FACTORS AFFECTING AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATIN@ STUDENTS’ PERSISTENCE IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain an in-depth understanding of factors Latin@ and African American students perceive as contributing to or impeding their persistence in adult education programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), the General Education Diploma (GED), Adult High School Diploma (AHSD) or Career Technical Education (CTE). A total of 20 participants (12 Latin@ and 8 African American) from Silicon Valley Adult Education (SVAE) volunteered for face-to-face, individual interviews. The qualitative data analysis revealed four major themes of importance to students in their success: (1) learners’ self-motivation and goal setting; (2) quality and relevance of program; (3) support from families and communities; (4) the teacher-student relationship. The findings show that self-motivation and goals were the most influential factors positively affecting Latin@ and African American students’ persistence in the adult education programs such as ABE, GED, CTE or AHSD. All participants, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, or socioeconomic status perceive that obtaining these adult education skills and credentials provides them opportunities for getting a job, attending college, helping their children in school, and becoming contributing members of their families and communities. In addition, all participants indicated that the adult education programs offered by SVAE such as ABE, GED, CTE and AHSD are relevant to their goals, with the majority of them expressing satisfaction.
with the quality of their programs. Most noteworthy, the majority of participants indicated that support from families, teachers, and friends played a significant role in fostering their persistence in adult education programs.

Keywords: student persistence, adult education, andragogy, community cultural wealth.
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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my family: to my wife, Tirualem Molla; Daughter Elsa; and son, Michael for their unconditional love and support during this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Adult education plays a major role in the American education system, bridging the gap between the K-12 and higher education institutions serving more than 1.5 million students each year in various programs such as adult basic education (ABE), general education diploma (GED), adult secondary education (ASE), English as a secondary language (ESL), and career and technical education (CTE) (LAO, 2012).

A study by the California Department of Education CDE (2011) shows that acquiring adult education skills and credentials such as ABE, GED, ASE, or CTE prepared individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective workers, parents, and contributing members of society. Additionally, acquiring these skills is linked to lower unemployment rates, greater job satisfaction, decreased reliance on public assistance programs, lower rates of overall health issues, and higher levels of volunteerism. Furthermore, it has been found that earning a high school diploma is an important factor in improving one’s earnings and financial security and reducing criminal activity (CDE, 2011; Darche, Naya, & Downs, 2009; NCAL, 2008).

Unfortunately, studies also show that too many adults in California, as well as in the nation, lack basic skills. A study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) showed that over 88 million adults in the United States lacked adequate literacy skills to earn family supporting wages or qualify for a college education. Literacy is
defined as “the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (NCES, 2006, p. 2).

A two year study by the National Commission on Adult Literacy (NCAL) (2008) found that a large number of the adult population in the United States lacked adequate skills required by the U.S. economy. The NCAL indicated that the American economy requires that most workers have adequate educational skills to be ready for current and future jobs in the global marketplace, yet over 50 percent of working age adults have at least one major educational barrier— no high school diploma, no college, or ESL language needs (p. v). The commission further indicated that due to these educational deficiencies, a large number of adults are falling behind in their struggle to get higher wage jobs, or to qualify for the college courses or job training that would help them get a job or promotion. Furthermore, one in five children lives in poverty because their parents cannot qualify for higher paying wages due to a deficiency in their education (U.S. Census, 2008; NCAL, 2008).

A survey by the American Management Association unveiled that 21st century jobs in the U.S. will require, at minimum, a high school diploma and technical skills, such as problem solving and communication skills (American Management Association, 2012). Unfortunately, millions of working age adults in California lack a high school diploma or the equivalent to qualify for most jobs in California. Darche et al. (2009) documented that California faced a more severe educational crisis than the rest of the nation because of high dropout rates from high school and low persistence rates of adult education programs. The 2008 Census report revealed that almost 20 percent of students in California were dropping out of high school with almost half (50%) of African American and Latin@ students failing to graduate. This Census report also found that over 5.3 million adults in the state lack a high school diploma or the equivalent general education diploma (GED), and half of these adults have less than a 9th grade education
(Darche et al., 2009; U.S. Census, 2008). Furthermore, a report by Lumina Foundation (2012) showed that like the K-12 education system, minority groups are experiencing disappointingly low degree-attainment rates: Latin@s (16%) and African Americans (32%) when compared with whites 51% and Asians at 59%.

A study by California Alcohol and Drug Program (2013) indicated that as Latin@s and African Americans in California represent almost 60% of the state’s population, this disappointing education gap has major social and economic consequences for the individuals as well as the state because social benefits and burdens are not distributed evenly across society. Similarly, the 2010 Census revealed that the poverty rate among families without any adult high school graduates was 31.3%; for college degree holders it was 5.2%, and with a high school diploma it was 19.2%. A December 2011 report from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) showed California has a higher poverty rate (16.1%) than the rest of the nation (14.9%). Latin@s (22.8%) and African Americans (22.1%) have much higher poverty rates than Asians (11.8%) and whites (9.5%) (Census, 2010; PPIC, 2010).

According to the California Alcohol and Drug Program (ADP) (2013), racially discriminatory practices in public systems such as criminal justice have a disproportionately negative impact on Latin@ and African Americans’ health and education. This ADP report indicated that large numbers of working age adults, mostly Latin@s and African Americans and people of lower socioeconomic status, are being sent to prison than whites and people with higher socioeconomic status. Thus, Latin@s and African Americans represented 39% of California’s adult population in 2010, but accounted for 68% of adults sentenced to state prison. In addition, Latin@s and African Americans under the age of 18 accounted for 87% of the Division of Juvenile Justice youth in 2010 (PPIC, 2010).
The 2008 NCAL further indicated, as many of these prisoners are parents, the effect of incarceration reaches their families and communities. Moreover, the rates of incarceration decline with higher educational attainment; the more education a person has, the less likely that individual is to go to prison. Well-educated individuals and communities fare better than their peers on rates of employment, access to higher paying jobs, and overall lifetime earnings (NCAL, 2008).

Bailey and Hayes (2006) found that California had an adult prison population of over 167,690 in 2005, which has increased three times faster than the general adult population since 1990. The authors revealed that African Americans have the highest incarceration rates of any other ethnic group: 5,125 per 100,000 adults in the population for men, compared to 1,159 for Latin@s, 770 for whites, and 474 for those classified as other (Bailey & Hayes, 2006).

The 2013 PPIC report showed that California’s adult prison population has gradually declined from 167,690 in 2005 to 144,000 in 2011. However, while the overall prison population has been reduced, the incarceration rate for African Americans has dramatically increased from 5,125 in 2005 to 5,525 per 100,000 (Census, 2010). Consequently, according to the statistics, African American men were disproportionately incarcerated. They make up 5% of the general population, yet they represent 29% of the prison population. Furthermore, the authors indicate that although adult women overall have much lower incarceration rates than men, African American women represent 28% of the prison population, 34% are Latina, 32% are White, and 6% classify themselves as “other.” Like their male counterparts, African American women are disproportionately incarcerated; they make up 6% of the general population but represent 29% of the prison population (Bailey & Hayes, 2006).
Statement of the Problem

Despite the enormous values and benefits of completing adult education programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), or Adult Secondary Education (ASE) to individuals and their communities, student persistence in adult education programs is low. Adult student persistence is defined as, “Adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow” (Comings, 2007, p. 24). For the purpose of this study, I prefer to use the term persistence because it is widely used in adult education literature as appropriate for describing the phenomena from the point of view of students rather than institutions (Comings, et al., 2000; Pickard, 2013). According to Comings (2007), many of these adults who enrolled in adult education programs did not persist long enough to acquire adequate learning gains. Keeping adults in the classrooms long enough to complete their program has been a challenge for the adult educators and institutions (Link, 2006). As many of these adults are parents of school age children, they often lack the knowledge and skills to help their children in school (Darche et al., 2009).

A study by Porter, Cuban, Comings, and Chase (2005) showed that the rate of student persistence in adult education programs was as low as 20% within the first 12 months. Due to this low rate, combined with high school educational attainment problems, over 5.3 million adults in California remain disengaged from education (CDE, 2011; Darche et al.; Census, 2006). Comings (2007) pointed out that most adult learners came to their programs with goals that might take hundreds or even thousands of hours to complete, such as obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent GED or Career Technical Education (CTE) certificate. Furthermore, Comings indicated that increasing persistence was critical in helping students meet their learning goals. Therefore, having
a broad definition of persistence as defined by Comings (2007) is essential for policy makers, practitioners, and educators in describing a learning process that continues until the learner meets his or her educational goals, and it ends when the student decides to stop learning. Comings further indicated that using only attendance in class sessions as a measure of persistence undermined the learning; thus, a wider definition of persistence would allow practitioners to focus on helping adults to become persistent learners (Comings et al., 2005; Comings, 2007).

Pickard (2013) suggested that understanding students’ persistence was important not only for the adult learners, but also vital to educators, administrators, and policy makers because beliefs about student persistence shape program design, classroom interaction, and influence funding decisions on adult education programs. Thus, the potential impact on learning gains continues to make student persistence an important focus of adult education research (Pickard, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain an in-depth understanding of factors that Latin@ and African American students perceive to contribute to or impede their persistence in the adult education programs. A total of 20 participants (12 Latin@s and 8 African Americans) from Silicon Valley Adult Education (SVAE) programs such as ABE, GED, ASE, and CTE volunteered for the interviews. The academic status of participants includes 10 beginners (those who are at a beginning level of their programs or at less than half of their programs) and 10 completers (those who completed their programs or expected to complete this year).

Silicon Valley Adult Education (SVAE) serves over 2,300 diverse students per year. SVAE is a unit of the Metropolitan Education District in Santa Clara County,
California, and is one of the oldest adult education programs in California. The profile at district level includes 44% female, 56% male; Latin@s 63%, White 21%, African-American 5%, Asians 6%, Filipino 2%, and all others less than 3% (MetroED, 2012)

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is: What factors do Latin@ and African American adult students perceive to contribute to their persistence or non-persistence in adult education programs?

The secondary research questions follow:

1. How do factors related to students or their families contribute to or impede Latin@ and African American learners’ persistence in adult education programs?
2. How do factors related to adult education programs contribute to or impede Latin@ and African American learners’ persistence in adult education programs?

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant in contributing to the area of research related to adult learners’ persistence in adult education programs like Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), or Career Technical Education (CTE). The main significance of this study will be the fact that no existing studies have explored Latin@ and African American adult students’ perceptions of factors affecting their persistence or non-persistence in adult education programs. Given the current high dropout rate of Latin@ and African American students from the
education pipeline in California, and over 5.3 million of California’s adults remaining disengaged from education (Dache et al., 2009), it is important to know what factors contribute to or impede their persistence in the adult education programs. Understanding these factors by engaging Latin@ and African American adult students in dialogue may offer further insight into why some adult students persist and complete their programs and why others drop out.

In addition, large numbers of Latin@ and African American high school dropouts look to adult education programs for a second chance. Helping these adults overcome the limits of under-education should be a top priority for educational institutions because adult education is the primary way for many low income Latin@ and African American adults to get a second chance to education (Zachry, 2010).

Furthermore, as over 65% of the student population in California’s adult education programs are Latin@ and African American, knowing factors that contribute to their persistence is significant for adult education institutions and programs. Moreover, this qualitative study will add to the research on students’ persistence in adult education by exploring participants’ perception of what they perceive as important to their persistence. Likewise, this study is particularly significant today as California’s adult education institutions have to face multiple challenges: on one hand, meeting the increasing demand for skilled workers by California businesses; on the other hand, preparing adult students seeking to increase their ability to meet requirements which enable them to compete in the job market and become viable workers, parents, and community, thus reducing their dependency and demand on the state’s welfare, health care, and ultimately, the prison system (CDE, 2011; LAO, 2012).

Additionally, this study is significant to adult learners planning to enroll in adult education programs. Likewise, adult education institutions offering these programs can benefit from this research in developing programs and creating learner support systems,
which will help enhance retention and completion rates. For adult education programs, this study can help to further improve the learning process and better meet the needs of adult learners by gaining an understanding of the students’ views and perceptions. Improving students’ persistence in adult education brings many benefits to the individual students and also to their families, communities, and the state. The economic and social returns of these adult education competencies include an increased tax base by supplying skilled workers needed to be competitive in the global marketplace; a decreased reliance on state services; an increase in civic participation, improved health for individuals and families; reduction of crime rates; and improved educational outcomes for the children of adult learners (CDE, 2011). The study will produce valuable knowledge in determining what factors contribute to or hinder student persistence and may contribute to a step forward in providing best practices for improving student success in adult education.

**Theoretical Framework**

Two theories serve as theoretical framework for this study: andragogy developed by Knowles (1980) and Community Cultural Wealth by Yosso (2005).

