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### Brain Waste Among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States

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University of San Francisco

# **Brain Waste Among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Teaching English To Speakers of Other Languages

By  
Kimberly Alva-Chavers Gardner  
December 2022

# Brain Waste Among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

by

Kimberly Alva-Chavers Gardner

December 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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December 15, 2022

Date

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## ABSTRACT

The issue of brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants is a key issue facing the United States today. This problem of equity has turned into an issue of economic stability in a country with a waning population whose workforce will soon depend on immigrant and international workers. Multiple agencies, including government programs and nonprofits, are attempting to address this issue from a language learning perspective. Using the theoretical framework of Cultural Capital and Community Cultural Wealth, this research project suggests that the key to reducing brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants is to take the focus off language acquisition before reclaiming one's previous occupational status, and instead focus on workforce development with on the job language training, all of which is provided by employers. The resulting product is a website that targets employers and provides essential information on the vitality of immigrant and international workers and why investing in the current language learning workforce is an equitable, economical, and sustainable decision.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

There is a certain level of desperation when you get off an airplane in a foreign country. You are tired, hungry, and need to find a bathroom, but the precise location of these elements remains a mystery, shrouded in a method of communication that is unknown to you. I have been in that moment--the moment you realize your vulnerability and utter dependence on kind-hearted human beings to assist you with even the most basic of tasks. In gratitude to the countless Welcomers who have graciously lent me assistance when they were under no obligation to do so, I seek with my entire being to be a Welcomer to new arrivals and immigrants in the United States. Practically, this passion plays out in my occupation as an Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor at HopeWorks, a local nonprofit in Memphis, Tennessee, that works in adult education and aims to “provide hope through education, employment and empowerment,” as well as my work with the University of Memphis in the Intensive English for Internationals program.

When I first started teaching at HopeWorks, I was surprised that the vast majority of students held degrees higher than mine, yet had resigned themselves to working in manual labor positions that they were extremely overqualified for. I met single mothers who were directors of political science departments, Venezuelan lawyers that owned their own firms, retired doctors who had lost all their pensions, and accountants with multiple degrees. Once I asked a student what kind of job he would like, and he replied, “I don’t know, I just want to get my life back.” As I worked to help students get jobs similar to their original occupational field, I realized just how many barriers are present and why many highly skilled immigrants feel like they have no choice

but to remain in underemployment. For this reason, I work to support immigrants who seek to overcome the barriers that result in brain waste and underemployment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Currently, the United States is experiencing a worker shortage, a skill shortage, and very soon, a population shortage, all of which could have devastating economic impacts. However, the solution to all three of these economic issues may come from a people group already living within our borders. In 2019, the Migration Policy Institute estimated that over 44.9 million immigrants resided in the United States, the highest number ever recorded. For the past five years, 48% of arriving immigrants have been classified as highly skilled, that is, holding a bachelor's degree or higher while only 33% of those born in the United States hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Batalova & Fix 2021). Thus, recent immigrants have an overall higher level of education than the average U.S. native population. However, Batalova and Fix (2021) estimate that 21% of highly skilled immigrants (HSI) are underemployed, that is working in positions they are vastly overqualified for, resulting in what is known as brain waste. Brain waste occurs when highly-trained, highly-educated individuals are in an occupational position that fails to access or utilize their developed skill set, resulting in a waste of skill and a waste of investment returns.

The problem of brain waste and underemployment among HSI is significant because of its profound economic impacts and because of the resulting social injustice. Research suggests that factors contributing to brain waste among HSI include: language and cultural barriers, federal and local policies, and credential recognition. Multiple scholars (Batalova & Fix 2021; Batalova, Fix, & Creticos 2008; McHug 2017) cite linguistic and cultural barriers as the main



factor contributing to underemployment. According to Batalova & Fix, 55% of HSI who self-reported speaking English *not well* were underemployed, while in comparison, only 16% of HSI who self-reported as English *proficient* were underemployed.

In addition, while there are policies in place to aid HSI as they seek to regain their previous occupational positions, there is some controversy as to the best practices that need to be implemented. For example, Gelatt (2020) points out that policymakers often attribute more merit to employer-sponsored immigrants, that is, HSI that come to the United States on an employer-sponsored visa, assuming that they contribute the most human capital. However, Yosso (2005) suggests that there are other forms of cultural capital that are often unacknowledged, and Bourdieu (1969) claims that all forms of capital, including human and cultural, have ties to economic capital. Thus, more research needs to be done to determine the best policies to be implemented.

Closely related to policy is credential recognition which also has multiple actors and stakeholders that must align in order for qualified, internationally trained workers to be placed in relevant, skill-appropriate positions (Sumption, 2013). While Batalova, Fix, Creticos (2008) hold that the origin of a credential is the primary factor of success, Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016) point to additional factors, such as level of education, stating that those with a bachelor's degree are three times more likely to be in a low-skills position than those with a master's or doctorate degrees. In theory, formal credential recognition would decrease brain waste and open opportunities for employment. However, a study conducted by Damelang et al. (2020) suggests that formal recognition of credentials alone will not result in the anticipated level of decrease in brain waste and underemployment. Other factors such as racism and employer bias also play a role.

The impacts associated with brain waste among HSI include economic and humanitarian issues. Concerning economic trends, Batalova & Fix (2021), point out that HSI may be directly linked to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. Additionally, Barker (2020) explicitly states that employing HSI in skill-equivalent positions leads to productivity growth and that when companies underemploy HSI, they are actively losing returns on investment. Barker's discussion also suggests that immigrants are now essential to the U.S. economy because of a decreasing population and the worker shortage that will occur as a third of the workforce retires in the next fifteen years. In addition to boosting the economy and aiding a waning population, Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016) estimate that if HSI in low-skilled positions regained their occupational status, the U.S. government would gain an additional \$10.2 billion a year in taxes. Such data may seem to affirm policymaker's notions that HSI have more merit for admission into the US. However, a waning population suggests that barriers and prejudices need to be removed in order to successfully integrate people that have become essential to the sustainment of our society. Much stands to be gained, from an economic and social justice perspective, from resolving the issues of brain waste and underemployment of HSI.

Potential solutions for brain waste have been discussed by researchers in order to address language and cultural barriers, policies and best practices, and credential recognition (Barker, 2020; Batalova & Fix 2021; Batalova, Fix, & Creticos 2008; Damelang et al., 2020; McHug 2017; Sumption, 2013). All parties acknowledge that linguistic, cultural, and technical skill gaps need to be addressed. Concerning language and cultural barriers, Mollica (2020) suggests that ESL programs need to form sustainable partnerships with community colleges and employers, creating bridge programs for HSI as they go into specific occupations. However, for such initiatives to be successful, policies must be in place in order to support the relationships being

fostered. As far as credential recognition, Sumption (2013) places more emphasis on employers, suggesting that they need to provide an adaptation period to provide supplemental soft and technical skills instruction. More research needs to be conducted in order to determine the best practices for narrowing the skills gap of HSI and connecting quality workers to appropriate positions.

In conclusion, brain waste among highly skilled immigrants is an immediate, urgent issue with far-reaching economic and humanitarian impacts and multiple stakeholders involved, including: policymakers, economists, employers, non-profits, humanitarian workers, and immigrants themselves. While progress has been made, the sheer amount of actors and stakeholders involved in brain waste and underemployment results in a complex problem that requires an interdisciplinary approach in order for resolution or improvement to result.

### **Purpose of the Project**

This research culminated in the development of a website designed to a) inform employers in Tennessee about state policies and procedures for hiring immigrants, b) increase awareness of the highly-skilled immigrants in the United States and how this demographic is a monumental asset that brings cultural and economic wealth, c) connect employers and immigrants to local resources, agencies, and nonprofits who can assist in fostering a relationship between the two parties, potentially resulting in occupational recovery, network growth, and equity for immigrants in Tennessee.

This field project was informed by a) statistical data acquired in the literature review, b) collaboration with the IELCE (Integrated English Literature and Civics Education) Director for the state of Tennessee and associated partners, and c) collaboration with:

1. Employers who provide English language courses for their employees during working hours, such as Tyson Foods
2. Nonprofits who provide industry specific training for immigrants and then direct them to sustainable, equitable employment, such as HopeWorks in Memphis, TN
3. Local immigrants who have started their own businesses.

This website is designed to target employers, not immigrants or international workers. Thus, the information focuses on why employers should hire immigrants, steps for how to complete this process, options for companies who want to invest in immigrant and international workers, as well as additional resources such as connections to potential partners and examples of companies who are actively investing in their employees who do not speak English as their first language. I believe that this website is a needed contribution, especially in the state of Tennessee, so that employers are aware of the wealth of cultural and economic benefits attached to hiring and investing in immigrants, resulting in more equitable and profitable outcomes for all parties involved.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural Capital and Community Cultural Wealth is the theoretical framework for this field project. Cultural Capital claims that other forms of capital exist outside of the more concrete economic capital, yet all forms of capital have ties to economic capital. Community Cultural Wealth expounds on the notion of Cultural Capital to include forms of cultural capital People of Color possess and contribute. Both theories will be used in this field project because the topic of brain waste among highly skilled immigrants has roots in humanitarian and economic issues. Links between the two sides of this phenomenon need to be identified and addressed so that a maximum positive impact can occur.

