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Exploring the learning experiences of refugee learners studying ESOL

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the learning experiences and challenges of refugee learners who were studying ESOL at a large FE college in a city in West Yorkshire, England. Furthermore, particular emphasis was paid to the course content and the effectiveness of the teaching/learning approaches. Therefore, a mixed methods approach employed a case study research strategy to view the research problems from different perspectives. The study was to assess whether the current content of the ESOL courses provided the relevant everyday linguistic needs for the refugee learners. In addition, the study also highlighted further learning challenges faced by the participants. The selected participants were a group of Arabic speaking refugee learners, who were studying at ESOL entry 3 in a monolingual class.

I observed the group and I noticed that they felt demotivated at times. The learners were punctual and motivated to learn English. However, they found it difficult to communicate in English as their confidence levels were low. Furthermore, I noticed some of the challenges they experienced when interacting with classroom activities (meaning, form and pronunciation of words). Informal conversations with colleagues also indicated that it was difficult to understand the various needs of refugee learners and how to support them. Therefore, I decided to explore their learning experiences of ESOL. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were the tools used to collect a variety of data (Bell and Waters, 2014). The findings from the study highlighted the experiences, challenges, learner opinions and preferred strategies to learning ESOL. The results from the study provided new and useful information for ESOL teachers working with the students and the wider ESOL community.

Furthermore, ESOL teachers could help learners overcome learning challenges by evaluating the current ESOL courses that are provided.

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possible.*

Statement of originality

I certify that this dissertation, and the research used in it, are the product of my own work and that any ideas or quotations from the work of other people, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices of the discipline.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

EAP- English for Academic Purposes

EIL- English as an International Language

ELF- English as a Lingua Franca

ELT- English Language Teaching

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other languages

ESP- English for Special Purposes/English for Specific Purposes

FE- Further Education

QCF-The Qualifications and Credit Framework

TEFL-Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TESL -Teaching English as a Second Language

TESOL- Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

UK- United Kingdom

Chapter one: Introduction

According to Ahmed, (2012) English is an international language that is taught all over the world. National governments, who want to meet the demands of globalisation, try to prioritise the development of ELT. English may be learnt for many different purposes of which some may include business, education, or as a second language. Therefore, ELT may be referred to as TESL, TESOL and TEFL. English language courses that are offered include: EIL, EFL, ESP, EAP and ESOL (FutureLearn, 2017). In the UK, ESOL courses are offered to individuals who want to improve their language skills and the courses are typically accessed by students who want to settle in the UK permanently, including those with a refugee status.

An ESOL course covers the productive and receptive skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening (Huang *et al.*, 2010). Learners (including refugees) of different nationalities and backgrounds attend ESOL courses to improve their English language skills, which may help them get a job, learn about their rights and responsibilities of living in the UK or to help their children (Thomas, 2013). This research highlights the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL. The introduction chapter highlights: (1) The background and content of the research, (2) Rationale, (3) Research questions, and (4) The structure of the research.

1. Background/content of the research

After entering the UK, refugees want to integrate into the British society (Phillimore, 2011). Refugees try to begin a new life but often encounter unexpected challenges of which some include learning a new language and adapting to the cultural environments (Shepherd, 2012 and Thomas, 2013). In addition, new challenges along with previous life experiences may make refugees feel insecure, isolated and helpless if there is no appropriate or timely support available (Phillimore, 2011). On the other hand, refugees have a desire and determination to learn English (Shepherd, 2012). Adult refugees have the awareness that English is essential for their independence and integration (Thomas, 2013). Furthermore, learning English will enable refugee learners to make friends with their neighbours, improve their education and more importantly find work (Phillimore, 2011 and Thomas, 2013).