**Andragogy**

Knowles (1980, 1984) promoted the concept of andragogy, aiming to distinguish adult learning from child learning or pedagogy. According to Knowles, andragogy is defined as “the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy which is the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). In the former, the learner drives the learning; in the latter, the teacher drives the learning (Alhassan, 2012).
Knowles (1980) theorized five assumptions about andragogy, including that the adult learners: (1) advance from dependent to independent as they mature and can direct their own learning; (2) apply their vast life experiences to foster learning; (3) are willing to learn when they see new opportunity; (4) are problem-solving oriented and want to apply new learning; and (5) are motivated by internal factors such as personal enrichment, rather than external factors such as employer requirements.

Knowles (1970) posits that adult learners are motivated by intrinsic goals such as pursuing their dreams or learning new skills. Knowles argued that, unlike children who attended school because of government mandated or parental-enforced obligations, adults go to school of their own free will motivated by their goals; if the learning environment meets their expectations they stay, if not they tend to leave (Alhassan, 2012; Knowles, 1970). Merriam (2004) posited that andragogy has been the best-known theory which distinguished adult learning from K-12 pedagogy and has become a rallying point for adult educators seeking to distinguish their field from that of education in general (Merriam, 2004).

Knowles (1980) indicated that adult learners bring vast experience to school and are eager to see their experiences and skills valued by the education system. In addition, Knowles asserted that these learners expect education programs to be relevant to real life application such as solving problems, or improving personal life or work performance. Knowles further articulated that if these adult learners feel that the programs are not meeting their expectations, they often stop coming to school.

Knowles (1980) asserted that adult educators should be class facilitators so that learners can be engaged to share their life and work experiences, accomplishments, and expectations. Knowles argued that the traditional school culture, including the formal classroom structure, the controlling teacher-student relationships, and the
pedagogy designed for children do not meet the needs and expectations of adult learners (Knowles, 1980).

**Community Cultural Wealth**

In her article, “Whose Culture Has Capital?” Yosso (2005) articulated the theories of community cultural wealth as a critical race theory (CRT) challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital by shifting the research lens away from a deficit view of marginalized people of color by magnifying the rich cultural knowledge and untapped assets possessed by people of color that often go unseen and undervalued. Similarly, Howard (2008) posited that the CRT analytic lens recognizes the existence and danger of racism, discrimination and hegemony, and enabled various cultural and racial frames of reference to guide research questions, influence the methods of collecting and analyzing data, and to inform how findings could be interpreted (Howard, 2008). Recognizing the existence of race and acknowledging the experiences of those who have been marginalized because of race becomes a necessary first step towards radical racial reform (Freeman, 2011).

Furthermore, Yosso (2005) asserted that the CRT approach to education involved a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of communities of color in order to serve the larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice. Yosso further pointed out that CRT addresses the social construct of race by examining the ideology of racism which is often disguised in the rhetoric of neutrality or scientific principles. However, when the ideology of racism is interrogated and racist injuries are unveiled, victims of racism can often find their voice; those injured by discrimination will stand against racism and become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the voices of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves (Yosso, 2005). Howard
(2008) asserted that educators and researchers who were concerned with disrupting school failures of students of color should become more aware of the role that race and racism play in their education and should consider conceptual and methodological frames that placed race, class, and gender at the center of their analysis.

Yosso (2005) posited:

One of the most powerful forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking: the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education (p. 75).

Yosso highlighted the importance of culture in education: culture is referred to as “behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people” (p. 76). Yosso asserted that culture has influenced how society is organized, how school curriculum has developed, and how pedagogy and policy are implemented. Furthermore, Yosso (2005) argued that education institutions needed to recognize the knowledge and skills that marginalized communities of color bring to school by nurturing their untapped community cultural wealth. According to Yosso, community cultural wealth has been defined as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Yosso argues that a CRT lens can “see” that Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth as mentioned above through six forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. For example, aspirational capital fosters the ability to embrace onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality. Yet, goals and aspirations are
developed within communities often through interactions and storytelling to challenge oppressive conditions or overcome barriers (Yosso, 2005).

Moreover, Yosso (2005) pointed out that community cultural wealth can motivate students to persist in reaching their educational goals through the following forms of capital: (1) aspirational capital cultivates hopes and dreams for the future; (2) linguistic capital magnifies the intellectual and social skills attained through multiple communication experiences; (3) familial capital reflects the cultural knowledge nurtured through a sense of community history; (4) social capital manifests the networks of people and community resources; (5) navigational capital nurtures the skills of maneuvering through social institutions; and (6) resistant capital fosters the knowledge and skills that challenge inequality (Yosso, 2005).

Furthermore, Yosso (2005) contended that traditional schooling criticized by Freire (in the 1970s) as the banking model of education has failed to acknowledge the cultural knowledge and experiences diverse people of color bring to school. The author further argued that educational institutions need to develop strategies that recognize the knowledge and skills students of color bring to classroom (Yosso, 2005).

**Summary**

In summary, two theories will serve as theoretical framework for this study. Andragogy by Knowles (1980) provides an in-depth understanding of adult learners’ motivation and goals and factor that support their persistence in adult education programs. Community Cultural Wealth by Yosso (2005) stipulates how the knowledge and skills Latin@ and African Americans students bring to school can foster their persistence and success. By connecting andragogy and community cultural wealth into
one theoretical framework, this qualitative study can add a new dimension to the study of student persistence in the adult education. Figure 2 on page 73, illustrates the theoretical framework for this study.
The previous chapter presented the background information, statement of the problem, the purpose of study, the research questions, significance of the study, and the theoretical perspective. This chapter examines selected studies in the field of adult education as they relate to the underlying topic: factors affecting students’ persistence in adult education. The review is organized into six sections: (1) models of students’ persistence; (2) factors affecting students’ persistence in adult education; (3) teacher student relationships in adult education; (4) socio-economic factors affecting student achievement; (5) factors affecting Latin@ and African American adult students, and (6) the gaps in past literature.

Factors Affecting Student Persistence in Adult Education

Research studies suggest that the environment in which adults live, work, and interact, along with the people in their lives is an important factor that can contribute or hinder students’ persistence in adult education (Alhassan, 2012; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Pickard, 2013; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1993).

In examining the literature on adult learning and factors influencing their persistence, Alhassan (2012) argue that learners need institutional and environmental support to persist to graduation. Alhassan indicated that understanding adult learning
theories such as andragogy developed by Knowles (1980) and the problem-posing model by Freire (1970), provide the foundation to explore what role institutional policies, services, and the classroom environment have had in persistence. Alhassan, further pointed out that understanding systems theory provides insight as to what role the learners, teachers, family support, and institutional policy have had in the persistence of adult learners. Alhassan contended that a systems theory explains the complexity of adult learning: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, exists through the interaction of its parts, and that when one part of the system is changed, the system will react to that change”; for adult learners to persist in their studies, all parts of the education system must function and interact (Alhassan, 2012, p. 156). Similarly, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) explained that adult learning is affected by multiple factors such as learner’s personal attributes, the learning climate, and the learning process. The authors asserted that understanding these factors is essential to heighten student persistence. Adult learning theories provide the tools for linking the concepts, practices, and processes.

Likewise, Banks and Banks (2007) described education institutions as social systems with tightly connected components, such as school culture and organization structure, and they are powerful forces in shaping student learning, learner-teacher relationships, and the interaction among students inside and outside the classroom (Banks, 2007). In order to understand factors that influence student persistence, one must explore learners’ interaction with their families, communities, work and learning institutions (Alhassan, 2012).

A two-year study by the National Council on Adult Literacy (NCAL) (2008) found that institutional factors such as poor student support services, lack of high-quality instruction, and high teacher turnover are identified as contributing factors to low student persistence and attrition problems. Furthermore, the NCAL’s report indicated that high-quality instruction is essential to foster student retention and produce successful
outcomes. However, as salaries for adult educators are low, and these positions lack benefits, teachers frequently leave the profession. In addition, the NCAL’s report found that the majority of adult teachers around the nation work part-time, and often work at a second job; thus, the lack of high-quality instruction is of major concern for adult education. Furthermore, many adult education programs lack essential student support services, such as counseling for learners who needed them to navigate for job training or college transfer (NCAL, 2008).

Researchers at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) (2005) found that four types of positive forces—people support, goal setting, teacher relationships, and self-efficacy—are important contributions to student persistence; in addition, these students also indicated three negative forces, including life demands, relationships, and poor self-determination as inhibiting their persistence (Porter et al., 2005).

Porter et al. (2005) found that students who set goals such as getting a better paying job, helping their children, or attending college are more likely to persist than those who do not have goals. The NCSALL also indicated that self-efficacy is the second top factor supporting student persistence. The researchers indicated that the educational program must help adult students build self-efficacy, so that they can reach their goals. The NCSALL’s researchers noted that self-efficacy is focused on a specific task and represents the feeling of being able to accomplish the task of successful learning in the programs. The researchers suggested that adult education programs should provide engaging learning experiences to their participants as a means to build self-efficacy. The study indicated that successful learning in an adult education program is attained through the programs reinforcing self-efficacy by providing regular recognition of progress, celebrations of achievement, and by using former adult learners as role models of success (Comings, 2007). According to Porter et al. (2005) social support and encouragement
from family, teachers, staff, counselors, fellow students, family, and friends, reinforces self-efficacy.

**The Role of Teachers in Adult Education**

In their study examining the role of the teacher in adult education, Wang and Sarbo (2004) found that adult educators have had significant influence on students’ persistence in adult education programs. Wang and Sarbo asserted that adult educators’ relationship with their students is dependent on their adapted philosophical beliefs to accommodate learners’ needs, interests, and experiences. The authors pointed out these philosophies shape the objectives of adult education and provide the guiding principles for educators. Moreover, Wang and Sarbo indicated that those adult learners’ diverse needs, interests, experiences and motivations, along with the internal factors such as teachers’ roles and beliefs, constitute the “what” factors that influence students’ persistence in adult education. Wang and Sarbu also asserted engaging students in the learning process fosters a positive learning environment, and teachers can play an important role in helping students’ succeed in adult education.

Freire (1970) posited that the humanist educator focuses on facilitating the environment for students to engage in critical thinking and a quest for mutual humanization because humanist education is imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power nurtured by teacher-students partnership where both are simultaneously educators and learners. Freire asserted that teacher-student partnership nurtured through dialogue foster knowledge to flow in two ways: from the teacher to the students and from the students to teacher; thus, teachers and students become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.
Wang and Sarbo (2004) pointed out that the roles of adult educators are framed by six underlying adult education philosophies:

In the liberal perspective, the role of adult educator is to make adult learners literate; in the behavioral perspective, to promote behavior change; in the progressive perspective, to prepare adult learners with problem-solving skills to reform society; in the humanistic perspective, to enhance personal growth and reform society; in the radical perspective, to change culture and its social structures; in the transformative perspective, to enhance the critical reflection process (Wang & Sarbo, 2004, p. 207).

According to Wang and Sarbo, adult educators must understand how their beliefs and learners’ needs interact to impact the process of student transformation and emancipation, particularly in the practice of andragogy. Knowles (1980) claimed the mission of adult education is to help adult learners to develop and achieve their full potential, and adult educators should champion this task with humanistic and progressive spirit.

Furthermore, Wang and Sarbo (2004) argued that adult education philosophies provide guidelines for decision making and policy setting related to the role of adult educators and facilitate a conceptual framework for incorporating into their teaching methodologies; understanding this complex, interactive process helps teachers to maximize their effectiveness. Moreover, Wang and Sarbo asserted that the roles of adult educators and their methods of teaching reflect their underlying philosophies (Wang & Sarbo, 2004).
Socio-economic Factors in Adult Education

A study by Pickard (2013) documented that the socio-economic status of learners could contribute to or hinder their persistence in adult education. Pickard argued that examining the socio-economic impact on adult learners is important not only for the students, but also to state and federal governments that hold adult education programs accountable for the retention of their students. Pickard asserted that the beliefs about student persistence shape program design and classroom interaction, inform policy discussions, and influence funding decisions governing adult education programs. Furthermore, Pickard points out that the combination of policy requirements, poor persistence rates, and the potential impact on learning gains make learner persistence an important focus of adult literacy research (2013).

In examining the current high attrition rate, Pickard (2013) discussed two perspectives on the issue: the control perspective and the acknowledgment perspective. Pickard asserts that the control perspective emphasizes the programmatic barriers and students’ dispositional attitudes as influential on learner persistence and seeks to view the problem of high attrition from the interest of the institution; whereas, the acknowledgement perspective views lower learner persistence as the result of a complex factors such as socio-economic status, poverty, and interactions between students and the environment (Pickard, 2013).