Some of the foundational authors who have contributed to the notion of Cultural Capital/Wealth include Bourdieu and Yosso. Bourdieu (1969) makes the claim that Cultural Capital, though abstract and difficult to attach monetary value to, has significant worth that, over time, can be connected to economic capital. Yosso (2005) expands the concept of Cultural Capital to include specific forms of Cultural Wealth among communities of color. Taken together, these authors provide a rationale for understanding why it is important to address both the humanitarian and economic impacts of brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants.

### **Significance of the Project**

This project will be of significant interest to employers, immigrants, organizations in adult education, and the U.S. government, all of which are stakeholders in the phenomenon of brain waste among highly skilled immigrants in the US. This website has been created to a) inform local employers about the cultural and economical wealth tied to immigrants in the US, b) provide an accessible road map for hiring immigrants in Tennessee, and c) connect employers and immigrants to outside resources and local partners for this process. Doing so has the potential to reduce bias, increase equity, foster partnerships, build networks, boost local economies and business profits, and reduce the amount of time needed for immigrants to regain their occupational status.

### **Limitations**

Given time limitations for this project, the website provides a roadmap for hiring immigrants specifically in Tennessee. It is important to note that each state will have slightly different policies and procedures. I acknowledge that more resources for immigrants themselves

would be an excellent resource to provide; however, given the time limitations, this resource primarily focuses on employers. My rationale for this is that many of the conversations surrounding this topic have focused on eradicating barriers to employment, such as English language skills, credential recognition, and government policies. However, in my experience, I have seen all of these barriers removed, yet successful employment still does not occur because despite all the efforts to remove these barriers, it is individual employers who say yes or no to individual workers.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following are working definitions organized by the author. Citations are provided at the end, reflecting the inspiration or the direct citation for the definitions.

- **Brain waste** - “Brain waste describes the situation when college graduates cannot fully utilize their skills and education in the workplace despite their high professional qualifications” (Batalova, 2016, pg. 2).
- **Critical Race Theory** - according to Britannica, “intellectual and social movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. Critical race theorists hold that racism is inherent in the law and legal institutions of the United States insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and nonwhites, especially African Americans.” (T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2022)
- **Developed countries** - Disclaimer. According to Encyclopedia.com this term is traditionally used to describe countries with “high standards of living and advanced economies” (Retrieved November 24, 2021). I do not prefer this term because I feel it is divisive and devalues lifestyles not considered *normal* by a wealthier majority. However, this term was unavoidable when citing certain sources.

- **Employer-sponsored immigrants** - international professionals that relocate to a host country (long-term or short-term) on a visa provided by an employer; associated with having high skill or high education (Gelatt, 2020 para. pgs. 72-73)
- **Family-sponsored immigrants** - immigrants that receive visas independently and not from employers; often such individuals are assisted by family members as they seek entry into the US; often associated with having low skill or low education (Gelatt, 2020 para. pgs. 72-73)
- **Glass ceiling** - according to Dictionary.com, “an upper limit to professional advancement, especially as imposed upon women, minorities, and other nondominant groups, that is not readily perceived or openly acknowledged” (Retrieved Dec. 2021)
- **Highly skilled immigrants (HSI)** - immigrants that hold a bachelor's degree or higher. (Batalova, J., Fix, M., & Creticos, 2008 pg. 5)
- **Integrated Education and Training (IET)** - According to WIOA, “a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.” Frequently, IETs for ESL students involve industry specific language instruction with some technical and soft skills essential for that industry. (United States Department of Labor, Retrieved September 2022)
- **Migration Policy Institute** - a nonpartisan research group that “seeks to improve immigration and integration policies through authoritative research and analysis, opportunities for learning and dialogue, and the development of new ideas to address complex policy questions” (About page, Retrieved Dec. 2021)
- **Mutual Recognition Agreements** - according to OECD.org, a “principle of international law whereby states party to mutual recognition agreements recognise and uphold legal decisions taken by competent authorities in another member state. Mutual recognition is a process which allows conformity assessments (of qualifications, product...) carried out in one country to be recognised in another country.” That is, two or more countries agree to recognize the credentials or qualifications of workers as

equivalent to their own. (Retrieved September 2022)

- **Other-skilled** - Author's Note: I created this term to refer to individuals that are not categorized as *highly-skilled*. Such individuals have skills, and are therefore not *low-skilled*, however, their skills are not formally recognized by an institution or credentialing body.
- **Soft skills** - According to Investopedia.com "Soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationships with other people. In the workplace, soft skills are considered to be a complement to hard skills, which refer to a person's knowledge and occupational skills. Sociologists may use the term soft skills to describe a person's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) as opposed to intelligence quotient (IQ)" (Kenton, 2021)
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA)** - According to the United States Department of Labor, "The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. WIOA requires states to strategically align their core workforce development programs to coordinate the needs of both job seekers and employers through combined four-year state plans..." (Retrieved December 5, 2021)



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*Brain waste* among highly skilled immigrants is an immediate, urgent issue with multiple stakeholders involved, including policy makers, economists, employers, non-profits, humanitarian workers, and immigrants themselves. The claim of policy for this literature review is resolving the issue of brain waste and *underemployment* among *highly skilled immigrants* (HSI) in the United States would (a) decrease the inequity among immigrants in the United States (b) fill the gap in labor market shortages and (c) positively impact the economy on a local and national level. The body of scholarship that justifies this claim is thematically organized around the major issues contributing to brain waste: language and cultural barriers, federal and local policies, credential recognition, and humanitarian concerns such as employer bias. The first section provides an overview of this complex issue, investigates the major factors contributing to brain waste and analyzes the actors and influencers involved. The second section explores the humanitarian and economic impacts of this topic, and the third section examines possible solutions for the key factors contributing to brain waste and underemployment. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this topic, and its far-reaching impact, this literature review is an attempt to foster the communication, collaboration, and cooperation that is much needed among the multiple actors and stakeholders involved.

#### **Economics and Cultural Wealth**

The theory of Cultural Capital claims that forms of capital other than economic exist, possess intrinsic value, and that such value has ties to economic capital. This section includes a brief history of Cultural Capital including Bourdieu's (1969) original scholarship, *The Forms of Capital*, which places the idea of Cultural Capital to three states, and the work of Yosso (2005)

Community Cultural Wealth, which both challenges and expounds upon Bourdieu. This progression of thought is important because it expands the notion of capital beyond the concrete, validating abstract wealth and reaching beyond the Western, capitalist mindset to include People of Color while simultaneously drawing connections between cultural wealth and economic gains.

### **Bourdieu: Cultural Capital**

The foundational work that articulates cultural capital includes an extensive analysis on the three types of capital and their relation to each other. The need for this theory arose from the concept that a society dominated by capitalism revolves around economic theory, which rejects other forms of capital as irrelevant because they are abstract in nature and difficult to quantify in terms of monetary value. Bourdieu (1969) claimed that the “science of the economy” must “grasp capital and profit in all their forms” (p. 16) and establish laws by which the different forms of capital can be transferred into one another. As such, this scholarship conceptualizes three forms of capital: (a) economic, that is, things that can easily be converted into currency such as property, (b) social, that is, the social ties and connections that afford favors or obligation due to status or association with other individual, and (c) cultural, which is abstract in nature but can be translated into educational credits.

Bourdieu (1969) proposes that cultural capital can be categorized into three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The embodied state represents that which is in a person--their cultural knowledge and heritage--and is linked to their biological capacity (i.e. their memory and lived experience). This form of capital is time-consuming to acquire, difficult to translate into other forms of capital, and is heavily disguised, making it an often unrecognized form of capital. The rate of inheritance of cultural capital depends on the time spent in the culture (i.e. one’s entire life or merely three weeks) and level of saturation (i.e. are all surrounding

members a part of this culture, or is an individual or family unit representing their home culture within the context of a foreign culture). Furthermore, the value of embodied culture is intrinsically contextualized. Similar to currency, its value will fluctuate depending on the situation and environment. For example, knowing how to properly tie a turban is valuable knowledge in the desert, but significantly less so in a place like New York City. Concerning convertibility, the embodied state of cultural capital can be linked to social capital. However, unlike the objectified and institutionalized states, embodied states' abstract nature limits its rapid, concise convertibility to economic capital.

Objectified and institutionalized states of cultural capital are more concrete and have high transferability to other forms of capital. The objectified state is a form of cultural capital that is related to material objects from a culture, such as pottery or clothing, or forms of media like writing or images. Given their concrete nature, they are easily assigned monetary value; however, as Bourdieu (1969) illustrates, the ability of a consumer to consume or use such artifacts depends on embodied capital (i.e. the difference in appreciating an ornate tapestry on a loom and being able to use a loom to successfully create an exquisite tapestry). Similar to objective capital, but less tangible, is the institutionalized state, which is cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications. Unlike the embodied state, this form is not explicitly attached to its bearer, that is, it exists outside of the bearer and is more concrete. Both objective and institutionalized states of cultural capital can be liquidated and transferred to or compared with other forms of capital.