Adult refugee learners attend English language classes that are referred to as ESOL classes. The ESOL classes are a regulated programme made available through educational providers (usually Further Education colleges) and, in some instances, is fully financed by the government (Phillimore, 2011). However, in recent years funding cuts have resulted in shortages of provision, waiting lists are longer, and additional barriers have occurred (no childcare) (Thomas, 2013). Due to the changes, refugee learners are finding it harder to obtain the vital language skills to assist them with successful integration. Therefore, it is vital that ESOL courses meet the linguistic needs for refugee learners, which will provide them with the ESOL skills that are required in their daily life. The linguistic needs will not only benefit refugee learners, but also benefit the wider society to which the individual can contribute to.

2. Rationale

Mallows (2010) suggests that refugee learners have a determination to develop their English skills in order to understand the life and culture in the UK. Furthermore, ESOL courses help refugee learners become more acceptable socially and also opens the doors for their economic future (Shepherd, 2012). However, Phillimore (2011) highlights that millions of pounds are spent each year on ESOL courses but refugee learners still struggle to learn English. Furthermore, Paton and Wilkins (2009) state that there are up to one million refugee learners in England who do not communicate in English as their first language. Chapleau (2015) and Thomas (2013) suggest that some educators just do not know how to teach refugee learners, which leads to learning barriers and social exclusion for refugee learners. Furthermore, refugee learners struggle to integrate into society as they are without the correct language skills (Thomas, 2013).

Therefore, this research investigates the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL at a Further Education college in the North of England. In addition, the justification of targeting the specific group was due to it being the only group entirely of refugee learners at the college. The limitation to the group was that they all spoke the same language but had different nationalities and traditions. The learners spoke in their first language whilst in the classroom, the researcher wanted to know how to motivate refugee learners to speak English and what content would encourage them to learn ESOL. Learning English may help refugee learners with the factors mentioned in the study, which may assist with becoming more involved in society. In addition, the researcher wanted to know what language topics were interesting to

refugee learners and their preferred teaching/learning strategy. There was a personal interest in the purpose of the study as the researcher teaches many refugee learners.

The direct benefit for the participants of the study was to give them an opportunity to share their experiences and challenges with an ESOL teacher. The voices of refugee learners are often not heard by educators as highlighted by Ayoub (2014). In addition, refugee learners may lack the confidence or not feel comfortable in sharing their experiences with their tutors. The participants discussed their learning experiences of ESOL with their tutor, which enabled the researcher to understand and provide the correct course content, strategies and support which would enable the learners to improve their learning (Ahmed, 2012). In addition, ESOL tutors may also use the findings of the study to alter their approaches and strategies to meet the learning needs of refugee learners (Chapleau, 2015). Furthermore, course content may be evaluated and changes may be made to motivate refugee learners to attend ESOL classes.

3. Research Questions

To determine whether ESOL courses facilitated the educational growth of adult refugee learners and met their specific needs, the research aims were to investigate three questions that needed to be addressed:

1. Is the content of the ESOL course currently provided viewed as relevant to the everyday linguistic needs of refugee learners?

2. What course content and approaches are more preferred for the learners in the study?
3. Are refugee learners offered academic support to overcome any learning barriers?

The first question investigates the various learning challenges experienced by the participants. Although the group of participants had entered the UK at different times and lived in different parts of the city, they all studied in the same class (monolingual) and at the same level. There was differentiation in the group, as some learners were at Level 1 and others may still have been at Entry 2. Some learners had studied at lower levels of ESOL and others had entered straight onto the current level. The second question was to find new ways to improve course content and approaches for teaching ESOL. In addition, ESOL courses would become more effective for the learners to achieve their goals (Shepherd, 2012). The third question was to highlight any support that was given to the learners (by the teacher) to help them overcome their learning barriers. Learners attended the class with different physical learning barriers that effected their learning (Summers, 2016). As highlighted by Morrice, (2016) the access to ESOL classes may be one of the biggest barriers to learning.

The insight the researcher was hoping to get was to understand the challenges faced by refugee learners attending a monolingual ESOL class. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to assess whether the monolingual classes were as effective as multilingual classes or vice versa. Practitioners could use the research information to

better develop ESOL courses for not only refugee learners but for all learners who may experience similar challenges. Furthermore, new researchers may want to explore learning challenges on ESOL courses.