According to Pickard (2013), the control perspective attempts to remedy lower learner persistence by addressing institutional and dispositional factors so that programs and practitioners can have a direct influence on such things as timing of classes, size of classes, type and intensity of orientation procedures or support services offered, or type and quality of teachers or classes. Conversely, the acknowledgement perspective recognizes that attrition will happen due to existing social structures of poverty,
inequality, and socio-economic structures that create barriers to persist in a systematic fashion; and persistence as desired by institution might not be relevant to the goals and values of some students (Pickard, 2013).

Furthermore, Pickard (2013) contends that approaching student attrition from a control perspective has failed to address the problem and instead tended to point fingers to someone or something, the individuals or the programs, creating a potential for conflict. Pickard has suggested that adult education institutions should engage in self-assessments, program improvement efforts, and dialogue with students about their needs; in addition, instructors and administrators needed to examine their beliefs about student persistence and cultivate an institutionalized sensitivity to the social and cultural factors that can influence student persistence (Pickard, 2013).

Pickard (2013) points out that programs need to place a greater emphasis on advocacy and action towards changing policies that restricted their ability to meet students’ needs, forging partnerships with groups and organizations outside of adult education to facilitate policy change, as well as expanding the range of services to which programs were able to easily refer their students. Socioeconomic factors can affect students’ potential for successful learning, both by limiting their ability to attend classes and by restricting their capacity to stay in the classroom. Thus, the author calls for educators to advocate for fair policies and procedures that promote student success by forging partnerships with local businesses and other adult institutions that can benefit from policy revision (Pickard, 2013).

In their study of adult students’ persistence in a library literacy program, Schafft and Prins (2009) found that socio-economic status has affected adult learners’ persistence. Schafft and Prins studied 30 directors and 17 participants at 20 program sites to examine their perception on the effects of socio-economic status in shaping student persistence in the literacy program. They argue that socio-economic characteristics such as housing,
transportation, job location, and poverty are more significant factors affecting student persistence than the traditional institutional attributes such as the programs or teacher related issues.

Furthermore, Schafft and Prins (2009) found that program practitioners in the study were inclined to link learners’ persistence to blaming learners as “failing to value education, lacking motivation, and poverty of intergenerational cycle caused by habits and traits of the poor” (p. 10). Contrary to the culture of poverty stereotypes, family literacy participants characterized themselves as determined individuals who valued education and wanted to make something of themselves.

Socioeconomic characteristics can influence participants’ security and residential stability, and, their program persistence (Anyon, 2014; Pickard, 2013). Policy makers, practitioners, and scholars should consider how multidimensional factors influence participants’ educational path above and beyond personal or programmatic characteristics. Pickard (2013) concluded that the control approach that focuses on the institutional and individuals’ attributes to students’ persistence has overlooked the larger structural barriers of opportunities for poor families. Schafft and Prins (2009) argued that educators must come to a fuller understanding of these social and economic realities America’s poor families face and acknowledge the broader social contexts shaping program persistence (Schafft & Prins, 2009).

**Multicultural Education**

In analyzing the need to reform our education system, Banks and Banks (2007) suggest that in order to prepare students for the twenty-first century environment, educational institutions must develop a multicultural learning climate that valued all students could learn. Banks and Banks state that diverse cultural groups should have an
equal opportunity to acquire multicultural knowledge, including key concepts of culture and institutional racism, so that they can describe their feelings, experiences, and draw linkages among different topics. The authors describe multicultural education as an educational pedagogy rooted in the concept that all students, regardless of their cultural affiliations or socioeconomic characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in education institutions, including libraries and museums (Banks & Banks, 2007).

Furthermore, Banks and Banks (2007) reveal that “under the current education system, some students, because of their cultural affiliations, had a better chance to learn in schools than students who had a different cultural classification” (p. 2). Moreover, Banks and Banks indicate some institutional characteristics of schools, shaped by mainstream culture, systematically deny some groups of students equal education opportunities. While some students bring their past life and work experiences, such as computer or bilingual skills, into the classroom (Knowles, 1980; Yosso, 2005), Banks and Banks point out that some adult students, because of their cultural affiliations, might come to class with negative experiences from previous schooling. Similarly, Yosso (2005) indicated that under the traditional schooling, the knowledge and experiences of students of color are considered worthless (Yosso, 2005).

Banks and Banks (2007) contend that equity pedagogy addresses the barriers stemming from the traditional control relationships between teacher and students by fostering an environment in which students become peers in the process to acquire, integrate, and produce knowledge and envision new possibilities for societal change. Banks and Banks (2007) argue that some students, because of their cultural affiliations, have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently more structured than did students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics. Scholars indicate that these labeling practices have powerful determinant effects on student learning (Anyon, 2014; Yosso, 2005; Freire, 1970; Banks & Banks, 2007).
Banks and Banks (2007) argued that students in the 21st century global environment must be equipped with multicultural knowledge in order to function effectively. Banks and Banks asserted that multicultural knowledge incorporates key concepts of culture, such as language, that can help students describe their feelings, and experiences, and draw linkages among different topics. According to Banks and Banks (2007) multicultural education is comprised of five dimensions: (1) Content integration, which deals with teaching practice by infusing materials from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts in the subject area; (2) the knowledge construction process, which engages students into the production of knowledge by engaging learners to identify, analyze, investigate, and determine how the cultural assumptions influence the knowledge construct; (3) the prejudice reduction element, which fosters positive images of various ethnic groups by utilizing multiethnic materials in classroom and program orientations to foster students’ positive attitude in the classroom and schooling; (4) equity pedagogy, which fosters the use of cooperative learning techniques to enhance the academic achievement of students from low income communities and marginalized communities; and (5) the empowering school culture elements, which inspires students from diverse cultural and ethnic groups (Banks & Banks, 2007).

However, according to (Freeman, 2011) the multiculturalist approach fails to explain or even explore why school segregation has increased since the 1970s, why black incarceration rates have exploded since the war on drugs escalated during the Reagan administration, or why income inequality continued to persist. Howard suggested that the CRT approach can be used in education to foster social and racial justice (2011).
Factors Affecting Latin@ and African American Adult Students’ Persistence

In the 21st century, communities of color are becoming the majority, representing almost 60% of the state’s population (Census, 2010), yet the two major ethnic groups, African American and Latin@ students, have the lowest educational attainment level among major racial and ethnic groups in the state (CDE, 2011; Dervarics, 2004; Romero, 2012; U.S. Census, 2008; Zachry, 2010).

The 2012 Census data showed the dropout rate from 1990 to 2012 is higher for Latin@ and African Americans than Whites. More troubling data showed that the gap between African American and Whites is not measurably different from dropout rates in 1990 to rates in 2012 (Census, 2012).

Research shows Latin@s and African American college persistence lagging behind. In their study of persistence in four-year and community colleges, Burrus et al. (2013) indicated that Asian and White students are more likely to persist in college than students from Latin@ and African American racial groups (Burrus, 2013). Similarly, a report by Lumina Foundation (2012) shows a significantly low degree attainment by Latin@s (16%) and African Americans (32%), compared with Whites (50.5%), and Asians (59.2%) (Census, 2010; Romero, 2012; Lamina Foundation, 2012).

Burrus et al. (2013) indicated that due to socioeconomic status, most Latin@s and African Americans enroll in community colleges; however, student persistence is low: only 57% of students who began college at a 4-year institution in 2001 had completed a bachelor’s degree by 2007, and only 28% of community college students who started school in 2005 had completed a degree 4 years later (Burrus et al., 2013; NCES, 2011).
Latin@s and College Persistence

In their analysis of “leaks in the Latin@ education pipeline,” Yosso and Solorzano (2006) shows that for every hundred Latin@ elementary school students in the United States (in 2000), 46 graduate from high school and only eight graduate with a baccalaureate degree. Of these eight college graduates, only two will go on to receive a graduate or professional degree, and fewer than one of them would eventually receive a doctorate (Romero, 2012; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

Burrus et al. (2013) have suggested that race and ethnicity are associated with college persistence. Asian and White students are more likely to persist in college than students from Latin@ and African American racial groups (Romero, 2012; Lumina Foundation, 2012; Burrus, 2013). The 2010 Census showed a significantly low degree attainment of Latin@s (16%) and African Americans (32%), compared with Whites (50%) and Asians (59.18%) (Census, 2010; Romero, 2012; Lumina Foundation, 2012).

Romero (2012) asserts that this disappointingly low education attainment rate of Latin@ students is connected to the “cracks” in the education pipeline. Romero argues that factors such as racial segregation, immigration status, and lack of institutional support affected the Latin@s’ education. Romero points out that Latin@ communities have long been subject to Mexican immigration to the United States. Romero states, “Despite the official abolition of residential and educational segregation by the Supreme Court ruling in 1954, U.S. schools are more racially segregated today than in the 1950s (Romero, 2012, p. 2).

Furthermore, Romero (2012) claimed there is a lack of culturally competent instruction to accommodate the needs of English language learners and special needs students who are disproportionately represented in special education programs at a national level. Moreover, Romero points that anti-immigrant laws have played a
significant role in fracturing the Latin@ education pipeline by forcing students to pay international student fees or denying them access to government aid (E4FC, 2012; Romero, 2012)

Similarly, Burrus et al. (2013) have asserted that financial constraints appear to influence college choice and persistence, forcing many Latin@ students to drop out of college. Furthermore, Burrus et al. indicated that financial support plays an important role on Latin@ college persistence and degree attainment by setting the stage for students’ academic performance and providing resources at home and social capital necessary to succeed in school. Moreover, the authors find that family responsibilities (such as being married, being a parent, and caring for children) are important factors in Latin@ college persistence (Burrus et al., 2013).

**African Americans and College Persistence**

Research suggests that disparities in socio-economic status lead to social inequalities, and there is a direct correlation between racial/ethnic groups where resources and access are limited due to under-privileged status (ADP, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013). Strayhorn (2013) posited that students with higher socio-economic status have access to more social capital and valuable information that enables them to benefit from resources and facilitates their college preparation advantage. Moreover, this social capital provides students with campus networking and social support. Strayhorn indicates that a large number of African American college students drop out due to family responsibility such as caring for child or parents or another family member (Strayhorn, 2013).

However, research indicates that African Americans experience disparities in home ownership and wealth accumulation, owning fewer homes with lower median values (Strayhorn, 2013). In addition, Latin@s and African Americans have the highest
number of people living in poverty and live in low income neighborhoods where they are less likely to have access to recreational facilities and full-service grocery stores and more likely to have higher concentrations of stores selling tobacco (ADP, 2013). Due to low economic status and financial constraints, African American students continue to enroll in lower numbers in college and are more likely to drop out without earning a degree (Burrus, et al., 2013). As most African American college students come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, financial support is an important factor affecting college persistence of African American students. However, financial aid has a positive relationship with persistence, as these programs help minority and students of lower socioeconomic status; in addition, an institution’s tuition and financial aid are associated with higher persistence and graduation rates (Burus et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Strayhorn (2013) have asserted that factors affecting African American college persistence and degree completion include socio-economic status and family responsibility. Research suggests that socio-economic status, a measure of a person’s social position of income, education, or occupation has a profound impact on individual success by directly influencing access and ability to utilize resources (ADP, 2013). Bush (2010) has suggested that deleterious institutional environments embedded practices of predominantly White colleges, thereby fracturing African Americans’ college persistence by creating dissatisfaction with college faculty and disengagement with the various campus activities (Bush, 2010).

**Gaps in Past Research**

Despite the high number of adult students enrolled in California’s adult education programs, there is less educational literature and research about the adult education system in general and Latin@ and African American students in particular. Furthermore,
if one examines the body of literature concerning Latin@ and African American students’ persistence in adult education, the shortage of literature becomes even more apparent. There are no studies based on participants’ perceptions focusing on Latin@ and African American adult students. This study highlights the factors affecting persistence of Latin@ and African American students in adult education. Furthermore, this study attempts to gain a better understanding of the perceptions Latin@ and African American students have on how these factors affected them.

A study by Zachry (2010) indicates that large numbers of Latin@ and African American high school dropouts participate in adult education programs for a second chance. Zachry suggests that helping these adults who do not have a high school diploma to overcome the limits of under-education should be a top priority for educational institutions. In addition, Zachry has pointed out that adult education is the primary way for many Latin@ and African American adults to get a second chance to education (Zachry, 2010).

