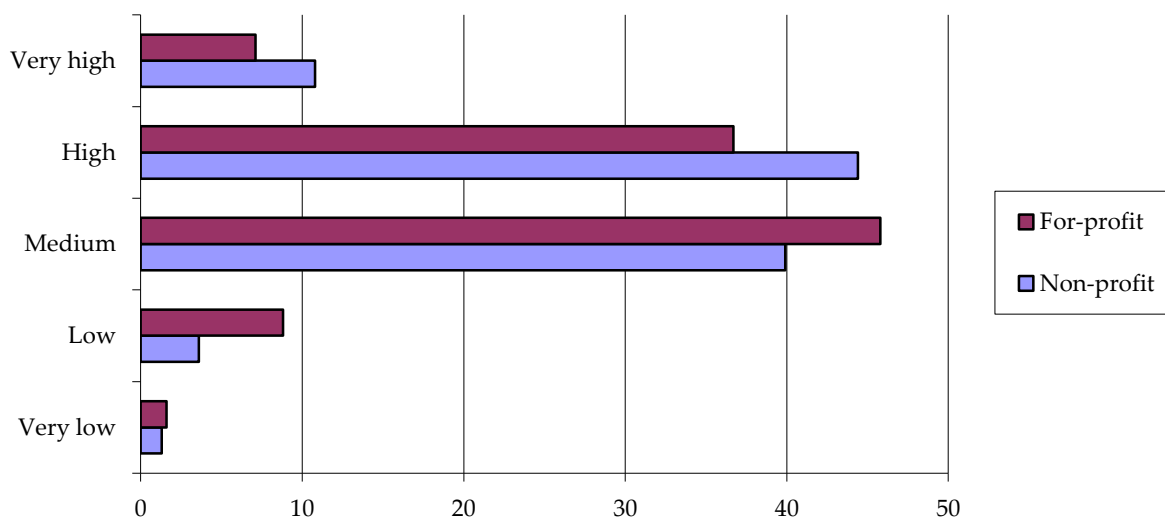


Figure 5. Rate of language acquisition experienced by ELLs.

DISCUSSION

Teacher Preparedness

As the number of local students increases, international schools have an obligation to provide teachers that are both knowledgeable in their area of specialty and have experience working with ELL. Although the participants revealed there was no overall difference between for-profit and non-profit schools concerning classroom teachers, there was a statistically significant difference between for-profit and non-profit schools concerning the minimum criterion for being an ESL/EAL teacher. Overall, non-profit international schools tend to provide ELLs with ESL/EAL teachers who have higher qualifications than for-profit schools. Although there was no statistically significant difference in the hiring of teachers based on knowledge versus experience with teaching ELLs between for-profit and non-profit schools, there is still a need to provide teachers with training for working with ELLs. As the number of schools grows and the number of local students increases, international schools should be prepared and willing to provide teachers with professional development for working with ELLs.

Digital Media

Analysis of participant responses revealed that the capacity for for-profit schools to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners was hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of digital media equipment more often than in non-profit schools. When digital media is not readily available during times of instruction with ELLs, teacher preparation time can increase substantially, and the amount of scaffolding can decrease when access to digital media is compromised. Under most circumstances, the use of technology in any classroom is considered a best practice. Additionally, computers and projectors are powerful devices that can be used to provide students with comprehensible input (Harris, 2000).

Instructional Resources

In addition to lagging in the provision of digital media, ELL academic progress in for-profit schools was more likely to be hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials designed to be used during times of instruction with ELLs than in non-profit schools. Instructional resources are resources that enable ELLs to gain access to the curriculum and language of the schools. These resources include textbooks written for ELLs, manipulatives, printed matter, and other materials that enable ELLs to receive comprehensible input. As more locally enrolled students who are ELLs enter international schools, international schools have a clear responsibility to ensure those students are provided with the necessary resources to achieve academic success (Shoebottom, 2009).

Library

Additionally, the capacity for a school to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners was hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of library materials more often in for-profit schools than in non-profit schools. Just as Kalinowski and Carder (1990) envisioned the ESL Department as being the hub of an international school for supporting ELLs, Sears (1990) posited that the library could serve as a hub for ELLs by providing them with accessible books in English and with opportunities to take part in activities designed to promote literacy and cultural exchange. Further, there have been previous calls for the ESL department to be a part of the library (Garner, 1990) and for ELL teachers to make extensive use of the library (Murphy, 1990), which align with the research by Krashen (2018) concerning reading and the acquisition of a second language.