4. Structure of the study

The study consists of six chapters. The introduction chapter has outlined the background/content of the research and the rationale. Chapter 2, reviews the relevant literature in relation to the current study. Chapter 3, discusses the methodology of the study and how the research was set up. Chapter 4, presents the findings, analyses the results and highlights the key themes. Chapter 5, discusses the results and gives recommendations. Chapter 6, evaluates and reflects on the research process as a whole and draws the study to a conclusion.

Chapter two: Literature review

[Introduction](#)

The chapter was to examine the research that was published which related to the learning experiences of refugee learners studying ESOL. The research explored and covered a wide range of topics; however, the voices of refugee learners are not often heard by researchers (Prior and Niesz, 2013). The findings and information in the literature review are presented in eleven themes that arose from present literature:

(1) Who are refugees and how they are different to migrants in the UK, (2) The importance of teaching ESOL to refugees, (3) Motivating refugee learners of ESOL, (4) Choosing the subject matter for refugee learners, (5) Using local events whilst teaching in community centres, (6) Refugees' learning experiences of ESOL/barriers to learning, access, etc., (7) Educators not familiar with the needs of refugee learners, (8) Criticism of current ESOL approaches used with learners, (9) Learner autonomy: if giving learners a choice in what they learn helps motivate them, (10) Education may be a source of frustration, (11) Gap in the literature, The chapter finishes with a conclusion which sums up the published research.

[1. Who are refugees and how they are different to migrants in the UK](#)

The media have regularly reported about the recent phenomenon of boats full of 'migrants' and 'refugees' crossing the Mediterranean Sea (Edwards, 2016). Millions of people in the UK and around the world watching the bulletins (news) may not know the difference between the two terms, which are distinct and have different meanings (Edwards, 2016 and Lawrence, 2017). According to Lawrence (2017) and

Edwards (2016) refugees are forced to leave their country as their lives are at risk of persecution. Furthermore, this may also include to escape from war, famine or natural disasters (Lawrence, 2017; Paton and Wilkins, 2009). It has been suggested by Lawrence (2017) that migrants are individuals who have a choice but decide to leave their country in search of a better life in a new country. Therefore, migrants try to improve their lives by finding work, gain a better quality of education and possibly have family reunions (Edwards, 2016; Paton and Wilkins, 2009). Refugees leave behind their homes, family, friends and most of their belongings (Lawrence, 2017).

Many refugees are forced to leave with no warning, their journey to safety is troubled with fears and they risk their lives to seek protection (Edwards, 2016 and Lawrence, 2017). Refugees are concerned about their safety and not an economic advantage (Lawrence, 2017). Refugees are unable to return to their home countries but migrants have no such obstacles and if they return they will continue to receive protection from their government (Edwards, 2016; Ehnholt and Yule, 2006). In a recent study, Edwards (2016) states that the distinction between 'refugees' and 'migrants' is important for the country's government as migrants are under their country's own immigration laws and processes. Lawrence (2017) highlights that refugees are protected by national legislation and international law. Combining the term 'refugee' and 'migrant' can endanger the lives and safety of refugees. Furthermore, confusing the two terms may take away the legal protection for refugees (Edward 2016). Paton and Wilkins (2009) suggest that refugees want to live in an English speaking country, whereas Lawrence (2017) highlights refugees want to live safely in a country that accepts them and provides them with the required support.

Refugees and migrants are both individuals who enter the UK to start new lives (Lawrence, 2017). The new life brings new educational experiences, with some refugees already having a vast amount of previous knowledge and educational background (Paton and Wilkins, 2009). According to Ayoub (2014) the education of refugees is usually interrupted due to the conflicts and safety concerns in their country. The lack of nutrition, shelter and medical assistance in refugee camps further has a physical impact on refugees (McBrien, 2011). Education for refugees is further affected as resettlement may take time, due to the needs for assessment in refugee camps (McDermott, 2005). The research by Refugee Action (2016) suggested that refugees in the UK have a chance to rebuild their lives in safety.