Comings and Soricone (2007) indicate that this deficiency in the past research in adult education programs is the result of lack of attention to the education of adults by policy makers and funding agencies. Furthermore, Comings and Soricone have pointed out that due to lack of funding, potential academics are discouraged from dedicating their time to the field of adult education and academic research. Moreover, these financial constraints have limited the establishment of peer-revised journals and other publications: “Just as the adult education field lacks resources to support and improve programs, it lacks resources to develop research” (Comings & Soricone, 2007, p.5)

In addition, the other challenge to conducting research in adult education is the problem of high turnover among staff. Since funding is sometimes unstable, programs can disappear in the middle of a research project or administrators can decide that they can no longer afford to participate (Comings & Soricone, 2007). The field of adult
education has suffered from a deficiency of peer-reviewed research (Pickard, 2013). Furthermore, Pickard point out that much of the past research produced in the field of adult education was published by research centers such as the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). Pickard indicates that while these organizations play an important role in creating interventions, extending theory, and disseminating of the contemporary learning in the field, the reports are not in peer-reviewed journals. Therefore, Pickard suggests that the field of adult education program needs more rigorous, peer-reviewed studies with more theory, more information about data and analysis that is consistent to academic standards. Furthermore, this study will add to the research on adult students’ persistence by exploring participants view on what factors contribute to their persistence or non-persistence in adult education programs.

**Summary**

This literature review showed that multiple factors, including personal attributes such as self-efficacy, family relationships, student-teacher relationships, program supports, and socioeconomics can contribute to adult students’ persistence. Alhassan (2012) suggested that understanding what factors affect students’ persistence can lead to high student persistence and success. Furthermore, the literature suggests that people support, goal setting, self-efficacy, and progress updates are the top four persistence supports. Moreover, the literature revealed that the adult students who set goals such as getting a high paying job or helping children in school are more likely to persist than those who do not have goals.

Potential sources for this literature review were identified by entering the search terms “adult education” and “student persistence” in the EBSCO search engine, with Academic Premier and ERIC selected as databases. Sources from the results are
considered eligible for inclusion if they focus on adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), General Education Diploma (GED), career technical education (CTE), adult students’ enrollment in an adult education programs and were published in 1990 or later. Five sources published before 1990, Bean and Metzner (1985), Freire (1970), Knowles (1980), and Spady (1971), were included, as they are considered important to this study on adult education theory and student persistence.

Qualitative and quantitative studies are both considered eligible for inclusion. Sources were excluded from the literature review if they are not related to adult education programs such as ABE, GED, ASE, or CTE students. Additional sources have been identified by reviewing the reference list of articles selected for inclusion. Adult education literature published in a peer-reviewed journal is almost non-existent in the field of adult education (Pickard, 2013; Porter et al., 2005). Therefore, much of the substantial research produced in the field and included in this review has been published by research centers such as the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), the National Council on Adult Literacy (NCAL), California Department of Education (CDE), and the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LOA).

Finally, although adult education programs cover various student population including students of English as a second language, this study focuses on four adult education programs: Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), Adult High school Diploma (AHSD), and Career Technical Education (CTE) students.
CHAPTER 3

QUALITATIVE PROCEDURES

This study applied qualitative research methods, an approach used for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social problem, such as student persistence in adult education programs (Creswell, 2009). This qualitative dissertation involves emerging research questions, data collected in the participants’ setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general themes, and the researchers making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research, the researcher focuses on understanding the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live (Cohen & Crabtree, 2005).

The primary data collection method for this study was the interview strategy, the most common method used in qualitative research. This method involves systematic and detailed study of individuals’ perception using open-ended interviews intended to gain detailed, in-depth understanding of the interviewee’s experiences and perspectives on complex social issues and situations (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005). The qualitative interviewing approach fosters better understanding of the participants’ views by encouraging them to share their experiences, while leaving the interpretation and analysis to the investigators (Warren & Karner, 2005). The rationale for choosing the interview method is that this approach will provide an in depth understanding of the views and opinions of the participants by asking open-ended questions. According to Creswell
(2009), the research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. “This means the initial design for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (p. 176).

Target Population

The target populations for this study are Latin@ and African American adult students in an adult education program. The concept of purposeful sampling was used in which “the inquirer selects participants and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon such as students’ persistence in the adult education program” (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). Thus, the target populations in this study are Latin@ and African American adult students who are enrolled at the Silicon Valley Adult Education’s Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), or Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs and took classes during the Fall 2014, Winter 2015, and Spring 2015 quarters. Also part of the target population are students who have completed their education and earned a certificate from the program and those who withdrew, or have been terminated from the program during the past 12 months. Students will be referred to as adult students if they have enrolled in one of these programs.

Recruiting of participants occurred through campus announcement and classroom visits of four programs: Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), high school diploma or Adult Second Education (ASE), and Career Technical Education (CTE). All students had an equal opportunity to participate. Those who signed up were invited to an interview. All candidates who volunteered and signed up for interviews were interviewed. The ethnic composition of the participants was 12 Latin@s and 8 African Americans. Although my original plan was to recruit an equal number of
participants from both ethnic groups, adjustment was made due to the low number of
African American students at the site.

The students’ status varies in terms of progress and/or completion of courses, number of courses taken, and certificate pursued. Criteria for selecting the participants included: (1) being an SVAE-AE active student during the time period of winter 2015 and spring 2015; (2) being enrolled in one of ABE, GED, ASE or CTE programs; (3) being either active, completed, or a leaver/dropped. The idea is to select participants purposefully who will be best suited to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2009). The Interview Protocol has 25-30 open-ended questions. The content of the protocol questions is grounded based on two theories: andragogy by Knowles (1980) and Community Cultural Wealth by Yosso (2005).

Data Collection Procedure

The primary technique for data collection was face-to-face, individual interviews of 20 participants. The rationale for choosing the interview method is that this approach seeks to foster learning about individual experiences and perspectives on a given set of issues. In addition, this method encourages the interviewees to share their views and opinions on the complex social issues such as adult student persistence in adult education (Warren & Karner, 2005).

Participants were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes each. The participants were also informed the interview would be tape-recorded and transcribed word for word. The interviews were conducted at Silicon Valley Adult Education (SVAE) site during the month of March, 2014. The text data obtained through the interview of participants was coded and analyzed for themes with the help of Hyper Research software and File maker database for qualitative data analysis.
Data Analysis

In qualitative data analysis, data collection and analysis progress concurrently, and in the final phase, the researcher explains the meaning of the entire study and presents his/her findings (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell, “This approach encompasses the process of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (2007, p. 25).

This study has implemented the following qualitative data analysis steps recommended by Creswell (2009): (1) organizing and transcribing data; (2) reading through all data; (3) coding the data to develop themes by aggregating similar codes together; (5) connecting and interrelating themes; and (6) summarizing and validating (Creswell, 2009).

The visual mode shown below presents the procedure for the Data Analysis:

![Figure 1: Visual model for qualitative data analysis](image)
In this study, text data obtained from the participants were organized and prepared for analysis. Then, all data were reviewed to obtain a general sense of the information and make overall meaning. Next, the coding process took place. Coding is the process of organizing text data obtained during data collection into categories, and labeling those categories with a term in the actual language of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Each interview was audio taped and transcribed word for word. After reading through the transcripts, I started the coding process. Using Hyper Research, software for qualitative code development, I began assigning codes to words and phrases found in the transcripts. Then, I created themes by grouping similar codes together. Below is an example of codes.

**Theme: Quality and Relevance of Program**

**Sub-theme 1: quality**
- Code: engaging
- Code: high standard
- Code: challenging

**Sub-theme 2: Relevance**
- Code: Job oriented
- Code: relevance to college

**Ethical Consideration**

The request for the Internal Review Board (IRB) form was approved, providing information about the principal investigator, the project title and type, type of review requested, number and type of subjects. An informed consent form was furnished to participants stating that they were guaranteed certain rights, agreed to be involved in the study, and acknowledged their rights were protected. To protect the confidentiality of participants while conducting the interviews, they were assigned code names for use in
their description and reporting the results. The original interview data has been destroyed and all transcripts were assigned code names, thus keeping the responses confidential. The summary data will be disseminated to the professional community, through adult education journals and professional conferences.

The Role of Researcher

I am an current educator who has worked with diverse adult learners for over 13 years at this site. In addition, I attended an adult education program and have personal experience with the challenges and opportunities with adult education programs.

With respect to participants’ relationship with me, five out of 20 participants had attended a course of study with me prior to May 2014. However, since I am no longer working at the institute, there is no direct teacher-student relationship. To ensure all Latin@ and African American adult students at SVAE’s four programs--ABE, GED, CTE and AHSD, have equal chance for participation--a detailed recruiting plan was submitted and approved by the dissertation committee. Based on this plan, there was a formal announcement, and forms were distrusted in each classroom for volunteers. Less than 30 candidates signed up, and 20 participants were interviewed.

Merriam (1998) described that in a qualitative study, the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data. Merriam further discussed that the investigator should minimize his or her bias to maximize acceptance of the findings. In addition, the author suggested that the researcher should be aware of how his or her personal biases might influence the interpretation of data. This study employed the following skills for qualitative investigator as recommended by Merriam (1998). The researcher must have the following qualities:
1. Tolerance for uncertainty. As there are no step-by-step guidelines to be followed, from the design stage to the data collection and data analysis stages; thus, the researcher in a qualitative study must have the ability to be prepared to face unforeseen events and change in direction.

2. Sensitivity when collecting or gathering data including to the obvious or explicit information and not so obvious or implicit information such as the nonverbal behavior of people.

3. Awareness of the influence of personal biases on the interviews conducted or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, to ensure trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher should be conscious of how biases shape an investigation and interpretation of findings.

4. Positive dialogue enriched with motivating questions and attentive listening to participants’ voices that enable the researcher to obtain good information (Merriam, 1998, p. 116).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an in-depth understanding of factors contributing to Latin@ and African American students’ persistence in adult education programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), Career Technical Education (CTE), and Adult High School Diploma (AHSD) by obtaining data from face-to-face interviews of 20 participants (12 Latin@ and 8 African Americans). The qualitative data analysis revealed four major themes that contribute to learners’ persistence: (1) learners’ self-motivation; (2) quality and relevance of the program; (3) social support from families and communities; and (4) teacher-student relationships.

The findings are presented in five sections, following the themes that emerged in the data analysis. The first section presents the participants’ demographic profile including each participant’s background, experiences, and attitudes and the common themes in the participants’ profiles. The second section presents learners’ self-motivation and goal setting. The third section reveals the participants’ view of the quality and relevance of program. The fourth section discusses the impact of social support from families and communities, and the fifth section sheds light on the teacher-student relationship and its impact on Latin@ and African American adult students’ persistence.
Participants’ Demographic Profile

A total of 20 participants from four Silicon Valley Adult Education programs are included in the profile: ABE, GED, CTE and AHSD, and the participants were compared on the following demographic characteristics: ethnicity, gender, age, program, education background, family status, and socioeconomic status as related to their persistence in program.

The participants included 12 Latin@s and 8 African Americans, 10 women and 10 men, between 18 and 62 years of age (see Appendix C). The socio-economic status of the participants includes the following: 15 out of 20 (75%) participants were unemployed, living with their families, or under public assistance program. The remaining five are employed, but four from this group reported they earn low wages and are enrolled in the CTE program to enhance their chances of getting better paying jobs. Only one participant indicated his pay was good (over $100,000 per year), but he is insecure about his future because he does not have a high school diploma, and his employer does not know about it.

Participants’ education backgrounds include the following: 15 out of 20 (75%) participants did not graduate from high school, and four from this group have less than an eighth grade education level. The remaining five have high school diplomas, and two from these groups have obtained their diplomas from SVAE. These five participants are enrolled in SVAE CTE medical assistance program to obtain a medical assistance certificate.