This original scholarship, which proposes three states of cultural capital, is important because Bourdieu (1969) illustrates the connections cultural capital has to economic capital and demonstrates that other forms of capital hold value even if they are not easily transferable to

economic capital, which dominates capitalistic societies. The author further outlines the functional similarities between cultural and economic capital by arguing that economic capital is measured by the time/labor spent while cultural capital has two steps: the time/labor spent in acquiring, and the time/labor spent transferring it. Bourdieu proposes that cultural capital should be measured by the time it takes to acquire it, making it a valuable asset and that cultural capital is worth investing in as it will yield fruit, monetary or otherwise, over time.

### **Yosso: Cultural Wealth**

Building on this foundation, Yosso (2005) critiques Bourdieu's theory on forms of capital, suggesting that his view on how societal structures of hierarchy replicate themselves has been used to justify why "the academic and social outcomes of People of Color are significantly lower than the outcomes of Whites" (p. 70). Drawing from *Critical Race Theory* (CTR), Yosso challenges the traditional interpretations of Bourdieu's work and presents six forms of capital that "comprise community cultural wealth and most often go unacknowledged or unrecognized" (p. 70), namely, aspirational capital, linguistic capital, family capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

Each type of capital in Yosso's theory of cultural wealth has a tendency to be abstract in nature, however, as Bourdieu pointed out, abstractness does not decrease value. Yosso's aspirational capital is defined as one's ability to hold on to aspirations and ideals for the future despite persistent obstacles. That is, one can conceive of possibilities outside of their current circumstances frequently without a tangible way to attain those hopes. Linguistic capital refers to the interpersonal and linguistic skills developed through experiences communicating in multiple languages or in differing styles. The third form of capital, family capital, sounds similar to embodied capital in that it encompasses cultural knowledge. However, it is specifically referring

to the concept of kinship and connection throughout a group of extended family members which may be expanded to include an entire community that contributes to each other's "emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Social capital involves networks of people, individual or collective, that have the potential to provide support (emotional and instrumental) and resources. This type of capital is not limited to social introductions, rather it primarily refers to the idea of overcoming adversity by relying on one's social network.

Navigational capital describes the ability to navigate through social institutions, specifically, "to maneuver through structures of inequality permeated by racism" (p. 80). Building on navigational capital, "resistance capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). This knowledge and skill is developed within communities and family units and is passed down to future generations who are resiliently equipped to "maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo...[and] transform oppressive structures" (p. 81). Yosso developed these six forms of cultural wealth in order to acknowledge the rich forms of capital People of Color possesses and contribute.

This addition to the field of cultural capital is important because Bourdieu's (1969) initial categorization of cultural wealth was limited and did not include the cultural wealth brought to the table by People of Color. In addition, Yosso (2005) highlights that embedded in our system of education is the idea of deficit thinking, the notion that families of color do not have the normative cultural knowledge/skills (what the dominant White majority have set as standardized cultural capital) and must obtain them in education in order to be successful. Yosso seeks to name types of capital beyond what has been classified by the White majority and reveal the cultural wealth of People of Color, particularly aspirational, family, and social capital.

## **Summary**

Both cultural capital and cultural wealth describe types of capital that are often overlooked or discounted because of their abstract natures but are, in fact, no less valuable. This includes (a) Bourdieu's (1969) clarification of cultural capital, that is the three states: embodied, objective, and social, as well as his justification that, like economic capital, cultural capital is worth investment and (b) Yosso's (2005) expansion of cultural capital in order to highlight the cultural wealth specifically originating from People of Color. These two theories will be used to frame this field project because HSI have a wealth of capital, much of which can be transferred into economic capital that positively affects individual companies as well as local and national economies. Related to this is a body of research that demonstrates the practical application of cultural capital/wealth by acknowledging that cultural capital is worth investing in and has ties to economic capital despite its abstract nature. The following sections describe this research and justify the claim that resolving the issue of brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants in the United States would decrease the inequity among immigrants in the United States, fill the gap in labor market shortages, and positively impact the economy on a local and national level.

## **Factors of Brain Waste**

### **Context**

The Migration Policy Institute estimated that over 44.9 million immigrants resided in the United States in 2019, the highest number ever recorded. For the past five years, 48% of arriving immigrants have been classified as highly skilled, that is, holding a bachelor's degree or higher, while only 33% of those born in the United States hold a bachelor's degree or higher

(Batalova and Fix, 2021). Echoing this, Gelatt (2020) estimates that in 2003, 46% of new immigrants were classified as highly skilled, confirming that recent immigrants have an overall higher level of education than the average U.S. native population. This is significant because despite nearly two decades of receiving HSI, the average number of underemployed HSI has not changed. Batalova and Fix estimate that 21% of HSI are underemployed, resulting in what is known as brain waste, the phenomenon that occurs when highly-trained, highly-educated individuals are in an occupational position that fails to access or utilize their developed skill set, resulting in waste. Even with the recent labor shortage crisis, the United States has yet to take advantage of the skilled human capital ready to work. Multiple factors contribute to brain waste among HSI, as well as the rate at which they recover their occupational status. The research discussed in this section demonstrates that the primary factors include: level of English proficiency, cultural knowledge, networking skills, visa category or documented status, origin of degree (US or abroad), occupational field, amount of work experience prior to entry, extent of work experience in the US, and country of origin.

### **Language and Culture**

The most significant factor of underemployment and the largest barrier to HSI is language proficiency (Batalova and Fix 2021; Batalova, Fix, & Creticos 2008; McHug 2017). According to Batalova, Fix, and Creticos (2008), HSI with limited English proficiency were twice as likely to be underemployed or work in low-skill positions as those with high language skills, making English essential for immigrants' integration into the labor market. Batalova and Fix (2021) confirmed that language remains the strongest predictor of underemployment, stating that significantly more HSI who reported low English proficiency were underemployed than those who reported high proficiency in English. In addition, the authors noted the impact of

interrupted careers and the lack of bridge programs, such as advanced *English as a Second Language* (ESL) classes or advanced *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) classes that could help immigrants top off their linguistic fluency, increase their soft skills, and build understanding of American cultural norms. McHug (2017) confirms this, suggesting that while state and federally-funded adult education programs have a large population of HSI, their ESL classes often are not advanced enough or lack the technical language instruction needed to pass academic exams, such as the TOEFL, or be integrated successfully into a specific occupational field. In addition, many HSI are ill-informed about potential government services (Batalova, Fix, & Creticos 2008), further limiting such program's range of impact.

All three of these studies (Batalova and Fix 2021; Batalova, Fix, & Creticos 2008; McHug 2017) include limitations in soft skills, social networks, and understanding of American business culture among the key factors in underemployment. In order to address the issues surrounding language proficiency in an effective and efficient manner, multiple actors and influencers, such as policymakers, non-profits, regulatory bodies, and employers, must engage in communication and collaboration.

## **Actors and Influencers**

### ***Policy***

In addition to language and culture, policy plays an overarching role in brain waste among HSI due to its far reaching effect on all stakeholder and actors involved in every step of the occupational recovery process. Concerning point of entry--the time and/or manner in which an immigrant enters the US--Gelatt (2020) points out that policy makers often attribute more merit to *employer-sponsored immigrants*, assuming they contribute more human capital.

According to Balatova and Fix (2021), such notions are supported by data, as only 8% of



temporary visa holders, most of whom are employer-sponsored, are underemployed. With this data, it is logical to assume that the simplest solution to reducing brain waste is to only allow entry to employer-sponsored international workers; however, doing so would not solve the economic and humanitarian crises that run in tandem with brain waste and underemployment. From an alternative view, Batalova, Fix, & Cretico (2008) call for policy reform but point to language proficiency as the key indicator of integration success. The authors point to other countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom that have limited entry to those with high language proficiency because they view language skills as the primary occupational success factor. However, Gelatt pushes back on limiting entry to those with high linguistic abilities and advanced education. Aligning with Yosso (2005), this author points out the unacknowledged qualities and skills immigrants with emerging English language abilities and alternative education (methods for transferring knowledge from one generation to the next) provide, including social and family support in the often uncertain, unstable situations surrounding relocation to a new country.

Upon entering the United States, language proficiency has traditionally emerged as the primary need of HSI, with underemployment being secondary. While private organizations and government services have risen to address both issues and provide personal assistance, such programs are frequently expensive, time-consuming, and can only serve a small number of HSI (Sumption, 2013). Batalova et al. (2008) seek to reframe the issue of language and employment by suggesting that they are two sides of the same coin. The authors claim that policies dealing with language learning and workforce development are misaligned because they insist that HSI must learn English before joining occupational training programs. Although some language

fluency<sup>1</sup> needs to be present in order for a *workforce development* program to be successful, the researchers propose that both barriers can be addressed at the same time by programs that provide instruction in the language and soft skills needed for industry-specific occupations. Similar to Batalova et al., McHug (2017) insists on the need for policies that create a more direct pathway to sustainable employment. However, the author acknowledges the difficulties of such a task. Most licensing boards are occupation-specific with each state having differing qualifications and standards, thus reform is needed at the state and federal level.