Refugees and migrants attend ESOL classes to integrate and settle in to the British society (Paton and Wilkins, 2009). Ayoub (2014) suggests that some of the challenges both groups face is trying to adapt to a new education system with unfamiliar teacher strategies and learning methods. Wars and conflicts tend to have a psychological impact on refugee students and are not often experienced by migrants. The trauma experienced tends to remain with refugees long after resettlement and they tend to underachieve. Migrants are able to develop the academic foundations, learning and language skills prior to leaving their home nation (Lawrence 2017). Refugees have a psychological and physical disturbance that is present in their learning environment (Ayoub, 2014). Therefore, refugees who learn ESOL may be the most disadvantaged learners in the classroom due to their traumatic experiences (Ayoub, 2014; Paton and Wilkins, 2009).

2. The importance of teaching ESOL to refugees

English is important for refugees, it helps to build relationships and understand life in the UK (Greater London Authority, 2017). Furthermore, Refugee Action (2016) further emphasise that refugees in the UK are determined to learn ESOL in order to develop the language skills needed to speak to neighbours, at work, children's teachers, doctors, in the community, and go into further or higher education. It has been suggested by Thomas (2013) that despite some refugee learners having high levels of academic qualifications, they still struggle to integrate and interact into society which leads to social exclusion and unemployment. It has been reported by Summers (2016) that ESOL classes are inadequate for refugees as they lack routes into employment and training. Furthermore, teenagers and women who missed core education in their home country are the most vulnerable learners and may find ESOL one of the biggest barriers to learning. On the other hand, refugee learners have high levels of motivation as they understand that learning ESOL is vital to live an inclusive life in the UK (Thomas 2013). Refugee Action (2016); and Summers (2016) further support Thomas (2013) by suggesting that English is the most important tool for refugees to build independent lives and integrate into British society. Taylor (2008) emphasises that refugees are motivated to learn English and want to fill the labour market and contribute to the UK economy.

3. Motivating refugee learners of ESOL

Refugees are amongst the most motivated, active and dedicated ESOL learners in a FE college who strive to achieve their learning goals (Shepherd, 2012). To support the views of Shepherd (2012) previous investigations have identified that:

The students themselves did not need to be persuaded of the need to learn English. As they explained: 'This is our life now, we're in England'; 'Living in England, must be learning English (Han et al., 2010, P.68-69).

Karaoglu (2008) highlights that intrinsic motivation drives some refugees to learn and ESOL teachers know that motivation is crucial for language achievements. Furthermore, effective teachers may have the ability to further develop the language skills by utilising the learners' strengths and learning preferences. Learner performances may be improved by offering rewards and incentives (extrinsic motivation) (Adair, 2006; Gasper and Bramesfeld, 2006 and Morrison et al., 2007). ESOL teachers may argue that knowing the refugees' previous learning experiences or background information would enable teachers to use the correct incentives for motivating students (Miller, 2009). On the other hand, refugee learners may be in a transition mode with regards to their settlement status and, therefore, have little or no motivation (Miller, 2009). Wachob and Williams (2010) further emphasise on Miller's (2009) claims by suggesting that refugees who are still waiting for the outcomes of their immigration status are less likely to be motivated than the refugees who have settlement status.

The motivation levels of refugees may depend on their purpose of attending ESOL classes (Miller, 2009). Paton and Wilkins (2009) suggest that refugees may be self-motivated as they have the abilities, experiences and qualifications and want to continue their careers. Goddar (2017) supports the points of Paton and Wilkins, (2009) by mentioning she was very impressed with the high levels of motivation the

refugee learners had. Furthermore, some refugees in Goddar's (2017) study were determined to restart their academic lives as they were still attending university back home. Motivation and language learning numbers increased when refugees were aware that the universities were facilitating language needs and offering free education to refugees, which was an opportunity to restart their lives by getting a university education (Goddar, 2017).