The academic status of participants includes: 10 completers (those who completed their program or are advancing to complete their program this year) and 10 Non-completers (those who are at the beginning level of their program which includes those
who stop and returned or those who repeated the courses). Ten out of 20 participants are parents of from one to four children, and eight from these group were female.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

A description of participants’ perceptions follows:

Fatuma, a 19-year-old African American, is a single mother of a three year old boy and lives with her uncle. She has been with SVAE since 2014 and has completed the ABE program, and she is enrolled in two other programs: GED and CTE medical assistance programs. Fatuma’s persistence in her program was supported by her self-motivation and goals to become a better person, Fatuma states:

As a young black female, you can’t make it without education, either you go to jail or you do prostitution. . . .So, without education I will be into prostitution because you go to street and they you want money and men use you–because you can’t get better job without education. So they just use you and they just give you like $10, $20 because you don’t have education. That’s why I want to be exempt from that. I want to become a better person (Fatuma, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015)

Fatuma further reported that the support she is receiving from her family has motivated her to persist in her program: “My uncle always tells me to study hard. He helps me do my homework at home. So he encourages me to study hard and pass my exams.” Fatuma also indicated this support and encouragement from family and community have helped her persist in her programs. She states:

Sometimes, I want to drop out, but then they encourage me to continue my education. They say “don’t drop out.” They talk to me nicely. So, I am going to
listen to them; I am going do it. If didn’t have encouragement from my family and friends, and teachers, I would have dropped out. They said they are very proud of me and that makes me feel good. So, I don’t want to let them down. That’s why the encouragement that I got from them makes me feel like going to school more. So, people like me need encouragement from teachers, from counselors, and from everybody. If they don’t have it, they are just going to get – drop out. As they are proud of me, I want to make them proud too. (Fatuma, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015)

Helen, a 43 year old African American, is a mother of two teens and is unemployed. She left school at 13, got married at 16 and had kids at a young age. She has been with the program for a few years and has been struggling in the program but continues to come back. Helen stated when you don’t have education, “it’s like you’re in darkness”:

The truth is without education you’re not going to go up; you’re going to go down. And you’re not going to be able to help nobody, not even yourself. Because when you don’t have education it’s like you’re in darkness, it’s like everything is dark; you’re scared. . . .I get married young [16], very low in education. . . . I was a kid having kids. And it was hard, work I used to do at a young age too. I used to be a maid. I then be a mom at the same time that was frustrating. And then you go to school at night. But I never gave up, and I’m not planning to give up. (Helen, personal communication, Feb. 6. 2015)

Despite socioeconomic barriers, Helen indicated that she is determined to persist in her program because without education, people will be subjected to various social problems and fall into drug and alcohol use and end up in incarceration. Helen stated:
If there was more education for people and there were more counseling to help young people to see what they’re doing wrong, instead of locking them up. Locking them up is not doing anything but taking years away from their youth, and they come out even worse because all the years are wasted. And they come and probably hurt people and then go back again. So education is good for everybody. From old to young, everybody need help. People that go to jail because they’re having a lot of problem at home. They’re with probably no money, probably parents on drugs or alcoholic. They’re not really there helping their children and the kids then end up doing bad things. And end up locked up. So, I think, education is better to try to educate the young people instead of throwing them in jail. That’s, how you gonna have a up a bunch of people in jail. . . .They’re never going to learn anything, like wild animal. We all need help to become what we’re supposed to become as a human being. . . . We learn something every day and we change every day. So locking them for every little thing, I don’t think it’s good. (Helen, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2015)

Sara, a Latina mother of two teens, is unemployed and lives with her husband. She is currently enrolled in a GED program. She has been in adult education for a few years, but completing the GED program has been a challenge for her. However, Sara did not drop out. She is determined to attain her two goals: obtain a high school credential for herself and become a role model for her two teenage children who are out of school and out of a job. Sara states:

My son and daughter dropped out from high school, and they are staying at home. It is very difficult for me. I feel sad. I told them, “We don’t have money to live with you when we die, so you need to get education.” I tell them, almost every day you must study, but they don’t do anything. That’s why I wanted to finish
and show them, “This is my diploma and why you’re not getting?” So, I wanted my daughter and my son to see me I can do it. (Sara, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2015)

Sara indicated that her low English level has slowed her progress, but she also noted that her teacher was helpful: “My teacher is supportive; it is just the subject hard for me. I am very shy, because I’m not sure in my English. Sometime I don’t know how to ask the question.”

Victor, a Latino is a full time employee. He is unmarried and living with his parents. His high school education was aborted due to making bad friends and bad decisions. He had a job over 15 years in one company with good pay and advancement. However, after he left that company, he could not find a job that paid the same salary because of his lack of high school diploma. Victor revealed that his former company did not check his education background. He is now enrolled in SVAE’s high school program, progressing to completer group and is expected to complete his diploma this year. Victor’s persistence in his program was supported by his goal to be prosperous in life. Victor stated:

When I was younger, I didn’t realize the point of having a high school diploma. But as I got older, I realized it’s one of the basic things I need to get a good paying, decent job. I feel like high school diploma is key into uh be prosperous in life. Because where we live in the Bay Area, it is one of the most expensive places to live and not making at least you know $28 to $30. You know you are living in one bedroom room and you are renting, you’ll never be able to get or own anything. (Victor, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015)
Victor further indicated that he was concerned about returning to school after 15 years of absence, but SVAE’s program made it easier for him to enroll as well as to persist in the program. Victor stated:

When I first received the program advertisement in the mail, I know I needed to do it, but I was terrified to go to the office to sign up for the program. I was worried, how are they going to look at me; how are they going to view me? However, the office staff was nice, understanding. The counselors were very nice. The teachers were very nice. As long as you worked hard, you will accomplish what you need. So, what I like about SVAE is a little bit of everything. (Victor, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015)

Victor also indicated that SVAE’s flexible schedule offers him an opportunity to work evenings while attending class in the day time: “I work mainly at night so in the high school diploma classes they give you an option of morning, afternoon, or evening classes. And now I work late at night, so I chose the afternoon class that fits my schedule” (Andy).

Victor further reported that cost of SVAE’s high school program of forty dollars per semester is affordable and the program’s independent study format fits his needs. Victor stated:

I like this program [high school diploma]. It’s more of an independent study program where they give you a contract for let’s say History. The person next to you might be doing English. The person next to him might be doing math, Algebra One or Geometry. I might be doing English A, someone might be doing B. Every Monday you meet with the teacher; she has a goal for each week trying to meet that goal and trying to exceed that goal. So they tailor the books, the classes to what that person needs. The sooner you finish your work, the sooner
you’re out of here kind of deal. . . . What I like about here [SVAE] is that when you finish five credits, they [teachers] announce to the whole class to motivate all student to finish early as well. (Victor, personal communication, Jan., 2015)

Andy, 35 years old and Latino, is married and a father of a six year old daughter. He is employed and making good money. He is enrolled in SVAE’s high school diploma and progressing into the advanced level. Andy indicated that his high school was disrupted by “hanging out with wrong crowd and made bad decisions to making easy money” (Andy). Andy is highly motivated in his program to achieve two goals: build his personal confidence and help his daughter in school, and it has it positively influenced his persistence in the program. He stated:

What I’m missing in my life is the confidence. I could tell you everything that I’ve been through and what I’ve done, how much I accomplished. The only thing that is left behind is my education and when you don’t have that subconsciously it’s really tough to keep going. You look at my daughter in the eyes and to know that I don’t even have a high school diploma is horrible. I think, once I have those certificates behind me I think my confidence level will go much higher and I will do so much more. (Andy, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015)

Andy’s second goal is helping his daughter in her school. His daughter is going to school, and she is starting to ask questions about school, but Andy indicated that he did not have anything to give her. He is concerned that helping in her homework is getting harder for him. Andy indicated that he found the answer for his concern at SVAE, and the program at SVAE] is working for him. He stated:

My teacher is really awesome; he knows how to talk to people, and I think that’s huge, that’s 100%. If they know how to make you feel like you’re not dumb . . .
And, it’s all in the teacher. . . .So, if you are my teacher and I’m asking you a question and you give me those looks like “you’re an idiot” I am going to feel that and I don’t want to ask more questions. . . .So, it comes down to the teacher as well. (Andy, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015)

David, Elsa, and Lisa have completed their programs at SVAE in 2014. While David and Lisa transferred to community college, Elsa continued into SVAE’s CTE medical assistance program. These three participants indicated that they have met their academic goals at SVAE, and all three reported SVAE programs, teachers, and staff have contributed to their persistence and success.

David, an African American is married with two children. He is unemployed living with his family. He is in his 60s and has completed GED and CTE programs at SVAE in 2014 and has transferred to community college. He is unemployed and lives with his family. His goal is to complete an AS degree at community college and obtain a supporting wage to help his family. David indicated that he enjoyed his education at SVAE. David states:

I love to say that Silicon Valley adult education is a very great institution, because I have been to many areas in my country, different schools. So when I compare the SVAE education system, the willingness of the people to help students, the study material provided by the school. All is fantastic. The program was really very good, because from the start, from the very beginning of registration up to the period of my completion, I have been to different offices for some information and everybody was cooperative. I have attended several classes, from the very beginning up to the end; I had no problem to ask questions to instructors regardless of their age or their gender. And every instructor, female or male, was
very, very cooperative to answer my questions. (David, personal communication, Feb., 1, 2015)

Elsa, a 32 year old Latin@ is married with two children. She is unemployed. She completed her high school diploma in 2013 at SVAE and her CTE certificate in 2015. Elsa indicated that SVAE’s CTE program was equivalent to a college certificate program. Elsa enjoys going to school and learning. Her goal is educate herself and become a role model for her kids: Elsa states:

For myself because I like going to school and learning for my kids, so that they can see that, . . .their mom has a high school diploma, their mom went to school to study, so when they’re older they could see, they could go to school, go to university and get their own degree. (Elsa, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015 )

Lisa, a 19 year old African American, is unemployed. She lives with her aunt. She has completed her CTE program at SVAE in 2014 and transferred to community college at the time of this interview. Lisa indicated her experience at SVAE’s program has helped her to prepare for community college. All three participants credit their success primarily to their self-motivation and the support from their teachers and family members.

Orlando, an 18 year old Latino, is unemployed and lives with his parents. Orlando reports his education was ended at 8th grade because of bullying. Despite his bad experience in his previous schooling, Orlando indicated he is very confident this time to persist in his program. Orlando’s persistence in his current program is energized by his goals: Get a high school credential and go to a community college so that he can change his life direction. Orlando also reported that without education, he does not see a future for himself, so he is determined to complete his program this time. Orlando is satisfied with the quality of the program and the relevance to his goal:
This program is important for my future. The people here are supportive in advising me on what I should do; even when I go up and I ask if they can describe something for me there, they will be supportive and everything. I am satisfied because I’m picking up on a lot of stuff that I forgot on and yeah I’m excelling. I think I’m better than I was before because before I wasn’t paying attention. I’m learning a lot. (Orlando, personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

Orlando indicated that he is determined to persist in the program: “I don’t think I’m going to drop out because I’m kind of tired of just quitting stuff. I’m just going to complete it the whole way and even if it’s bad “(Orlando). Further he stated:

I think it’s very important growing up on who you spend time with; for example, I grew up in the wrong neighborhood and I grew up with friends. I had friends who had dysfunctional family, or they had brothers and or their whole family was in gangs so . . . I kind of grew up to thinking that those were my only friends. Now, I see the difference. I have a little brother and he has never had that type of influence, and he has grown up; he is actually five years younger than me; he has grown up way different than I have. My parents were really, really supportive. I just I was a dumb kid back then. (Orlando, personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

Rosa, a 32 year old Latina, is married with two children. She is enrolled in the CTE medical assistance program. Rosa has dropped out school in the past due to financial problems and immigration status. However, recent changes on immigration status have helped her and other students to return to school. Rosa indicated that the quality of program at SVAE was more than she anticipated, and the teacher is supportive.
The teacher pushes you to your limits. She knows your limits and when I wanted to quit my first semester got my first F in my lifetime, so, I cried, I didn’t want to come back, and she told me I could do it. (Rosa, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Rosa stated, “Without public assistance, I would not afford this program,” so Rosa suggested that community leaders and government agencies should extend their hands to help Latin@ and African American adults engaged in education (Rosa).

Barry is a 19-year-old half African American and half Asian. His parents are separated, and he lives with his mother. He does not see his father, but they talk on the phone. He dropped out of high school and is now enrolled in SVAE’s high school diploma. Barry states:

My family is very typical Asian because I’m half Black half Asian, so I live with my Asian side and they’re your typical Asian family when it comes to school. When they heard I wasn’t doing well, they were disappointed. So me and my mom didn’t exactly get along and it kind of affected me in a way like I didn’t want to be home when she’s home, so I was always out with my friends. (Barry personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

Barry pointed that the important support students need from their family is moral support, encouragement. Barry stated:

For example my friend he’s not from here; he came over from Mexico and his family’s living in one place; he has really big family. And he graduated high school perfectly fine, and he wasn’t exactly in the best financial state and he’s doing well. He graduated high school, he’s got a job, and he’s got his own car. He’s going to go to school for automotive just like me, and it’s all because his
family said he could do it. It’s like you know do it, I believe in you it’s never about money. I am who I am because that’s what I want to do not because oh I have money. (Barry, personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

Tamera, a 43-year-old African American mother of two children, is unemployed, and she receives public assistance. She enrolled in CTE’s medical assistance program. Tamera’s goal is to finish her program and get a job and support her kids in school. However, Tamera has been on public assistance, and her eligibility is running out. She will be without financial support. Tamera stated:

The government program that I’m on which pays for this school program is running out. I’m going to be no longer getting benefits. I exceeded my 48th month of aid. So they said as of February 3rd I’m getting zero, zero, zero, but they will help me with some stuff and they will still continue my program here which is a plus so I’m blessed for that. (Tamera, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Tamera indicated that this is her second time enrolled in this program. In 2013 she was kicked out of the program. Because of her financial and family problems, Tamera stated she was confused: “I don’t know what I was thinking about. My mind was somewhere else, and I ended up getting kicked out” (Tamera). However, Tamera reported her decision to go back to school was for her family, especially for her two children. Tamera reported that support and encouragement from family and friends are important for adult students, but her family is in a financial crisis:

Recently [in] my family there’s been like a couple deaths, and it’s like they weren’t prepared, they had no money, they had no careers no jobs, so we end up doing a carwash just to bury a loved one that’s dead. So I don’t want any to end
up like that so. And you know, it took me a while but I’m here, I’m trying to get it
together. (Tamera, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Tamera indicated that having educated parents can help adult students navigate
resources. She stated:

My dad was kind of in and out of jail but for the most part my mom was always
working. It does help if your parents are doctors, lawyers because they’re pushing
you to be that. Show you different resources and different avenues and somebody
that doesn’t have any money you know and doesn’t have a good career or
education. I am not going to dropout; I got kicked out last time. I did because I
wasn’t a good student so they might as well … get dropped out. I am progressing
in the class. So you know before when they came out and passed any modules F,
F, F, F, this time I don’t see F on there. It’s like I knew I could do it. I know I just
wasn’t applying myself. And this month and each month I get stronger, I’m going
to top my homework and I want to aim for 10s on all my homework and all my
tests. (Tamera, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

James, a 19 year old Latino student, lives with his parents. His high school
education was taken away by socio-economic setbacks: “I felt troubled, at times
confused” (James). However, he is now confident to complete his GED. James’s
persistence in the program was revitalized by his “dreams”: “I want to be script writer.
I’m taking GED and I’m doing great. It’s easier than I thought; after this [GED] I am
going to college. And then get like a part-time job” (James). James indicated that he is
motivated by the quality of program and accessibility of SVAE by public transportation.