Unlike Sumption (2013), McHug (2017) sees local adult education programs as the most qualified to address the industry-specific state needs, however, nonprofits and similar organizations bearing the weight of the solution are problematic. The author acknowledges that in order for such programs to effectively bridge skill gaps, which vary by state and occupation, the classes would need to be industry-specific on a level that is typically not sustainable by current structures within adult education which must have a high enough level of enrollment to justify opening a class for a single occupation.

In summary, adult education services were designed to apply to a wide audience, so while they are equipped to provide general English language instruction, HSI often have to explore other options as their career in the United States progresses. After some time in the United States, HSI seek to regain their previous occupational status, and credential recognition becomes the next major barrier. Sumption (2013) acknowledges the limited communication between employers, regulatory bodies, and policy makers. There are so many actors involved, each with differing policies, that pathways to employment are unclear for both employers and potential employees.

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<sup>1</sup> Fluency is used here as a linguistic term which refers to students' ability to put meaningful words into sentences with some speed and in ways that lead to communication, not the notion of being totally fluent in a language.

### ***Credentials and Education***

Research clearly indicates that credential recognition is another primary issue (and perhaps the most complex) in brain waste and underemployment among HSI on an international and local level (Batalova and Fix, 2021; Damelang et al., 2020; Sumption, 2013). Sumption (2013) in particular notes that the complexity is due to the sheer amount of players and actors involved, such as multinational corporations, professional associations, government agencies, universities, credential-assessment bodies, and nonprofits. Sumption (2013) also highlights the moving pieces involved: the abstract nature of recognition, the variety of recognition across regulated and unregulated occupations, and the different demands and standards of each country. Each of these elements contributes to the skill gaps that occur when a professional relocates to a new country. Sumption indicates that while organizations exist to evaluate foreign credentials, it is unclear the value or credibility given to such evaluations by employers. The same author also comments on the potential usefulness of *Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA)*--agreements between countries (two or more) to acknowledge each others' assessment results, such as certifications, credentials or tests, as equivalent to their own--while acknowledging that the political parties involved in MRA typically view economic concerns as the issue and may not see credential recognition as a key factor worth considering.

At the local level, factors in credential recognition include origin of certificate/degree, level of education, field of study, and extent of work experience in a field relevant to that being applied for. Batalova, Fix, Creticos (2008) hold that the origin of a credential is the primary factor of success, while Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016) point out the impact of HSI's level of education, stating that those with a bachelor's degree are three times more likely to be in a low-skills position than those with a masters or doctorate degree. Batalova and Fix (2021)

confirm this, stating that while 77% of HSI with a Masters degree and 91% of HSI with a PhD are in highly skilled positions, only 50% of HSI with a bachelor's degree are in highly skilled positions.

Batalova and Fix's (2021) research demonstrated how drastically underemployment was affected by differing occupational fields. The authors' analysis revealed that the highest rates of underemployment are among HSI with bachelor degrees in law (~42.5%), education (~37.5%), and agriculture (~37.5%) while those with degrees in STEM majors have the lowest rates of underemployment (~16% in architecture; ~15% in health; ~14% in computers; ~10% in biology)<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, those born in the United States had slightly higher levels of underemployment in biology and life sciences than both internationally trained immigrants and *U.S.-educated immigrants*. In addition, multiple reports pointed out that U.S. employers are unfamiliar with foreign credentials, leading to bias or resulting in misinformation (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

Although many reports propose that credential recognition would decrease underemployment and brain waste (Batalova, Fix, and Creticos 2008; Gelatt 2020; McHug 2017), a relevant quantitative study conducted in Germany suggests that credential recognition alone will not solve the issue of underemployment and brain waste among HSI. Similar to the United States, Germany is currently receiving a wave of HSI and is experiencing a shortage of skilled labor. However, unlike the United States, Germany has partial credential recognition (a credential is considered similar, but has skill gaps that need to be addressed) as well as full credential recognition (credential is equivalent).

In 2020, Damelang et al. sought to understand if foreign credential recognition would reduce barriers to employment and, therefore, reduce brain waste among HSI. The authors

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<sup>2</sup> Percentages are displayed with ~ to indicate that they were read from a bar graph.

conducted a study among roughly 400 employers in order to measure the effects of foreign credential recognition of skilled immigrants concerning their access to relevant (in their field) employment in three occupational sectors: hotel specialist (customer service), precision machinist (blue-collar), and logistics managers (white-collar). This study is relevant because it directly answers a question proposed by Sumption (2013), namely: Do employers value credential assessment conducted by bodies outside their organization? Furthermore, because Germany is seated in the heart of Europe and a member of the European Union, they are more familiar with Mutual Recognition Agreements (also a concern of Sumption's).

Damelang et al. (2020) concluded that while recognition of foreign credentials helps to narrow the gap between native and foreign-educated and serves as a useful tool for employee screenings, it does not harmonize the difference between native and foreign workers, that is, make equally likely for an individual to be placed on the short list of potential candidates to hire. This research illustrates that full recognition of credentials only comes close to closing the gap if the individual has nine years of experience or was trained in a higher quality system than the host country. Interestingly, the results demonstrated that experience overall held more weight than credential recognition. Also, as pointed out by Batalova and Fix (2021), results varied by occupation. Overall, this study confirms that brain waste is an interdisciplinary issue that cannot be resolved by a single approach.

In summation, the cause of brain waste and underemployment among HSI cannot be attributed to one factor alone, with language and cultural barriers, policy, credential recognition all playing a role. Based on the research cited in this section, HSI must achieve proficiency in English, identify relevant resources and networks, and obtain or possess recognized credentials and/or experience (by seeking a U.S.-based degree, arriving with extensive experience, or

working in a STEM related field) in order to recover their occupation status. Policy highly influences this progression of occupational recovery and stands as an authority on major humanitarian and economic issues facing the United States today.

### **Impacts Associated with Brain Waste**

#### **Economic**

According to Batalova and Fix (2021) the immigrant population grew by 42% between 2010 and 2019. Given HSI's close ties to the labor market, such an increase has significant implications for the economy at the local and national level, affecting governing bodies, business' outcomes, as well as individual migrants. At the local level, a report by Batalova and Fix (2021) notes a compelling trend occurring for cities with an influx of HSI, namely, five out of the ten states with the highest influx of HSI also ranked top in the nation for highest GDP growth. Barker (2020) affirms such trends in her discourse "The Economics of Brain Waste," where she discusses how brain waste among HSI negatively affects a country's economy. According to Barker, "When high skilled immigrants are employed at a level equivalent to their qualifications, there is a greater level of capital-skill complementary, which enables a higher domestic rate of productivity growth" (p. 106). Therefore, when companies under-employ HSI, they are actively losing "some of the productivity and returns on investment" (Barker, p. 106).

Barker's (2020) review goes beyond GDP growth and considers the dire population statistics for many *developed countries*, including the United States. According to her literature review, 32.3% of the average developed country's workforce is made up of people fifty years of age or older. Thus, roughly one-third of the current labor force will retire by 2035. Furthermore, 44.3% of the these countries' overall population is fifty years of age or older meaning that HSI

are becoming essential not only to fill the worker shortage but to boost the population as well, showing that both high-skilled and *other-skilled* immigrants are contributing to the economic growth of the United States (Barker, 2020).

Economic and humanitarian issues of equity are further linked by Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016). The authors' report reveals that HSI men in low-skilled positions earned on average \$56,000 per year less than individuals in high-skilled positions. Based on this data, if HSI in low-skill positions regained their occupational status, the U.S. government would receive an additional estimated \$10.2 billion a year in taxes. Barker (2020) also claims that lowering levels of brain waste would increase government revenues, decreasing the "tax burdens of future generations" (p. 107). This evidence suggests that parties and stakeholders on the fringe of this issue, such as economists and policy makers, have much to gain by investing in the remediation of brain waste in HSI. Thus, multiple authors (Barker; Batalova et al.; Gelatt 2020) point out that policy improvement would allow the economy to benefit more from workers already highly skilled and in the United States, filling the labor shortage gap. However, in order for effective policy to be initiated successfully, other humanitarian issues besides monetary must be addressed.

### **Humanitarian**

As HSI regain their occupational status three major *glass ceilings* emerge: a) perceptions that what is not quantifiable and documentable is not valuable, b) rooted beliefs that other countries are inferior to the US, and c) employer bias, specifically within the hiring process. Bourdieu (1969) and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural capital and cultural wealth counter these nationalistic postions with Bourdieu claiifying that cultural capital, though abstract in nature, has

ties to economic capital which is highly valued in capitalistic societies, and Yosso affirming the intrinsic capital possessed by People of Color that is often unacknowledged.