On the other hand, Shoebottom (2017) suggests that learners become frustrated with the language differences as they are unable to identify the differences (in Arabic and English) between the grammar and tenses. Therefore, motivation amongst refugee learners may fluctuate, due to the complications in the language (Gibbons, 1997). To further boost refugee learners' motivation, Lightbown and Spada (2004) suggest that teachers should vary the activities, tasks and materials to avoid learner boredom. Furthermore, teachers should use co-operative learning activities rather than competitive goals to increase self-confidence in refugee learners (Karaoglu, 2008; Lightbown and Spada, 2004). To improve learners' interests, teachers should allow learners to discuss the topics and share their opinions (Karaoglu, 2008). On the other hand, refugee learners who have had no formal education struggle with the social, cultural and academic demands when being taught in mainstream institutions, as it may be their first interaction with an education (Miller, 2009; Wachob and Williams, 2010).

Refugees may have physical and psychological factors that may override their desire to learn. Previous studies found that the:

...lack of adequate familial support for children and young adults is also a primary issue, causing focus and disciplinary problems in the classroom

(Wachob and Williams, 2010, P.599).

Furthermore, refugee learners may compare tight learning spaces (learners being overcrowded) in the classroom to previous experiences, which can affect the concentration and lower the levels of participation (Wachob and Williams, 2010). It has been suggested by Prior and Niesz, (2013) that age, gender, previous schooling and economic standards may affect the motivation levels as learners try to adapt to the learning settings. Bao *et al.*, (2012) stress that refugee learners need to feel safe and able to express their opinions without being ridiculed before they accept the teacher. The attitude and behaviour towards the learning environment would determine learner motivation. Furthermore, teachers' rapport will determine how learners interact and complete activities. Therefore, teachers hold the key to motivating learners. Gibbons (1997) emphasises that despite the intrinsic, extrinsic or no motivation, ESOL teachers need to stay positive and encourage learners to achieve, participate and interact and ensure learners feel secure and comfortable. ESOL teachers need to consider that learners have developed many concepts in their first language and have the potential to do the same in ESOL as well. The attitude and positivity of the teachers will determine the confidence of the learners and their success in learning ESOL.

4. Choosing subject matter for refugee learners

BNCN Community Researchers (2007) and Thomas (2013) suggest that lessons based on real life, daily events help refugee learners improve the vocabulary and phrases related to their daily lives. Commonplace activities and regular interaction with teachers, doctors, the local council and immigration staff may be frustrating and challenging for refugee learners of ESOL due to their limited language skills (Phillimore, 2011). Therefore, choosing the subject matter for an ESOL class is important for learner engagement. Furthermore, lessons based on real-life situations which are practised through role-plays give refugee learners the opportunity to increase their confidence in a supportive, non-threatening environment and share their personal experiences with each other (Thomas, 2013). Karaoglu (2008) highlights that relating classroom topics to the interests of the refugee learners' makes language learning more relevant. On the other hand, lesson topics about a popular TV programme may not provide ESOL learners (including refugee learners) with the opportunities to learn essential daily vocabulary, however, it adds a feeling of excitement into the classroom that often sparks a lively, fun discussion (Thomas, 2013). Furthermore, Karaoglu (2008) emphasises that ESOL teachers should encourage refugee learners to watch English programs, listen to English music or read texts in English which can lead to broaden their language acquisition process. Refugees who try to interact in local events may develop the language skills and confidence to speak English on a regular basis (Paton and Wilkins, 2009). Furthermore, participating in such activities develops the understanding about language and culture in the UK.