Sam, a 19 year old Latino student is unemployed and lives with his parents. He is
enrolled in the GED program. His goal is to finish with a high school diploma and get a
job. Sam indicted that is motivated now because he is changed. Sam stated:
I’m very committed now. I show up every day; in high school, I would never show up. Now, I really wanted to graduate high school. I’m more mature now. So I realize what we do need to do in this life. Getting my high school diploma and find a job will benefit bettering myself and everybody around me. (Sam, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2015)

Maricela, a Latina, is married with four children. She is unemployed, and she is enrolled in GED. Maricela is motivated by her goals: getting her diploma get a job and help her kids in school.

I have four kids, and one of them is six a year old boy, and if I don’t understand it, I can help him with his homework or things like that so one of my priorities is to help my kid to do homework, to be good in school, and have better education. I want to get, you know my GED (Maricela, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015).

Maricela indicated that her education has been a challenge because of her family responsibility: “For me it’s really, hard to come to school sometime, because I’m mother of four kids. So, sometimes I have a lot of things to do; some of my kids are you know get sick or things like that and I have to stay in home” (Maricela). Maricela’s education is supported by her husband. In addition, Maricela indicated that the support and understanding of SVAE’s teachers has helped her persistence in her program. She stated:

The teachers understand my situations and give me the opportunity to continue with my study. So, I would appreciate that. If some of my kids are sick I have to go back and stay at home because I don’t have really family close to care for my son, so I have to stay at home. That’s why I decide to come to adult education because it’s only my way to continue with my education. SVAE is convenient
because I live close, and with my children, it is convenient for me. So, you know if something happen or emergency it’s really convenient to me. My husband, give us house, food, and clothes and all those things. So if you wouldn’t have support we have to go and work, get a work. (Maricela, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015)

Amy, a Latina, is enrolled in the CTE medical assistance program. She is single and lives with her parents. Her mother is a school principal, her family pays her school tuition, and they fully support her education. Amy indicated that she was motivated by the quality of instruction she is receiving in her medical assisting program:

I think I motivated myself, because I want a job, because I want to do well for myself, for my family, for my siblings, for my friends. Fortunately, I have my mom who is very supportive of my education, and now I have new motivation from these my classmates and the teacher. This is so awesome. I really feel like this program deserves more recognition. (Amy, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Amy appreciates the support and encouragement from her teachers and classmates which contribute to her persistence in the program:

We’re very family oriented; whenever anybody needs help, we’re always there to help. When we need a tutor, the teacher assistant will be there for us and she [is] willing to stay after; some of us stay after or we come early or, you know, whatever it takes we do it. (Amy, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Amy’s persistence and progress in her program have been strengthened by the support and encouragement from her teacher and fellow students. She indicated:
The CTE teacher is like a mother to all of us. She is always making sure that we’re doing what we have to and the same with her class aids. Everybody is very helpful. We are like a little family. . . . I’m super motivated. I think all the girls [in CTE program] can say that they first come in like really excited, and it’s just so overwhelming and very challenging field, but that’s what makes it so different. What motivates me more is the classmates and doctor [instructor]. The teacher is really good; everybody is just it’s like a little family; they help you and feel like you want to give up and they’re just like no don’t give up keep going. (Amy, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Support and encouragement from fellow students were important in the medical assistance program. Amy suggested that the CTE program is stressful because it’s supposed to be a fast program, and time management was crucial to succeed. She stated:

There are exams every day, and then you have work, and then you have school and then you have kids. We struggle with time management, and being organized is really important. Fellow students become best friends because you’re seeing these people five days a week, and then even on the weekends you’re going to library, and you’re studying and you’re sharing experiences, so, we’re very open with each other. We have a girl she doesn’t speak very well English; she just works that much harder and we help her and, she still does it. . . . I’ve witnessed people coming in super quiet, and timid and shy and then they just come out of their shell, you know, which is awesome. (Amy, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

James indicated his parents are supportive of his education, “My mom paid the class for me. Family support is important because when you need ‘em, they’re the ones that are actually there, unlike friends who, they might be there. But when you really need
‘em, your family is the closest to you” (James finish citing). James suggested that having community support such as an internship was important for adult students to gain work experience. James stated:

Having role models definitely can help because, someone telling a story about them, you could learn what they’ve been through or anything. You could give that advice on them already. From what you know, on what works. You could transfer that to them. Give them ideas. A lot of celebrities, they come from different traits. And I definitely look up on to some people. I think, the main obstacle for my relatives, my nephews, to go to school is financial problems. That’s a big thing what I have observed. (James, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2015)

Jessica, a Latina, is a full time employee. She has graduated from high school. She is enrolled in SVAE’s CTE medical assistance program to enhance her chances for a higher paying job in the medical field. Jessica stated:

The CTE class has a very friendly climate because the teacher completely loves her students. She wants to help them in any way she can to make them be better for themselves, to succeed in what we’re doing. The program seems like it’s much accelerated and it is difficult, but it’s not impossible. You just have to commit yourself to it, and work as hard as you can. I mean, I did; some of the times I question, “It’s hard what am I doing?” All that type of stuff but, no, I mean I’m confident. I really do everything that’s required, and it’s not outside of my ability. We are very welcoming. We have a very multicultural, there’s a wide variety, there are a lot of people that speak English very well, people who don’t speak English very well, but I mean we all help each other, because we all know we want to succeed in the class, so we do everything we can, because there are
some people that are a little bit apprehensive. (Jessica, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Jessica indicated that she enjoys the program and the support of her teacher. Furthermore, she indicated that the classmates have a good relationship with each other. She stated:

I like the program. I didn’t know what to expect. I had no clue, but I mean there’s a wide variety of people, age ranges, and everything. So, I’ve had a pretty positive experience. I mean positive because you have some young people, some older people, because I mean it’s just different levels where everybody’s at in stage, and life, and their experiences. I think it blends really well to motivate you. And in that class you have to be participating, and be social. I mean the teacher completely loves her students. She wants to help them in any way she can to make them be better for themselves and to succeed in what we’re doing. (Jessica, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

In addition, Jessica stated in CTE program, “Students’ participation is 100% necessary. If you do not speak up, you don’t talk, you’re going to do very badly. You have to interact with them, and if you’re shy people will still try help you” (Jessica).

Tamera indicated that having kids at any age in your life is a big responsibility, and it affects education in significant way. She stated:

Having kids at young age big responsibility for any age. As far as young girls having kids, yeah it’s definitely something that should; we should be against totally. But these days its like moms are like “I don’t have a granddaughter. I want a grand baby. They are so cute,” but it’s like your daughter is 18; what do you want a grand baby for? Let her go and be great; let her go to college, let her
do whatever because once you have a kid, “OH I’ll do it once my baby turns this age” and then you say that and then you’re having another kid and then, “Oh when this baby turns this age” and you’re having another and another. It’s just that you go back and back and back. You don’t stay young forever you know. Your time goes by quick you know. So discouraging you know kids until you’re married or until at least you have a career is best. That way you can you know, you can provide for them. (Tamera, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

In addition, Tamera suggests that the African Americans aren’t taught with regard to family responsibility and education priorities.

African Americans aren’t taught all about at least I wasn’t, this is how it should be; school, marriage first then there’s kids you know, save money. That wasn’t instilled in me, and I don’t know how many other black families do that, but we don’t teach our kids that to save money. We weren’t taught that, we don’t know so we just stay poor. And we stay with these and it just keeps going, but Asians generally, they’re really focused, they’re really smart, they’re dedicated to their school, and they’re like number one in the class and it’s just like amazing don’t even and they’re not from here but they can come here and just and point all this stuff because they’re taught that they’re taught. Some Asian do not have kids at young. They have degree and they are engineers and teachers. She [teacher] didn’t have a kid until she was like you know. We’re just not that here in America not all of us, not my family…. I don’t have a car, I’m on subsidized housing. No one’s going to pay for me to go to school. (Tamera, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Tamera’s condition illustrates the importance of support from family and community. For the purpose of this study, community refers to stakeholders of adult
education including students, parents, local businesses, social workers, social service agencies, and others. All these agencies and individuals play significant role in helping students find resources for day care, tutoring, transportation, or other assistance.

Jones, a 19 year old African American, is enrolled in high school diploma program. He is expected to complete it by May 2015. Jones enjoys his program and has a good relationship with teachers. In addition, Jones reported that his family has a tradition of round table dinner on Sundays. Jones indicated that this family provided an opportunity to talk about any issue, including his education progress. He stated:

My parents are always trying to keep track with me and the stuff that I’m doing. We always have family dinner around the table on Sundays. We all discuss about different things that are going on, and they always ask on the table and try to figure out where I’m at in my program. I let them know, you know, what’s going on and they support me. We’re like a Christian family, and the reason why we do that is just that my dad and my parents they all feel like we’re all blood so were like family. A lot of people that have families are very distant from each other. They always tend to let everyone do their own thing, and they’ll be having sitting down and having that bond. My dad always feels like it’s always good to have a bond and because you know where you come from and how you’ve been grown. So, umm, you can rub that off on your kids when you get kids and you can teach them maybe the same thing. (Jones, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015)

Jones suggests, “It’s always good to have support system like everywhere you go you know whether it’s in class, whether it’s at home. It’s always good to have someone support you because if you constantly bash the person about things, then the person’s not going to want to do wherever they’re at” (Jones).
Summary of Thematic Analysis

Four major themes related to the participant’s persistence in the adult education program emerged in the analysis of the 20 participants: Self-motivation, quality and reliance of program, support from families and communities, and teacher quality. The data analysis showed that those themes differed in the number and similarity of sub-themes and categories comprising them (see Appendix C). Overall, there were more similarities between the participants who were completers than with those who are Non-completers. There also similarities among students who attended CTE program. Factors considered important for these 20 participants as related to their persistence in the program are self-motivation, quality of programs, and support from family and teacher relationships.

Self-Motivation and Goal Setting

The qualitative data analysis revealed that almost all participants indicated self-motivation and goal setting the most important factor positively affecting their persistence in adult education programs such as ABE, GED, ASE, or CTE. The findings show that having goals such as getting good paying job, obtaining a high school diploma, helping child in school, and become professional empower them to persist in their programs.

Quality and Relevance of Program

Participants’ persistence was positively affected by the quality and relevance of program. Quality of program is described as challenging, high standards, and engaging students. Relevance reflects the importance of the program to students’ academic goals, such as jobs, colleges and personal enrichment.
Support from Family and Community

The findings show that support and encouragement from family and communities such as friends, counselors, and fellow students has positive impact on students’ success. Participants indicated that support such as homework assistance, transportation, financial or moral encouragement was significantly important for adult students’ success in adult education.

Teacher Quality

The findings show that teacher quality was an important factor for student success in adult education. Participants indicated that teachers who care about their students play a key role by treating all student equal, providing timely feedback and willingness to support. The students who persisted in the program had a high comfort level with their teachers and participant in classroom activities.
The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain in-depth understanding of Latin@ and African American adult students’ perception of factors that they believe contribute or impede their persistence in adult education programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Diploma (GED), Adult High School Diploma (AHSD) or Career Technical Education (CTE). The qualitative findings show that learners’ self-motivation and goal setting were the most influential factors positively affecting Latin@ and African American adult students’ persistence in the adult education programs such as ABE, GED, CTE or AHSD.

Figure 2. Illustrates the theoretical framework in relation to input variables/factors and persistence.