Similar to Yosso (2005), Gelatt (2020) acknowledges other forms of human capital beyond that which is evident (i.e. language proficiency and level of education) and pushes back on the view that brain waste could be reduced by selecting immigrants for entry into the United States based on language proficiency or job placement (Batalova and Fix 2021; Batalova, Fix, & Cretico 2008). Gelatt (2020) holds that levels of education and skill sets are not the sole determiners of labor market success for immigrants. The researcher used New Immigrant Survey to study longitudinal labor market trends in order to show the value of *family sponsored immigrants* and challenge the dominant view that employer-sponsored immigrants contribute more human capital. While the results did not quite reveal what the author intended (according to the data employer-sponsored immigrants do contribute more *quantifiable, reportable* human capital), the study did confirm that immigrants overall have higher levels of education than the average U.S. population and reveal that immigrants tend to invest in entrepreneurial work more than individuals born in the United States. The second is significant for this discussion because it shows the adaptability of HSI; even if their skills do not match the labor market, they are able to adjust and contribute in significant ways.

Gelatt (2020) further notes the unrecognized ways that many immigrants, who have emerging language abilities and skills that are not formally certified, contribute to the labor market as homemakers and caregivers. As evidence, Gelatt cites a survey of family-sponsored immigrants conducted in Canada. The survey revealed that 40% of *sponsors* of spouses and 48% of sponsors of parents agreed that having relatives with them helped them work more hours. It is clear that the filling of such roles allows HSI to invest more time and energy in their careers,



resulting in better occupational outcomes. Therefore, this study recommends that policy makers view immigrants not as individuals but as family units who, working together, contribute to the economy.

Another humanitarian barrier for HSI is the U.S. notation that other countries' programs and qualifications are inferior to U.S. programs and qualifications (Batalova, Fix, & Creticos, 2008; McHug, 2017). According to Batalova et al. (2008),:

The current approach that many public and private bodies in the United States take typically assumes that other countries' educational and training programs are inferior. As a result, internationally trained candidates must assume the burden of proving that their coursework or skills should be accepted (pg. 34).

McHug (2017) confirms this trend continues over a decade later, citing an IMPRINT survey conducted in 2015 which showed that 40% of HSI surveyed said that employers unrecognition of foreign experience was barrier, and 35% said that employers unrecognition of credentials was barrier, confirming that employers tend to discount foreign qualifications and experience.

While employers' limited information on foreign qualifications and their level of equivalency to U.S. qualifications is a factor of HSI underemployment, employer bias, internal prejudices and racism are also present and must be addressed. McHug (2017) points to a study conducted in Canada where researchers sent identical resumes to employers, but changed the names to sound English, Indian, or Chinese. According to the study, English sounding names were 35% more likely to be called in for an interview. In 2008, Batalova, Fix, & Creticos noted that among HSI, Latinos had higher rates of underemployment. A second study conducted by Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016) documented that highly skilled African and Latino immigrants showed higher levels of brain waste than Europeans or Asians. More recently,

Batalova and Fix (2021) confirmed that employer bias continues in the United States, stating that in 2019, 32% of highly skilled Latino workers were underemployed, the highest percentage of any race group, with Black workers following close behind. Thus, over a decade of research confirms that misinformation concerning foreign credentials is not the only factor involved; racism and employer bias also play a crucial role in brain waste and underemployment.

In summation, the impact of brain waste extends beyond individual HSI, affecting economics and family units. Local GDP growth is connected to incoming HSI, and the federal government stands to gain an additional \$10 billion in tax revenue annually if the issue of brain waste is resolved. In addition, by expanding capitalistic notions and acknowledging other forms of capital, such as cultural capital, aspirational capital, family capital, and social capital, previously marginalized groups will be included in ways that lead to an overall increase of national wealth. Considering all that stands to be gained by addressing brain waste among HSI, a body of literature has emerged in order to analyze effective strategies, approaches, and methods to reduce brain waste and underemployment among HSI.

### **Potential Solutions for Brain Waste**

Given the humanitarian and economic impacts, multiple stakeholders, direct and indirect, have something to gain by resolving brain waste and underemployment among HSI. Potential solutions have risen from actors and influencers in order to address the key barriers discussed above, including: methods for efficient and relevant language acquisition, approaches to policy reform, and strategies for developing occupational pathways for HSI.

### **Language and Culture**

The most significant factor of brain waste among HSI is language proficiency (Batalova, Fix, & Creticos, 2008; Batalova & Fix, 2021; McHug, 2017). Multiple suggestions have been

made to remedy this issue. The results of the literature review by Batalova and Fix (2021) suggest that more bridge programs offering advanced or ESL or ESP classes need to be developed. Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016) add that immigrants need to be more informed about how to navigate the labor market. In response, McHug's (2017) report recommends creating databases that tailor information for how to access specific industries and adds that personal career assistance needs to be provided. However, as noted by Sumption (2013), merely informing HSI of opportunities will not resolve the issue, suggesting that nonprofits can only provide personalized career assistance to a small number of immigrants, limiting this solution's impact. Furthermore, multiple authors declared that soft-skill development needs to be included in any program that seeks to bridge the gap in underemployment of HSI (Batalova, Fix, & Creticos, 2008; McHug, 2017).

In order to maximize impact, ESL programs must form alliances. Batalova, Fix, and Creticos (2008) claim that language learning programs and workforce training programs are misaligned because they insist that HSI first learn English and then join work-related training programs. The authors recommend combining the two separate fields and utilizing distance learning in order to create fast-track programs co-constructed by language programs and employer groups, enabling HSI to top off skills more efficiently. A more recent qualitative study by Mollica (2020) confirms Batalova, Fix, and Creticos's (2008) suggestion that ESL programs need to develop sustainable partnerships with community colleges and employers. Such partnerships would allow all groups to collaborate and collect data on *best practices* for serving HSI. In addition, Mollica points out such partnerships are necessary as employers provide the networking piece necessary for HSI career progression as well as drive labor market trends. However, in order for such alliances to be fostered, they must be supported by policies.

## Policy

The U.S. policy's overreaching effect on all aspects of brain waste make it a key actor in the resolution of this brain waste and underemployment among HSI. McHug (2017) acknowledges that progress has been made by such legislation as the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act* (WIOA), a program designed to improve the US's workforce system. However, updates and reforms are needed as the program seeks to find a more streamlined approach. Scholars continue to call for policy reform in communication procedures, licensing requirements, and clear employment pathways for HSI. For example, both Batalova, Fix, and Creticos (2008) and McHug's (2017) literature reviews recommend building systems of communication between government grantors and the programs receiving the funds. McHug especially claims that programs need to be able to give feedback so that policies concerning federally funded grants can be modified and best practices developed.

Additionally, multiple authors agree that licensings qualifications/requirements need to be simplified (Batalova, Fix, & Bachmeier, 2016; McHug, 2017; Sumption, 2013). Batalova, Fix, and Bachmeier (2016) even suggest allowing partial licensing or conditional recognition in order to create more flexible pathways. However, the study by Damelang et al. (2020) implies that credential recognition, even partial credential recognition, may not have the grand effect so anticipated by scholars. Furthermore, Sumption's point that many licensure entities differ depending on the state and the occupation must be considered. Similar to Sumption (2013), McHug (2017) examines the potential benefits of MRA, pointing out that such a policy, while originally designed to mediate between countries, could be modified to mediate credentials between states. This study suggests the following action steps be taken: reduce requirements that are unnecessary for HSI, increase bridge programs, evaluate programs that have successfully

connected HSI to the labor market, and determine what elements of adult education and workforce training could complement the process. Using policy's far reaching influence to tie all actors and influence together will augment the other impacts being made by ESL programs and credentialing bodies.

### **Credentials and Education**

There is a need for licensing requirements to be reformed as well as a need for bridge programs, traditionally found in adult education programs, to adapt and effectively aid HSI as they seek to top off their skills (Batalova and Fix, 2021; McHug, 2017). However, some scholars, for example Mollica (2020) and Sumption (2013) do not envision adult education and ESL programs as being the sole actor responsible for this reform. Sumption (2013) places more weight on employers, suggesting they provide an adaptation period where HSI fill a position that matches his/her credentials and experience with the company providing the training necessary to fill any skills gap. This solution would allow for targeted, advanced language instruction, soft skills training for individual company cultures, and technical, industry-specific training that would close any gap in hard skills. Simultaneously, HSI would have early access to their field and have the opportunity to make a sustainable wage. However, such an approach is relatively new, thus there is limited research with data convincing employers that such an expense is in their best interests.

A qualitative study conducted by Mollica (2020) suggests a compromise between Sumption (2013) and Batalova and Fix (2021) and points to apprenticeships and *Integrated Education and Training* (IET) strategy. IET is a strategy developed between WIOA partners in

order to create career pathways<sup>3</sup>. According to Mollica (2020), successful IET apprenticeships include industry specific English, offer context-based ESL instruction or courses co-taught by language instructors and industry trainers, include instruction in social, legal and cultural issues, partner with employers directly, and offer advising services.