5. Using local events whilst teaching in community centres

Teaching in community centres gives ESOL teachers the opportunity to base lessons on local events or activities where the learners are familiar with the subjects (Thomas, 2013). Furthermore, community learning brings together refugees of different nationalities to practice and share common interests about their neighbourhood and their life in the UK. Crouch (2016) suggests that bringing refugee learners together is not only a shared interest in learning English but also a communal sense of belonging. Furthermore, refugee learners feel more relaxed, confident and motivated as they are familiar with the surroundings. In addition, ESOL activity classes (sewing class, etc.) help refugee learners develop employment and language skills (Candlin and Mercer, 2001). On the other hand, teaching in the community centre may bring many challenges, as many refugee learners speak their first language with each other in their community, which may also be spoken in the classroom (Crouch, 2016 and Thomas, 2013). Therefore, English language skills may be limited and not developed due to the learners using their first language in the classroom. Teachers who try to adapt to the language and culture of the community tend to help learners build self-esteem, confidence and become more self-assured in English (Mallows, 2010 and Phillimore, 2011). Great demands are put on ESOL teachers as they try to meet the language needs of the learners whilst juggling their time, effort and everyday responsibilities (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). To balance, facilitate and support the learning process and meet the language needs of refugee learners, ESOL teachers may need to consider the learning barriers refugee learners face in order to help maximise the learning potential of the learners.

6. Refugees' learning experiences of ESOL/barriers to learning, access, etc.

Refugee learners have great determination and desire to learn ESOL, as they are aware that learning English is crucial for an independent life and successful integration in the UK (Refugee Action, 2016). However, obstacles and responsibilities create learning barriers which make refugee learners one of the most vulnerable members of society due to the insufficient provision of ESOL classes (Summers, 2016). Morrice, (2016); (quoted in Summers, 2016, P.1) and Summers, (2016) suggest that problems arise when the government generalises and uses the one size fits all model when organising ESOL classes for refugees. Morrice's (2016) (quoted in Summers, 2016, P.1) interview highlights that learners who were put into monolingual classes found that learning in a multilingual class would improve their English at a greater pace, as they would have to communicate with other learners in English. On the other hand, government cuts, classes allocated and personal commitments are also barriers to learning. Summers (2016) claims that sixteen thousand refugee learners will be affected by the government cuts to ESOL courses. Furthermore, Shepherd (2012) mentions that:

ESOL learners, for all their motivation and interest, are also adults with jobs, families, and the rest, for whom the ESOL class is a short and pretty small part of their week (P.1).

The access to ESOL classes may be one of the biggest barriers learners encounter as mentioned by Moorhead (2015) and Morrice (2016) (quoted in Summers, 2016, P.1). Refugees are only offered up to four hours a week of ESOL classes if they are

in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and meet the immigration requirements (Moorhead, 2015). Learners with children are unable to find suitable childcare and, therefore, are unable to attend classes (Doyle and O'Toole, 2013). Learners also face barriers inside the classroom, with their teachers, their peers and their self-belief. Miller (2009) suggests that refugee learners encounter a barrier to learning when teachers generalise: "*There is generally an assumption that students can read, can use dictionaries, or at least have literacy in their first language*" (Miller, 2009, P.574). Furthermore, research carried out by Ahmad *et al.*, (2017) found that women learners were reluctant to learn ESOL in mixed gender groups as they felt cultural and traditional values were disrespected. On the other hand, emotional and psychological problems disengaged learners and became barriers to learning. As highlighted by BNCN Community Researchers (2007) the uncertainty of immigration status had an impact on the learners' ability to learn English. Learners would feel depressed, alone, confused and isolated, where teachers would recognise the problems but were not trained to deal with such learning barriers. In addition, Shepherd (2012) suggests that ESOL learners are the most actively disliked members of society due to their character highlighted by the media, creating a barrier to learning through insecurity. Refugee learners are generally motivated to learn ESOL due to their life experiences and language needs, but may feel pressured in new learning environments (Ahmad *et al.*, 2017). The motivation and desire of refugee learners is overwhelming that the barriers to learning could be overlooked (Goddar, 2017). Furthermore, additional barriers are created when educators are not familiar with the needs of refugee learners.