![Theoretical Framework](image)

*Figure 2: Theoretical framework*
All participants, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, or socio-economic status perceive that obtaining these adult education skills and credentials provide them with opportunities for getting a job, attending college, helping children in school, and becoming contributing members of their families and communities. In addition, all participants indicated that the adult education programs offered by SVAE such as ABE, GED, CTE and AHSD are relevant to their goals, and the majority of them are satisfied with the quality of their programs. Significantly the majority of participants indicated that support from families, teachers, and friends played significantly important role in fostering their persistence in adult education programs.

**Learners’ Self-Motivation**

The qualitative data analysis revealed that students’ self-motivation and goals were the most influential factors for Latin@ and African American adult students’ persistence and successful completion of adult education programs such as ABE, GED, CTE and high school diplomas. All participants, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, or socio-economic status indicated that their decision to reengage by going back to school and persisting in their programs was empowered by their personal dreams for a better life, to overcome poverty, become financially independent, and help their children in school, and/or become proud members of their communities.

The majority of participants reported that living without these adult education skills has a major economic and social consequence for Latin@ and African American communities: being trapped into easy money schemes for selling and consuming bad products; falling into gang, drug, and alcohol habits; falling into prostitution and exploitation by others; and, finally, being locked up. One participant describes this environment:
Being a high school dropout leads into branches you don’t want to go to. Like, I need to make money, I’ll start selling this? And that leads into I’m going to start consuming my product and consuming my products will lead into more trouble. Because then it’s not really your product; it’s someone else’s product that you’re just selling, and then it leads back to you not having a certain amount of money then you get in trouble, or you die, or you or you go to jail. You’re running into the police, you’re getting into trouble, all kinds of mischiefs. Like it’s not something you want to get into because then you just lead into the wrong people, wrong people lead you into the wrong direction and then sooner or later you’re in jail. (Barry, personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

All parent participants were highly motivated, indicating part of their goal was to help their children in school. These parents report that acquiring basic skills and obtaining high school credentials provide them with skills they need to help their children in their homework. Maricela, a mother of four stated: “I have a six-year-old boy and if I don’t understand, you know I can’t help him with his homework or things like that so one of my priorities is to help my kid is to do homework, to be good in school and have better education” (Maricela). Another parent stated:

My daughter is six and she’s asking me questions about school, and I don’t have anything to give her. In fact helping in her homework is getting harder for me to help her, so it kind of wakes you up. If you’re not a role model and you’re telling them how important school is to them if you don’t do anything for yourself, your word really doesn’t mean anything. (Andy, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015)

Research shows that parents’ participation in an adult education program provides them with access to resources, knowledge, and other supports from the instructor and
fellow students (Shiffman, 2011). The findings confirm previous literature on adult education that adults are motivated by their goals such as love for learning, meeting a personal challenge, a lifelong dream, changing life direction, becoming a better person or helping a child in school (Knowles, 1980). Other studies have demonstrated that adult students who had a goal such as helping their child in school, get a good paying job, or go to college were important factors in adult students’ persistence in adult literacy programs (Porter et al., 2005; Comings, 2007).

**Program Quality**

The data analysis revealed that all participants believe that the adult education programs offered at SVAE such as ABE, GED, CTE and a high school diploma are relevant to their academic goals. The majority of participants reported that they are satisfied with the quality of program and almost all participants perceive the programs are relevant to their goals. Andy stated:

> My confidence level has gone higher because now I ended up with a B in English from having an F; for me that’s huge. For some people they have no idea what that is but internally you start believing that you’re smart and you want to keep going, and for that you tend to be more motivated to do other things (Andy, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015).

High standards, meeting expectations, relevance to goals, convenience, and flexibility are important factors contributing to students’ persistence. The amount of satisfaction, however, was the greatest among the completers and the lowest among the non-completers group. The independent study style format of the program in ABE, GED, and high school programs has resulted in some mixed feelings. Completers reported
that they enjoy this format, pointing out that they can go forward at their own pace to finish their program faster, while participants from non-completers group found it as challenging or difficult. Victor from the completer group indicated the independent study format in the high school program was working for him. He stated: “If you have any questions or concerns about the work you are doing, there is a teacher and also a teacher aid in the classroom, so you can ask him for help or for reference, and they are willing to guide you” (Victor). Another completer, Fatuma, reports that these programs do involve student participation.

In fact every like Monday two days per week, our teacher has our group altogether and we do it together. But we ask her questions, she ask us, we read by individually. Then she asks us questions. And we ask her too and she answers us. We do spellings. We do a lot of things, so teachers are supportive. (Fatuma, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015)

Some participants from the non-completers’ group also reported that they enjoyed their programs. Orlando from the non-completers’ group mentioned that he is making progress in his program. He stated:

I am satisfied with my program because I’m picking up on a lot of stuff that I forgot on and yeah I’m excelling. Now I’m all ears so it’s different, I’m learning a lot, because without the high school diploma. I don’t see me getting a good job in the future. (Orlando, personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

Participants in the CTE program reported that they enjoy their program. Almost all participants from CTE program reported that although the program is designed as a fast paced format, the interactive nature of the classroom climate positively affected students’ experiences. These participants reported the environment to work together, ask
questions, collaborate and form study groups, and engage in classroom activities have helped them to persist and progress.

David has completed his programs at SVAE and transferred to community college at the time of this interview. He reported that he enjoyed his academic program at SVAE. David stated, “I have attended several classes and all program have exceed my expectation. The teachers and staff were supportive” (David). Another participant who completed her HS diploma at SVAE reported that she decided to continue her CTE medical assistance at SVAE. Elsa stated:

I would say medical assistance program is excellent because what I’ve been seeing all the people that graduated with me, they’re getting jobs like they are paying 20 something dollars an hour like, when I went to do my extra shift, they wanted me to stay and mostly everybody in our class, by the time they’re out within a month or two they get hired somewhere. (Elsa, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Some participants who are employed indicated that the program flexibility provided them the opportunity to keep their work and family schedules intact while taking classes. Victor stated: “I work mainly at night, so the high school diploma classes they give you an option of either morning, afternoon or evening classes. And now I work late at night, so I chose the afternoon class around 12:30.” (Victor, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Overall, almost all completers and the majority of the non-completers indicated that their experience at SVAE was positive, and they like the programs, teachers, and support services. In addition, the findings reveal that the participants were attracted by convenience of the location and accessibility by bus or train. The majority of participants reported that they enjoyed their programs. The CTE classroom is more interactive
and requires students to engage in a classroom discussion, thus, differently affecting participants’ persistence. For all participants in the completers group the self-paced format positively impacted their progress, because, reportedly, these students would like to advance through the class at their own pace, while non-completers tend to require some instructional assistance.

Teacher-Relationship

Almost all participants indicated that teacher support is critical in student persistence. The qualitative data analysis showed that the majority of participants were satisfied with the relationships that they had with their teachers. This positive teacher-student relationship was described as awesome, care for students and supportive.

Elsa from CTE medical assistance program stated: “Teacher’s [are] really supportive; they come to me to ask me if I needed anything or I could go to them and ask them if I need something” (Elsa). Likewise, Fatuma from the GED and CTE program reported that her teachers encourage them to participate. She stated:

In fact every like Monday, two days per week, our teacher has our group altogether and we do it together. But we ask her questions, she ask us, we read by um individually. Then she asks us questions. And we ask her too, and she answers us. We do spellings. We do a lot of things, so teachers are supportive. (Fatuma, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015)

Classroom participation, paying equal attention to students, and timely feedback on student progress were mentioned as important factors for students’ persistence and program completion. The positive impact of teacher support on students’ persistence in adult education was consistent with other studies on adult education students’ persistence
(Knowles, 1980, Comings, 2007; Porter et al., 2005). All participants in the CTE medical assistance program indicated that they enjoy their programs and support from their teachers and classmates. One student from medical assistance class indicated that despite the high cost [$2000] of the course and despite the challenging nature of the coursework, she enjoys her program and states, “It’s worth it. Because the program is real relevant to my goal; the teacher is always there to help” (Jessica).

Most CTE medical assistance students mentioned that the program is rigorous and requires hard work, but the teacher-student relationship and the welcoming classroom climate has positively affected them. Amy stated:

My God, the teacher is like a mother to all of us. She is on everybody’s case; she watches everything even when you think she doesn’t know she knows. I mean she sees you’re struggling like she doesn’t have to hold your hand, but she does it anyway because she cares and she wants us to do better and it’s like she has told us, “If you don’t want to be here, if you don’t have the motivation”, she is like “I’m not going to drag you, you know, but if you want it,” she is like, “I’ll hold your hand and I’ll help you,” and she is always making sure that, we’re doing what we have to and the same with her class aids. Like I said everybody is very supportive. Everybody is very helpful. We are like a little family. (Amy personal communication, Jan. 29, 2015)

Some participants indicated that their primary source of support for education is from their teachers and fellow students because they did not have family, or their family members are uneducated or are in and out of prison. These participants report that teachers who believed in helping all students can make a major difference in motivating adult students to persist and succeed in their program.
Both Latin@ and African American participants shared similar views that having good relationships with the teacher and fellow students is the most effective way to support learning and persistence in the program. These harmonious relationships are the approaches by which teachers can convey timely feedback, motivation, and equal attention to all students to succeed. This finding confirms Freire’s (1970) assertion that establishing harmonious teacher-student relationships fostered the process of knowledge construction.

Overall, participants were more satisfied with instructors’ support and their willingness to help struggling students. Participants reported that they appreciate timely feedback and encouragement from teachers: One student recalls receiving an F in her first exam, and she was terrified and contemplated to dropout, but because of the teacher’s prompt feedback, it helped the student to persist and complete her program. Rosa stated: “The teacher pushes you to your limits. She knows your limits and when I wanted to quit my first semester. I cried, when I got my first F in my lifetime, so I didn’t want to come back, and she told me I could do it” (Rosa).

Students’ persistence was positively affected by support that they received from their teachers. Lack of persistence in high education programs often was attributed to lack of support and encouragement from teachers. Bush (2010) stated that students who perceived support from their faculty were more likely to complete their degrees. However, little research has been conducted on the role of teachers on Latin@ and African American students’ persistence in adult education programs. The data analysis in this study revealed that teacher support is a critical factor in student persistence in adult education.
Family Responsibility

Almost all participants indicated that family plays a significant role in the students’ persistence in adult education. Almost 15 out of 20 (75%) participants in this study were unemployed, living with their parents, or receiving some public assistance; thus, social support from family and community was critical for most Latin@ and African American adult students. Previous studies also suggested families, friends, and employers among the most helpful sources of support (Comings, 2007). Participants reported the support and encouragement from their parents, spouses, relatives, friends, and classmates were important to their persistence in the program.

The findings revealed that different participants had different sources of external support. For some participants, family support was an important factor for their education. These participants report they live with their parents and spouses, receive transportation assistance, tuition payments, and also receive assistance in their homework. Fatuma stated:

Because my uncle, the one I am living with right now, always tell me to study hard. He helps me do my homework at home. And he said, if I want to succeed, I can’t do anything without education. So he encourages me to study hard and pass my exams. He helps me do my homework so I can make it. (Fatuma, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2015)

For others, their only source of support is government assistance. For some participants, there was no apparent support from external sources. One participant reported that her family is so poor that they had to do a car wash to raise funds to bury a dead family member. Because of her government assistance program ending, she has nowhere to go, “My back is against the wall” (Tamera). These findings were consistent
with previous research on the effect of socio-economic factors on adult students’
persistence (Pickard, 2013; Schafft & Prins, 2009).

Barry from the high school program reported he has a broken family relationship. He stated:

My mom is a lot of pressure to be honest because she would talk to me every day about it. It’s not like we’ll talk this day or talk that day”; it’s just every time me and her are alone in the house or in the car it’s always about school. And that puts a lot of pressure on me and at the same time it gets really irritating. It’s just I don’t want to hear the same constant thing every day. And it’s irritating to the point like I don’t want to talk to her; it agitates me, and it’s just something not pleasant to hear from your parent all the time like, how are you doing in school, how are you doing in school? Are you doing well in school, how good are you doing in school? It’s, it’s not fun to hear because you don’t want to hear that every day, and you want to have a decent conversation you know at least once in a while. (Barry, personal communication, Jan. 27, 2015)

The qualitative findings show that family responsibilities such as day care are important factors in impacting adult education. Ten out 20 participants were parents of one to four children, and eight from this group were female. Most female participants indicated that having children at a young age has affected their education, and their family responsibility continued to be challenging to their education. All parents indicated that part of their goal for going to adult school is to motivate their children to succeed in school so that what happened to them would not happen to their children. Almost all participants agree that having children at a young age has a negative effect on education. Helen stated: “I got married early, and then I had kids early. So, I couldn’t continue, I had to work and take care of husband and kids” (Helen).
However, there were more important factors for female participants than male participants. These findings were supported by other studies of adult students’ persistence with regard to their motivation to complete the program (Comings, 2007; Porter et al., 2005; Pickard, 2013). Almost all participants indicated that life without basic skills and credentials such as ABE, GED, or ASE makes it difficult to get a job, raise a child, and become a fully independent adult person.