Mollica (2020) conducted 66 semi-structured interviews with ESL teachers, ESL program staff, state and national leaders across 30 programs. The researcher's goal was to explore programs that provided apprenticeship pathways for HSI and examine how they prepared HSI for apprenticeships. The findings suggest that IET programs of this nature are limited and exhibit mixed levels of success. The researcher identified three different models used by programs to prepare HSI for apprenticeships: a) short industry-specific ESL class prior to the interview with an apprenticeship, b) IET programs that funnel candidates to specific apprenticeships, c) embedded ESL hours within an apprenticeship. The results show such programs are time consuming, expensive, and require a combination of partners in order to successfully connect HSI to apprenticeships<sup>4</sup>. However, the researcher concludes that adult education programs have the ability to connect HSI to apprenticeships and doing so would result in social equity and higher levels of economic prosperity.

In summation, the complex nature of brain waste requires a complex solution. Nonetheless, as different bodies of literature discuss approaches from the key factors, several themes emerged: partnerships, increased communication, and adaptation and modification of existing legislation, policy, and programs. While progress is being made by adult education programs, policy makers, and employers, its impact has yet to be far reaching. More research is

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<sup>3</sup> While this author uses IET to refer to the strategy as well as program, it is important to note that IET has come to refer to the programs or classes that utilize this strategy as the basis for connecting workers to employers. Typically, IETs involve industry specific language instruction with some technical hard skills essential for that industry.

<sup>4</sup> Note, while Mollica's study exclusively links IETs to apprenticeships, other IETs directly funnel students into direct employment; there are many variations of IETs.

needed to determine the best practices and strategies for reducing brain waste and underemployment among HSI in the United States.

### **Summary**

This literature review claims that resolving the issue of brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants in the United States would increase the equity among immigrants in the United States, narrow the gap in labor market shortages, and positively impact the economy on a local and national level. Evidence that supports this claim includes a theoretical foundation by Bourdieu (1986), who claims that all forms of capital have roots in economic capital and cultural capital should not be discounted because of its abstract nature, as well as Yosso (2005) who expounds upon Bourdieu in order to name additional cultural wealth that is contributed by people of color. Research suggests that such a theory, from an economic and humanitarian perspective, is accurate and applies to the current crises affecting the United States today. Organizations (such as nonprofits and adult education), employers, credentialing bodies, and policy makers need to open gateways of communication so that best practices can be established as each work to create pathways for HSI who seek to regain their occupational status and meet employer demands. This claim and body of evidence addresses brain waste among HSI by acknowledging the main factors contributing to brain waste such as language and culture, policy, credential recognition and misinformation combined with negative attitudes embedded in society and by drawing on a body of research that recommends adjustments and reforms that each influencer must make in order to limit brain waste, resolve labor shortages, and boost the local and national economy. For my field project, I created a website that shows employers how hiring immigrants is an economical, equitable, and sustainable business decision by sharing data on current immigrant populations in the U.S. and

future workforce trends. I also clarified common misconceptions about non-citizen workers, provided resources for companies hiring non-citizens, listed ESL partners for the state of Tennessee, outlined methods for investing in language learners, and highlighted a company who is actively developing pathways for their language learners to regain their previous occupational status. All of this was done in efforts to include employers in the conversation as multiple agencies and governing bodies seek to reduce brain waste among highly skilled immigrants.



## CHAPTER III

### THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

#### **Brief Description of the Project**

After conducting the literature review it became apparent that, while many organizations and government agencies are working to resolve brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants, there is a major gap in the plan to resolve the issue. Most agents are investing in programs that result in language development for immigrants or creating fast tracks for certification, like the recent act that was passed to expedite the time needed for a CNA license due to the incredible worker shortage. Both of these approaches are needed and those pushing this strategy should continue their work; however, I approached the issue from a different angle. Excessive amounts of training can still result in underemployment if the employers themselves do not see the applicant as a valuable asset. I strongly believe that immigrants and international workers have a wealth of skill and knowledge to offer U.S businesses, yet many companies are unaware of the wealth of untapped resources.

I created a website designed to target employers, directly connecting them with the resources they need in order to invest in immigrant and international workers. This website a) highlights current data concerning HSI and workforce trends companies need to be aware of in an ever-changing market, b) outlines the process for hiring immigrants while providing resources to outside agencies such as USCIS.gov, c) provides a list of ESL service providers and resources for the state of Tennessee as well as different ways to invest in immigrant workers and connections to an ESL consultant, and e) contains an exclusive interview with Anson Green, a leader at Tyson Foods who is spearheading the company's investment in their immigrant workers with their adult education program Upward Academy. While this website is targeting the tri-state

area (Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas), it can serve as a blueprint for other states, who have their own resources and models to share.

### Development of the Project

This section shows the contents of the website.

Home page					
(logo) <b>Home</b>	<b>Why hire Immigrants</b>	<b>How to Hire</b> <i>Hiring Lawful Residents</i>  <i>Hiring International Workers</i>  <i>How do people get Green Cards</i>  <i>Can Employers Petition for Green Cards?</i>	<b>Ways to Invest</b>	<b>Resources</b>  <i>Partners for English Classes</i>  <i>Companies Leading the Way</i>  <i>Additional Resources</i>	<b>About</b>
Slider of stats					
Stat: By 2030 97% of the net workforce growth will be immigrants and their children.			Image - man with tools		
Stat: Did you know the average immigrant has a higher level of education than the average American?			Image - man outside workplace		
Stat: The U.S. government is losing \$10.2 billion a year in tax revenue because highly skilled immigrants are in low skilled positions.			Image - woman on computer		
Ready to diversify your hiring pool?	Concerned about equity and sustainability?	<b>Hire and invest in immigrants</b>	Want to lower hiring costs and increase employee retention?	Unsure about your future workforce?	
Need more information about upskilling your employees?			Struggling to find the right fit for your company culture?		
One company is leading the way...					

<p>TYSON LOGO + Image of Anson Green</p>	<p>See interview with Anson Green, an Economic Opportunity leader at Tyson Foods, and learn more about why and how this company is investing in their English language learners.</p>
<p><b>Footer (at the end of every page)</b>          Interested in a consultation or want more information?          Contact me</p>	

<p>Why hire immigrants</p>	
<p>Hiring immigrants is not just a good investment-it's good business.</p>	
<p>Frank came to the US in 2019. Since then, he has started his own remodeling company which specializes in complete remodeling for residential and commercial projects. Click his logo to visit his website.</p>	
<p>Learn more about this study by the Center for American Progress.</p>	<p>1. In the next 10 years, immigrants and their children will make up 97% of net workforce growth.</p> <p>In the next 15 years, Baby Boomers will be retiring from the workplace. Who will replace them? A study conducted by Center for American Progress shows that between 2020 and 2030, 97% of the people filling their positions will be immigrants or children of immigrants. Are you ready to meet this turn in the road?</p>
<p>Need to evaluate international credentials?          Check out World Education Services</p>	<p>2. The average immigrant has a higher level of education than the average American.</p> <p>The talent you have been searching for may have already walked through your doors. Many immigrants are highly skilled in their occupation, but are forced into underemployment because of uncertainty about their credentials or their language skills. Anyone can learn a language, but not every person will be a perfect fit for your company culture and values. Investing in a skill boost is much easier than reforming personalities or constantly trying to find the right fit for your industry.</p>
<p>Want to learn more about the research behind untapped talent?          See research by the Migration Policy Institute</p>	<p>3. Access untapped talent while raising employee retention and lowering hiring costs.</p> <p>Many highly skilled immigrants just need to brush up their language and culture skills in order to reclaim their occupational status. Investing in English language learners shows you are investing in their future with your company, resulting in a reduction of hiring costs and an increase in employee retention.</p>

	If you have international workers in your company you have tons of untapped talent!
Learn more about this study at SpringerLink	<p>4. Combat population decline.</p> <p>According to a study entitled “The Economics of Brain Waste,” the population of many developed countries, including the US, is declining at an alarming rate. 44.3% of these countries’ overall population is fifty years of age or older meaning that immigrants and international workers are becoming essential not only to fill the worker shortage but to boost the population as well. This shows that both high-skilled and other-skilled immigrants are contributing to the economic growth of the US. Investing in foreign workers now is preparation for the future.</p>
Learn more about immigrant's connection to GDP growth at Migration Policy Institute	<p>5. GDP growth has been linked to increased immigrant populations.</p> <p>On the local level, a recent report by the Migration Policy Institute notes a compelling trend for cities in the US with an influx of highly skilled immigrants. Five out of the ten states with the highest influx of immigrants also ranked top in the nation for highest GDP growth. Other reports affirm such trends confirming that brain waste among highly skilled immigrants negatively affects a country’s economy. In fact, according to financial experts, employing skilled immigrants at a level that matches their qualifications leads to a higher balance of capital and skill, resulting in higher productivity growth. However, companies that underemploy immigrants are actively losing on investment returns.</p>
Is it really \$10.2 Billion? See the research changing minds at the Migration Policy Institute.	<p>6. A deficit of \$10.2 billion that everyone is missing out on. Another report by the Migration Policy Institute reveals that highly skilled immigrants in low-skilled positions earned on average \$56,000 less per year than individuals in high-skilled positions. Based on this data, if immigrants in low-skill positions regained their occupational status, the US government would receive an additional estimated \$10.2 billion a year in taxes. That is a large piece of the pie that everyone is missing out on.</p>
You may be wondering.. but isn't time wasted when workers have to acquire the language? Wouldn't it just be simpler for me to hire someone who already speaks English?	<p>(HIDDEN HOVER)</p> <p>There is an astounding amount of wealth attached to cultural capital. A modern scholar, Yosso, claims that there are six forms of cultural capital attached to people of color, but that such forms are often unacknowledged and discredited as capital. If you wish to go further back, Bourdieu, a French intellectual, elaborates on other forms of capital besides economic capital. He outlines the three states of capital, namely, economic (things you can buy/sell of monetary value), social (social ties, connections, those off-the</p>