Teaching Space

In the process of examining the provision of dedicated teaching space for ELLs, the researcher found that a school's capacity to provide instruction for ELLs was more likely to be hindered by a lack of a designated space or spaces in for-profit international schools than in non-profit international schools. The shortage of designated space for ELL instruction can marginalize both ELLs and ELL specialist teachers (Carder, 2011). Carder (2011) asserted that "Without a firm base, centered at the hub of the school, ESL will not be able to thrive" (p. 16). Further, Carder (1991) stated that international schools could support ELLs by creating structures that allow ELL departments to retain independent status in schools without being merged with other departments such as English or Special Education Needs (SEN). Lastly, Carder (1991) encouraged international schools to recognize the teaching of ELLs as a self-standing academic subject instead of a series of classes on the peripheral edge of the school.

Rate of Language Acquisition

The first five research questions provide evidence that can be used to support the results of the final research question. With the exception of subject knowledge preempting teacher experience, all other areas investigated in this study revealed how non-profit international schools tend to provide more learning resources for ELLs than do for-profit international schools. The benefits in providing more resources can be seen in the data reflecting increased language acquisition experienced by ELLs in non-profit schools. Access to digital media, instructional resources for ELLs, the availability of library materials for ELLs, and designated space for working with ELLs are factors critical to providing ELLs with comprehensible input and for supporting ELLs in their acquisition of English language skills in international schools. While international schools were traditionally operating on the provision of educating expatriate students, a large number of international schools today are operating with the primary focus of generating profits. Although the majority of international school enrollment is comprised of local students (ISC Research, 2019), many of whom are ELLs, data from this research study demonstrates how many international schools, both non-profit and for-profit, are not providing ELLs with resources to reach their full linguistic and academic potential.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the main finding of this study is that instruction for ELLs in non-profit international schools is less likely to be hindered by a lack of resources for working with ELLs than in for-profit international schools. These resources include more access to qualified ELL specialist teachers, digital media, instructional materials, library material, and designated space(s) for working with ELLs. In addition to non-profit international schools being more likely to have ESL/EAL teachers with higher qualifications, this study also revealed that participants in non-profit international schools reported higher levels of English language acquisition by ELLs than participants in for-profit schools.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the participants answered questions based on their unique perceptions and experiences in their international school at the time of completing the survey. An additional limitation of the study was the use of a forced four-point Likert type scale. Although none of the survey questions were mandatory, the forced four-point scale did not provide a neutral option for participants.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends international schools, regardless of business model, examine their commitment to ELLs and seek to find an appropriate balance for resourcing the ELL department and or school and for the provision of second language acquisition in their school community. The researcher also recommends further research comparing for-profit and non-profit international schools in the areas of language acquisition and resources provided to teachers for working with ELLs.

Concluding Remarks

As the number of international schools continues to expand, the international school market absorbs numerous new stakeholders, which includes an ever-increasing percentage of local students. The researcher encourages owners, school boards, corporate bodies, and other entities controlling finances in international schools to examine their commitment to education and to the students who are learning English as a second language. Language planning in international schools occurs in the decision-making processes that affect the *what*, *how*, and *why* of language instruction, as discussed by Ricento and Hornberger (1996). Unfortunately, language planning and policy are at times overshadowed by politics and economics (Jurnudd, 1982), and “It cannot be assumed that improving educational quality is the interest of all policymakers” (Spolsky, 2012, p. 287).

Disclosure

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APPENDIX

Survey

Are you currently a teacher in a school that uses English as the primary language of instruction?

- Yes
- No

Are you currently an administrator in a school that uses English as the primary language of instruction?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following best describes the business model of your school?

- Non-profit
- For-profit

In the hiring process, does teacher subject knowledge preempt teacher experience in working with language learners?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following best describes the minimum educational criterion set for being an ESL/EAL/ELD/TESOL teacher in your school?

- No ESL/EAL/ELD/TESOL staff
- No qualification
- TEFL certificate, but no university degree
- University degree
- University degree and TEFL certificate
- Education degree/Post graduate certificate
- Master's Degree (or above) in TESOL/ESL/Linguistics

Is your school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of digital media equipment?

- Not at all
- Very little
- To some extent
- A lot

Is your school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials?

- Not at all
- Very little
- To some extent
- A lot

Is your school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners hindered by a shortage or inadequacy of library materials?

- Not at all
- Very little
- To some extent
- A lot

Is your school's capacity to provide instruction for students categorized as language learners hindered by a shortage of a designated space or spaces for working with language learners?

- Not at all
- Very little
- To some extent
- A lot

Which of the following best describes the rate of language acquisition that English language learners experience in your school?

- Very low
- Low
- Medium
- High
- Very high