7. Educators not familiar with the needs of refugee learners

To meet the needs of refugee learners is a daunting task for ESOL teachers (Ayoub, 2014 and Solis, 2016). According to Solis (2016) teachers are unable to comprehend the challenges that refugees encounter whilst attending ESOL classes. Furthermore, additional challenges are faced when trying to meet the needs of refugee learners who have had no formal education, and have different levels of skills in the English language (Ayoub, 2014). Regardless of educational backgrounds, teachers need to find ways to effectively teach and meet the needs of refugee learners (Roxas, 2010). It has been suggested by Taylor and Sidhu (2012) that it is important for ESOL teachers to know the backgrounds of refugee learners to ensure they are able to provide an educational program that is responsive to the different needs for each learner. As highlighted by Ayoub (2014) ESOL teachers may not have the necessary training to meet the needs of refugee learners. Szente *et al.*, (2006) support Ayoub (2014) and further emphasise that teachers are uncomfortable and not prepared to address the emotional stress experienced by refugee learners. Therefore, mentoring and in-service training is essential for teachers to provide the best practice for refugee learners (Adams and Kirova, 2011). Furthermore, learning opportunities for the teachers may increase their knowledge and understanding on how to support refugee learners in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers may effectively meet the needs of refugee learners if there is regular communication between relocation agencies, family support staff, settlement workers and educational professionals (Roxas and Roy, 2012). Learners may indicate their learning needs and preferences through their behaviour, attitude and their responsibility. Therefore, learner autonomy

may not only meet the language needs of refugee learners but motivate them in learning ESOL as learning may become more personal (Little, 2016).

8. Criticism of current ESOL approaches used with learners

It has been suggested by Roberts and Cooke (2009) that it is difficult for teachers to select the correct authentic material that refugee learners could use to interact outside the classroom. Teachers may not live in the same communities, share similar interests or have similar values as the learners and, therefore, are unaware of the authentic materials the refugee learners use in their daily lives. On the other hand, ESOL course books contain a lot of question and answer activities and after a few lessons, learners may find the learning process boring which could cause learner disengagement (Tze-Ming Chou, 2010). Listening activities take longer for learners to understand due to the different accents and linguistics heard in the recordings, which increases the activity time (Moussu, 2010). Despite the criticism of ESOL teaching, learners still improve their language skills. Furthermore, teachers who give learners an opportunity to decide the lesson topics help motivate learners to achieve the language needs (BNCN Community Researchers, 2007).

9. Learner autonomy: if giving learners a choice in what they learn helps motivate them

It has been suggested by Yagcioglu (2015) that teachers who give the learners autonomy tend to generate positive energy in the learning environment. Little (2016) and Yagcioglu (2015) both agree that autonomous learners appreciate the purpose of their learning, accept responsibility for their learning outcomes, make decisions

about their learning goals, create and complete learning activities, and regularly analyse their learning and evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, learners have an insight into their learning, have a positive attitude, an ability to reflect, a willingness to be proactive in self-management and have good interaction skills. Furthermore, learners are constantly engaged as their learning is more focused and personal, which produces more efficient and effective lessons (Little, 2016). On the other hand, Bocanegra and Haidl (1999) claim that for learners to be autonomous they must be customised of being taught a foreign language rather than being taught how to learn it. According to Little (2016) English is developed by using the language and learners who use social autonomy in their learning environment may find it easier to improve language skills through effective communication. In addition, learners build confidence, develop social interaction and can take their learning beyond the classroom. On the other hand, teachers need to create and maintain a learning environment in which learners have the opportunity to be independent in order to become more autonomous. Teachers need to support the learning process for learners to develop their cognitive and social interaction skills. However, learners may still find education a source of frustration.