Some married participants indicated they are attending school because their spouses are working and providing financial support to the whole family. Furthermore, participants’ goals such as getting family supporting wages were among the most important factors causing them to keep going in adult education programs. These findings confirm previous findings (Schafft & Prins, 2009) that family commitments were crucial barriers leading some participants to quit the program. This study focused on the adult students pursuing certificates in the CTE which offered convenience, flexibility, and the opportunity to keep regular work and family schedules. For some participants, SVAE’s flexible course schedule provides them with more options to choose suitable times for studies and keep their full-time employment.

The CTE medical assistance program participants received the most support from their teachers and fellow students; however, some from this group also claimed to be the most challenged by pressing job obligations and family responsibilities. The qualitative findings revealed different participants had different sources of support: For some it was family and employment, for others family; for one interviewee, there is no apparent support from any source: Her only income from the public assistance program will run out soon, and she has nowhere to go; she stated “my back is against the wall” (Tamera).

For the majority of participants, family responsibility factors also were important for staying in the program; however, they were more important for female participants than male participants. These findings were supported by other studies of adult students’
persistence with regards to their motivation to complete the program (Comings, 2007; Porter et al., 2005; Pickard, 2013).

**Socioeconomic Status**

Socioeconomic factors also were important factors for adult students’ decisions on whether to keep going to school or dropout. The finding shows that 75% of participants were unemployed, living with families, or receiving public assistance. The findings revealed that different participants had different sources of external support. Some participants receive financial support from their family. Most of these participants report that they live with their parents and spouses, receive transportation assistance, tuition payments, and also receive assistance in their homework. One participant reports that she is working, but her mother who is a school principal has paid her $2000 tuition and more educational funds are available for her future use. Most participants have experienced difficulty finding help due to lack of information or resources. These participants come from low-income communities where family members are also uneducated, are not there to assist them with homework, or are themselves in trouble such as on drugs or in jail. Thus, most Latin@ and African American adult students are more likely to be vulnerable to economic factors in their academic progress because some of them don’t have jobs or families to support them. For some participants there are no supports from any source. As indicated above, Tamera had to hold a car wash to raise fund to bury a dead family member. Because of her government assistance program ending, she has nowhere to go (Tamera).

Thus, having educated parents or a financially supportive family plays a critical role in students’ persistence. On the other hand, low socioeconomic status can negatively affect adult students’ persistence. These findings are consistent with previous research on

The findings show that educators and leaders of adult education should pay attention to the needs of adult students. Understanding the socio-economic conditions of these adult students is very crucial for teachers, social workers, and administrators in helping their students persist in their programs.

**Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications**

The goal of this study is not to prove or disprove any one theory or concept. The intent of this qualitative study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of factors affecting Latin@ and African American adult students’ persistence in an adult education program by obtaining data from interviews of 20 participants (12 Latin@s and 8 African American).

The finding show several factors contribute to adult students’ persistence, but the most influential factor affecting the Latin@ and African American adult students’ persistence is self-motivation and goals. The findings show that Latin@ and African American participants are motivated to learn skills and obtain credentials that can help them get a job, attend college, help their kids in school, or become contributing members of their family. The findings also show that the quality of the program positively affected participants’ persistence in their programs. Likewise, participants reported that support and encouragement from teachers and family members were important factors in their persistence.

The data analysis also revealed that Latin@ and African American adult students face barriers such as family obligations, poverty (unemployment), and stereotyping. Andy
reported that Latin@ and African American communities are several years behind from the rest of the society. Andy stated:

Latin@ and African American are at least 15 years behind. We’re in the same spot for years, and we haven’t moved out from there. We’re so bright but we’re just misunderstood. We could build a house without any education, we could build a fence, we could do plumbing we could do so many things without education. . . . Imagine the potential, imagine that; it’s scary, it’s scary. You could go to Home Depot and a guy could build a fence, someone that with an education could charge you thousands they could do for a few hundreds and do it right imagine how the whole world would change. So what we need is just that opportunity, we need that opportunity so bad and people just gave up on us so far. (Andy, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2015). As mentioned by Andy, some people feel that they are forgotten. In order to address these educational grievances, we must engage all stakeholders in adult education programs including students, teachers, and communities. This discovery is a wake-up call for educators, leaders, policy makers, and elected officials to investigate, interrogate, and calibrate the current education system so that Latin@ and African American communities will feel their voice is heard. Latin@ and African American community leaders and educators need to take the lead and engage in public discourse to uncover the deeply rooted educational crisis that devastates Latin@ and African American communities. The story uncovered in this study should be in the public domain, and it should be the priority agenda for policy makers and elected officials including mayors, governors, congress, and the President of United States. Our policy makers should investigate, critique, and attune our current laws, policies, and strategies that have negatively affected Latin@ and African American communities.

The current students’ persistence problem in adult education cannot be addressed by a single institution or organization; it requires strong community collaboration and partnership among various organizations. This study calls for a strong community
partnership comprised of stakeholders of adult education, K-12 districts, community colleges, state and federal agencies, local businesses, non-profit organizations, and other organizations aimed at improving persistence of Latin@ and African American adult students. For example, adult education institutions can form an advisory committee comprise of students, teachers, administrators, local businesses, and other agencies with the aim of helping adult students succeed. This committee can help improve student persistence by providing inputs on the quality of program, for example local business can offer valuable insight on the types of skills they expect from potential workforce. In addition, engaging both students and teachers in the problem solving process can foster harmonious relationships, an essential factor for student persistence in adult education. Furthermore, facilitating student support services can help student persistence. For example participants mentioned a day care as a barrier to their persistence. However, by engaging the community in the education process, adult schools can establish student support service to assist with where to find resources such as day care centers, public transportation, job search, and college transfer.

**Implication for Practice**

The findings show that teacher relationships play significant role in students’ persistence. In order to increase student success in adult education, educators need to examine, probe, and diagnose their own hearts and minds towards the current practices in adult education programs. The grievances expressed by Latin@ and African American adult students such as being forgotten and lacking opportunities should be addressed by engaging students in the problem solving process. Adult educators can positively contribute to students’ persistence by encouraging student participation in classroom activities, finding tutoring services or facilitate after class homework assistance, and providing timely progress updates.
Implication for policy

To improve the persistence of Latin@ and African American students’ in adult education, leaders of adult education institutions need to develop fair policies that can attract teachers from Latin@ and African American communities. This action can foster diversity for institution and, at the same time, when the institutions’ work force represents the ethnic composition of their student population, the institution starts to look like, act like, and communicate like its student population.

Implication for further research

A recent report by Torlakson and Harris (2015) reveal that Assembly Bill 86 charged the California Community Colleges and the California Department of education to redesign and implementing an adult education system aiming to better serve the education needs of adult learners. Furthermore, Torlakson and Harris (2015) pointed out that the AB 86 priorities include: increase service levels to meet the demand for adult education, improve programming to better prepare students, provide adequate supports for all students, align assessments between the K-12 Adult and community college systems, develop a common accountability approach for documenting student progress; and better regional coordination among adult schools, community colleges, and community partners (Torlakson & Harris, 2015).

As the Assembly Bill 86 is in its early stage, further research is warranted in order to examine its impact on students’ persistence in adult education programs.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
   • Please describe your previous education experiences. Please tell me your current educational goals.
   • What would you like to do after you completing you current program? Do you plan to change your job or transfer to college, or start a business?
   • If you dropped from the program, please tell me why did you quit? What factors were important for your decision to drop out? Family relationship, employment, financial strain, or program related, please describe.
   • Do you plan to return to adult education in the future? Tell me how effective you think your study skills are?
   • How much time do you spend studying outside the classroom? Do you have mentors or tutors to assist you on your study?
   • Describe your commitment to completing your program?

2. Tell me about your family and neighborhood.
   • Describe your environment such as family, neighborhood, and employment.
   • Is your family supportive towards your education? Please describe in what ways they are supportive or unsupportive.
   • Please describe the importance of family support to adult students.
• In your opinion, how important is cultural relevant instructions content in adult education?
• Please tell me how your financial situation affects your persistence in completing your program.

3. Tell me about your school (Silicon Valley Adult Education).
• Please describe your academic experience at this school.
• What programs are/were you enrolled at these schools?
• In general, how supportive is the school staff in assisting you?
• Please provide examples of support. In your opinion, how confident are you that SVAE has the right program for you? Why or why not?
• How likely is it that you will re-enroll at this school next semester? Why or why not?
• In your opinion, what types of support from the program help you completed your program

4. Tell me about the instruction you are receiving at this school.
• Please tell me how supportive your instructors are in assisting you reach your goals?
• Please describe how engaging did you find the class sessions to be?
• How confident do you feel in completing your program?
• Please describe, how motivated do you feel towards your completing your program?
• In general, how do you view the quality of instruction?

5. Please tell me about the supports and barriers you experience in completing your goals.
• What types of support from program, teachers, or staff help you complete your goal? What types of barriers prevent you from completing your goal?
• What types of external supports such as family, community, or agency help you complete your goal? What types of barriers prevent you from completing your goal?
• What types of personal motivations help you overcome these barriers?
• Is there anything else you think I should know about why you did or did not persist in your Adult education program?
## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANTS’ DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>HSD/GED</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Economic Status</th>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>HS</td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Af Am</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-65</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married, 2 children</td>
<td>Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-65</td>
<td>ABE</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Single, 2 children</td>
<td>Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny</td>
<td>Af Am</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>HS</td>
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<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
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<td>Maricela</td>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married, 4 children</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orlando</td>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>ABE</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Latin@</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-65</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married, 2 children</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamera</td>
<td>Af Am</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-65</td>
<td>CTE</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Single, 2 children</td>
<td>Assistance</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## APPENDIX C

### THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Learners’ Self-Motivation</th>
<th>Quality and Program Relevance</th>
<th>Teacher Relationships</th>
<th>Support from Family &amp; community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completers</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>become professional</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard Engaging, convenient</td>
<td>Loves students, peer collaboration</td>
<td>Tuition support, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Build self-confidence, help family</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard, Convenient, affordable</td>
<td>Very supportive</td>
<td>Pride, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Go to College</td>
<td>Relevant, engaging</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>Financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsa</td>
<td>Become professional help family</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard</td>
<td>Loves students peers’ support</td>
<td>Pride, day care support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatuma</td>
<td>Become professional help family</td>
<td>Relevant, challenging, Convenient.</td>
<td>Motivating, supportive</td>
<td>Encouragement, pride, homework help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Become professional</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard Engaging, convenient</td>
<td>Care for students peer collaboration</td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>Obtain HS credential, go to college</td>
<td>Relevant, Challenging, Convenient, affordable</td>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>Encouragement, Advice, supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Go to college</td>
<td>Relevant, affordable</td>
<td>supportive</td>
<td>Community internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Become professional help family</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard Engaging, convenient</td>
<td>Like a mother, peer collaboration</td>
<td>Family pride, first graduate in family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Get HS credential change direction</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard, Convenient, affordable</td>
<td>Awesome,</td>
<td>Pride, encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-completers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>Get HG diploma, get a job</td>
<td>Relevant, affordable, difficult</td>
<td>Not the best</td>
<td>Financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Become literate, help family</td>
<td>Relevant, challenging, convenient.</td>
<td>could be better</td>
<td>Appreciation, encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Get HS credential, change life direction</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard, Convenient, affordable</td>
<td>Supportive, helpful</td>
<td>Financial support, Encouragement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>Overcome disability, become social worker</td>
<td>Relevant, challenging, convenient.</td>
<td>Accommodative,</td>
<td>Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenny</td>
<td>Get HS diploma, get a job</td>
<td>Relevant, affordable, difficult</td>
<td>Not the best</td>
<td>Broken family, lacks decent conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maricela</td>
<td>Become literate, help family</td>
<td>Relevant, challenging, convenient.</td>
<td>Accommodative,</td>
<td>Supportive, encouraging, pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando</td>
<td>Get HS credential change direction</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard, Up-to-date books</td>
<td>Supportive, helpful</td>
<td>Financial support, Encouragement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Get HS credential change direction</td>
<td>Relevant, high standard, Convenient, affordable</td>
<td>Supportive, helpful</td>
<td>Financial support, Encouragement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Become literate, help family</td>
<td>Relevant, challenging, convenient.</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Financial support, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamera</td>
<td>Get Credential, get a job, help family</td>
<td>Relevant, challenging, convenient.</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>Financial assistance, transportation, shelter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>