<p>In short, not necessarily</p> <p>→ A philosophical approach.. Learn more.</p>	<p>-record favors), and cultural. Though cultural capital is abstract in nature it can be made of tangible things (a basket) that have monetary value or knowledge (how to make the basket) which takes much more time to acquire. Bourdieu argues such knowledge is valuable because as we say in the modern world, time is money.</p> <p>The point is this, the wealth of knowledge and experience someone from a different country brings to your company is intrinsically valuable. Not only did it take years to obtain, it is also a unique and rare set of abilities in the current market, which is naturally full of Americans who, while individuals with particular skills and experiences, are all from a similar culture and were trained with a similar mindset.</p>
<p>Hiring and investing in immigrants is a decision of economic stability, equity, and sustainability.</p>	

How to Hire			
<p><b>Hiring Non-Citizens</b> There are many different processes for hiring a non-citizen, however, for the employer, only one thing matters--Are they authorized to work in the US? The answer to this question depends on their status. Here is a basic road map to get you started and some resources to keep you going.</p>			
Status Pathways			
<p><b>Green card?</b></p> <p>A Permanent Resident card or Lawful Permanent Resident card. This allows non-citizens to work without restriction in the US. If someone is still waiting for their Green Card, they could still be eligible to work. Check for an I-551</p>	<p><b>Immigrant</b> A non-US citizen who already lives in the country. If this individual has a green card, they are ready to work</p>	<p><b>Nonimmigrant</b> A highly skilled international worker that US employers hire to fill specific positions at their companies. An employer sponsored visa is needed.</p>	<p><b>Employer Sponsored Visa</b></p> <p>An individual who does not reside in the US can be invited to work in the US through a work visa.</p> <p>Employers select a specific candidate for a role in the</p>
	<p><b>Green card holders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ready to work</li> <li>- No additional cost</li> </ul>	<p><b>Visa Holders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Petition Needed</li> <li>- Additional cost</li> </ul>	

stamp in their passport.			company, then petition and pay for an employer-sponsored visa.
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Routes and Resources Every situation is unique. Find the solutions that fit your business.	
<b>Hiring Immigrant Workers</b>  Have you found excellent local talent but are uncertain about the hiring process? Here is a step-by-step guide with additional resources.	<b>Hiring Non-immigrant Workers</b>  Are you in need of someone with a special set of skills and abilities? Having trouble hiring locally? Hire internationally.
<b>How do People Get Green Cards?</b>  There are many paths to a Green Card. Find the best solution for you.	<b>Can Employers Petition for a Person to Get a Green Card?</b>  A step-by-step guide with links to additional resources.
A word from your future employees...	
<b>Mercy</b> I would like to tell US employers to not be afraid to help immigrants to grow. We can offer them an excellent job, with high quality and production, and a love for what we do.	
<b>Amanda</b> I want American businesses to know that there are immigrants with many skills and work experience who want to be valued for our knowledge and not for our nationality. We just need the opportunity to learn the language, to communicate effectively, and to be able to share our wealth of knowledge.	
<b>Adelaida</b> I'd like to say to employers.. that there is a large population of Latino immigrants with different professions, most of whom made their countries prosper. They no longer occupy relevant positions and waste their time in factories...Take advantage of their talent as they are excellent professionals and your business will prosper because of their creativity and initiative, which is difficult to find.	

Hiring Lawful Residents	
What documentation does an immigrant need to be hired? You have three options.	
Permanent Resident	Stamp in Passport

<p>The Permanent Resident Card, also known as the Green Card because of its color, means that an individual is fully authorized to work in the US without restriction.</p> <p>Visit USCIS.gov for examples</p>	<p>Some may have applied for their Permanent Resident Card, but they are waiting to receive it. These individuals may still be eligible to work. Check their passport for the I-551 stamp.</p> <p>Visit USCIC.gov for examples</p>
<p>Substantial Presence No Green Card and no stamp? A person may still be eligible to work if they pass the Substantial Presence test. Basically, a person needs to have been in the US for a total of 183 days in the past three years.</p> <p>Visit IRS.gov for the exact formula</p>	
<p>Common Questions</p>	
<p>1. Filling out the tax forms looks complicated. How do I do that?</p> <p>The IRS has provided a step-by-step video for filling out tax information for noncitizens. Check it out at <a href="http://irsvideos.gov">irsvideos.gov</a>.</p>	<p>2. I want to hire someone who doesn't have a Green Card. What can I do?</p> <p>It is illegal to hire someone without work authorization, but as an employer, you can petition for them to receive a Green Card.</p>
<p>3. I'm unsure about a potential employee's status. What should I do?</p> <p>One way to verify a person's status and work eligibility is to visit <a href="http://E-verify.gov">E-verify.gov</a>. This government website will help you determine someone's status.</p>	
<p>IMAGE</p>	<p>Still wondering about completing the Form I-9 for noncitizens?</p> <p><a href="#">Click here for a list of acceptable documents</a></p>

### Hiring International Workers

1. Determine what kind of talent you need.

Hiring international workers can be an involved process, so make sure that you have a specific role that you are hiring for. Often companies hire internationally when they can't find the talent they need locally.

2. Learn more about your visa options.

There are many, many visa options out there. Are you hiring someone for a temporary position or do you want them to stay long-term? If you are hiring an individual, are they bringing a family along? Does their spouse also want to work? There is a lot to think about. Check out this list of temporary work visas.

3. Get a certificate from the US Department of Labor.

In order for international workers to join the US workforce, you have to prove that particular talent is needed and you could not find it locally. Visit this site for an outline of the process.

4. Petition the USCIS for a visa.

The exact procedure for this step will vary depending on what kinds of status you are applying for. Check out this helpful guide for USCIS.

Looking for more information on hiring international workers?  
Betterteam.com has an excellent outline of the process.

How do people get Green Cards?

There are many ways for people to get a Green Card. Typically individuals obtain Green Cards because of their situation or documentation status.

Employment

This category could be based on a person's skills, training, level of education, occupation, ability to invest financially in the US economy, as well as the current demands in the US workforce.

Family with Citizenship

A person can apply for a Green Card if they are or were an immediate relative of a US citizen.

Refugees or Asylees

Refugees and asylees are people who fled their home country because they were in an unlivable situation. Both are eligible to apply for a Green Card after living in the US for one year.

Crime Victims

Those who have been the victim of abuse, human trafficking or other violent crimes and have obtained a certain documentation status by being helpful to government officials investigating criminal activity are eligible for Green Cards.

Special Circumstances



<p>Individuals from specific countries, religions, or those with specific occupations may be eligible depending on world affairs and current treaties.</p>
<p><b>Other Categories</b></p> <p>There are other ways for individuals to obtain a Green Card depending on how long they have been in the U.S., where they were born, their nationality, earlier world affairs, and other circumstances.</p>

<p>Can employers petition for Green Cards? → See this overview of Form I-140</p>
<p><b>What's Form I-140?</b></p> <p>Form I-140 is a petition for employment authorization (Green Card) based on a person's skill and education, and in some cases, the offer of a full-time position in the US.</p>
<p><b>Who makes the petition?</b></p> <p>Depending on a person's skill, some people can petition for themselves, but employers also have the ability to petition.</p>
<p><b>Does it cost money?</b></p> <p>Yes, there is currently a \$700 fee for this petition. Click here to visit <a href="https://uscis.gov">USCIS.gov</a> and learn more information about fees.</p>
<p><b>What are the steps for employers?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read the instructions for Form I-140.</li> <li>2. Get approval from the Department of Labor for a Permanent Labor Certificate.</li> <li>3. Finish filling out Form I-140.</li> <li>4. Pay your fees.</li> <li>5. Provide supporting documents or needed.</li> </ol>

Ways to Invest		
<p>Every company's situation is unique. Find the right solutions for your business needs.</p>	<p>Start your own program, On-site, After hours</p>	<p>Connect with a consultant</p>
	<p>This is an excellent solution if you are ready to start investing in your English learners with classes specifically designed for your company. Hire an English teacher to start working with your employees and select a suitable curriculum, or work with a consultant who can conduct a needs assessment and design a curriculum catered to your specific needs.</p>	

	Adult Education, On-site, During the paid workday	See what Tyson is doing
	A new era is approaching--one that is concerned about equity and economical security. Show your employees you are invested in their future with you by offering Adult Education courses at your company during the paid workday.	
	English Classes, Off-site, via Third-party	
	Not ready to start your own program? Many companies have partnerships with local organizations that provide language training and workforce skills development specifically for English language learners. These programs can provide the language skills boost your employees need as they advance in your company.	Meet local providers

Resources	
Partners for English Class	
Soledy came to the US in 2017 and created Latin Soul, a bakery that specializes in cakes and desserts for all occasions. Click her logo to learn more.	<p>Want free English classes for your employees?</p> <p>Many immigrant and international workers are highly skilled in their line of work. Help them reclaim their occupational status and access their untapped talent by boosting their language skills.</p>
What are IELCE programs?	
IELCE (Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education) programs are local agencies that have received the IELCE grant, a federal grant initiated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Funded by the government, their services are free and usually include some combination of English classes, citizenship training, and workforce development.	
Zack Dime 901-930-8026 zdime@whyhopeworks.org	<p>HopeWorks Memphis, Shelby County, TN</p> <p>Nonprofit whose mission is hope and a job for individuals who are marginalized in society, impacted by generational poverty, recently incarcerated, or in a new country. They offer HiSET (GED) courses, Adult English classes, and Career Development training all free of charge. With an extensive network of partners, they are able to provide a Mechanical</p>

	<p>Engineering IET (Integrated Education and Training), Digital Literacy class, and CNA course all specifically designed for English Language Learners.</p> <p><a href="#">View Site</a></p>
<p>Brandon White 615-315-9681 brandon@empowernashville.org</p>	<p>Nashville International Center for Empowerment Nashville, Davidson County , TN</p> <p>NICE provides a variety of services specifically catered to English language learners, such as general English classes, HiSET (GED) courses, citizenship classes, as well as Career Development and Soft Skills training. In addition, they offer two IETs (Integrated Education and Training), a CNA course and a Bilingual Banking program. In the next year, they seek to foster their partnerships in different industries, including healthcare, transportation and logistics, automotive mechanics, and hospitality.</p> <p><a href="#">View Site</a></p>
<p>Charalin Kipker 931-684-8635 charalin.kipker@sctworkforce.org</p>	<p>South Central TN Workforce Alliance Shelbyville, Bedford County, TN</p> <p>While the IELCE office is in Bedford county, this program has contacts throughout South Central Tennessee. In addition to providing free ESL classes for the general public, they are also a partner of Tyson Food Industries and provide ESL classes on site. This IELCE program is very interested in forming more partnerships with local businesses in order to offer industry specific ESL courses via IET (Integrated Education and Training) programs.</p> <p><a href="#">View Site</a></p>
<p>Kelly Valcarce 423-697-3363 kelly.calcarce@tcatathens.edu</p>	<p>TCAT Athens Hamilton County, TN</p> <p>Offers free ESL classes with an emphasis on workforce development and civics education at multiple locations across the county. In addition, they provide pathways to HiSET (GED) attainment and facilitate job placement with local employers. This program is interested in offering on-site ESL instruction to local companies and is willing to cater to employer needs.</p> <p><a href="#">View Site</a></p>

<p>Jenni Rouse 865-264-3578 jenni.rouse@tcatknoxville.edu</p>	<p>TCAT Knox Knox County, TN</p> <p>This IELCE program services east Tennessee with free ESL classes that are offered in-person and online. Their current IETs (Integrated Education and Training) are Home Healthcare Aid, a program partnered with BrightSpring Health Services, and HouseKeeping, an intensive training that leads to an interview with employers. TCAT Knox is very interested in partnering with local businesses in order to construct new IETs around specific employer needs.</p> <p><a href="#">View Site</a></p>
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<p>Companies Leading the Way</p>
<p><b>TYSON LOGO</b> Learn more about what Tyson is doing with their employees who are continuing to learn English, and see how they are accessing untapped talent with their adult education program Upward Academy</p> <p>Tyson has several models of ESL classes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Classes during the paid work day</li> <li>● Classes after hours on-site</li> <li>● Classes via third party</li> </ul>
<p>VIDEO</p>
<p>Video Guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Background and Introductions ..... 0:00-8:25</li> <li>● Untapped Talent ..... 9:07-13:17</li> <li>● Accessing Highly Skilled Immigrants .....13:18-13:57</li> <li>● Tyson’s Workforce ..... 13:58-16:35</li> <li>● Upskilling and Reclaiming Occupations ..... 16:36-26:02</li> <li>● A Different Kind of ESL Class ..... 26:03-28:57</li> <li>● Success Story ..... 28:58-32:56</li> <li>● Why Create Upward Academy ..... 32:57-36:09</li> <li>● Program’s Impact on Employee Retention .....36:10-39:12</li> <li>● English and Robots .....39:13-46:29</li> <li>● Advice for Other Businesses..... 46:30-50:15</li> <li>● Liquid Gold: Pros and Cons of In-House Models of Instruction ..... 46:30-50:15</li> </ul>

Additional Resources Helpful resources to fit your company's needs.	
Image	<p>Jobs4TN</p> <p>This state website is packed with employer resources including, industry projections, labor market data, training opportunities, and connections to state partners. It also serves as a platform connecting job seekers with employers.</p> <p>Check it out →</p>
<p>Grants for Employers</p> <p>The Incumbent Worker Training grant provides funding to Tennessee businesses who want to upgrade their employees' skill sets. Learn the details at Jobs4TN.gov.</p> <p>Check it out →</p>	Image
Image	<p>Communication Skills</p> <p>Communicating with someone who doesn't speak your language can be challenging and at times frustrating.</p> <p>Simplify Language goes beyond intercultural communication training and offers practical solutions for your business' needs. Click their logo to learn more!</p> <p>LOGO</p>

About	
<p>Hello My name is Kimberly Gardner.</p> <p>I am a local Memphian and educator passionate about social justice who saw how a need for equity could be the solution to boosting Tennessee business.</p> <p>I believe that by reducing barriers we can welcome some amazing international talent to the Tennessee workforce, boosting our local and state economics while creating inclusive workplaces that benefit from the wealth of cultural diversity.</p>	Professional Image

With my background in adult education, workforce development, ESL instruction, and digital literacy, I decided to investigate why highly skilled immigrants' talent is being wasted and to do something about it.

This website was created as part of my research, "Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants" for my Masters in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at the University of San Francisco.

Want to learn more about the data behind this project? All my research can be found on USF's website.

See Research

What services can a consultant provide?

Discuss options for investing in your immigrant workforce.

Conduct a needs analysis and determine the best solution for your company.

Collaborate and create training content based on your specific industry.

### **The Project**

The project can be found in its entirety at [www.whyhireimmigrants.com](http://www.whyhireimmigrants.com).

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Conclusions**

Brain waste and underemployment among highly skilled immigrants (HSI) is a major humanitarian and economic issue in the United States today. The average immigrant has a higher level of education than the average American, yet many HSI remain in underemployment. Creating pathways for such workers to reclaim their occupational status is not only a humanitarian action, it is a needed economic action that will have profound impacts on the workforce and the waning U.S. population in the next ten years. While many organizations, non-profits, and government programs have arisen to address this issue, my research suggests that such efforts will not be sufficient to resolve the issue of brain waste. Such a complex phenomenon demands a multidisciplinary approach. It is my conclusion that more efforts need to be made in the private or business sector.

#### **Recommendations**

Directing focus to the employers and providing information on best practices for upskilling current and future staff will reduce several prominent issues. First, the current model in Tennessee of nonprofits leading the way in language instruction and workforce development is not sustainable. Even with government funding, they do not have the capacity to provide services to every potential client in their area. From personal experience, I have seen successful nonprofits exceed their capacity in space and staff resources. The result is a consistently burned out staff that must continue to follow the government requirements that they maintain open enrollment. At the same time, such organizations are unable to provide industry specific instruction for the vast range of industries represented by their clients. While partners can

supplement the industry knowledge, most organizations can only focus on a few industries. However, if the upskilling services were provided by employers then the amount of clients needing such training would be distributed evenly, with each getting the industry specific they need to reclaim their previous occupational status by working and receiving training at their own company. Second, different industries have different requirements for certifications and education. Training in house would guarantee that the necessary credentials were obtained and accelerate the process for regaining occupational status. While this is not the solution for every industry, I believe that approaching the issue of brain waste from an industry perspective will expedite the reduction of brain waste faster than an approach that insists that workers obtain English abilities *before* allowing them to contribute to the workforce with their full capacity.

My recommendations for moving forward include:

- 1) Businesses who have wide-scale ESL classes for the purpose of upskilling their employees and allowing them to reclaim the occupational status need to be more public with their best practices.
- 2) Local businesses need to be invited to the conversation of ESL in the workforce. Adult education organizations need to create more opportunities for collaboration between businesses and curriculum providers, not just other non-profits.
- 3) Companies with a large population of immigrant and international workers need to be more informed about why investing in English language learners is the equitable, economical and sustainable decision for their company's future, especially in the next ten to twenty years.



- 4) Experts from the field of ESL and adult education need to bridge the gap to business by serving as consultants and industry specific instructors and curriculum designers.

Likewise, businesses need to see that such an expense is a worthwhile investment.

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APPENDIX

**Why Hire Immigrants**

[www.whyhireimmigrants.com](http://www.whyhireimmigrants.com)