10. Education as a source of frustration

It has been suggested by Kilbride and Anisef (2001) that refugee learners may find education frustrating due to their mental health issues, academic challenges and may feel nervous of being alone in the classroom. Therefore, refugee learners may not able to successfully integrate into the education system in the UK. Despite the language barriers and daily challenges to attend ESOL classes, refugee learners are

motivated to work hard and learn ESOL. On the other hand, Taylor and Sindhu (2012) suggest that refugee learners are often seen as problems, rather than being seen to have distinctive and positive essentials. Although refugee learners could bring different ideas and unique cultural perceptions to the classroom, they are often seen to be harder to teach than other ESOL learners. In addition, research shows that there is an academic underachievement with refugee learners (Loerke, 2009; and Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Taylor and Sidhu (2012) highlight that teachers have a responsibility to provide care for the learners and to create an openhearted classroom environment, which will ensure they could deliver a successful teaching and learning process. Teachers may find it very difficult to balance the burden of social, emotional and academic needs of the learners at the same time, which may lead to job frustration. Furthermore, the attitude and limited support provided by the teachers may lead to learner frustration. On the other hand, teachers may need to establish trust and build rapport to encourage the learners to share experiences and accept assistance (Segal and Mayadas, 2005).

11. Gap in the literature

The masters' study explored the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL in a large college in West Yorkshire, England. The research focused on the content of the ESOL courses that were currently provided and if they met the everyday linguistic needs of refugee learners. Particular emphasis was on what course content and approaches were effective for the learners. Previous research that was carried out was mainly in North America and Europe. The research carried out in the UK was within communities in London and Birmingham (BNCN Community

Researchers, 2007; Phillimore, 2011 and Thomas, 2013) which explored the teachers' perspective of teaching ESOL. Research had not been carried out in the North of England and, therefore, there was a gap in the literature. Previous research that explored the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL appeared to be limited.

Conclusion

After all the struggles and loss that refugees have been through, refugee learners try to attend ESOL classes to integrate into the British society. Language barriers, access to courses and personal commitments may restrict many refugee learners to attend ESOL classes. However, refugee learners of ESOL are determined to overcome challenges and barriers. Therefore, teachers must ensure they understand the needs of refugee learners and are able to provide the support that is needed. Teachers may use teaching strategies and teaching methods to help facilitate the learner needs. Furthermore, learner autonomy, intrinsic desire or extrinsic rewards may be a source of motivation for the learners. However, refugee learners of ESOL may still find education a source of frustration due to the limited course quality and teachers not being familiar with the learner needs. A gap in the literature was found and explored. The purpose of this chapter was to examine the published research that highlighted the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL. The next chapter will discuss the methodologies that were used to carry out the research into the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL.

Chapter 3: Methodology

[Introduction](#)

The methodology chapter explains the methods and procedures that were applied in conducting the investigation. The overall methodology that was used was a mixed methods approach and a case study strategy. The chapter is organised into nine sections: (1) Research approach, (2) The research strategy, (3) Reliability, Validity and Triangulation, (4) Sampling, (5) Pilot, (6) Data collection, (7) Data Analysis, (8) Ethics, and (9) Positionality.

[1. Research Approach](#)

The qualitative approach would enable the researcher to understand the participants' language learning experiences from their perspective (Bell and Waters, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, Bell and Waters (2014) suggest that "*Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world*" (P.9). A qualitative approach offers open-ended questions, which gives the participants an opportunity to share their learning experiences in their own words, as opposed to closed-ended questions, which offers pre-arranged answers (quantitative approach) (Denscombe, 2014). Therefore, the qualitative research approach was more appropriate than quantitative research for interviewing the participants. On the other hand, the researcher wanted to find out how many participants felt that ESOL courses met their linguistic needs by collecting questionnaires (quantitative data) (Denscombe, 2014). As explained by Denscombe

(2014) that the quantitative approach is “*associated primarily with strategies of research such as surveys and experiments*” (P.250).

To support Denscombe, (2014) Bell and Waters, (2014) suggest that a quantitative approach aims to “*collect facts and study the relationship of one set of facts to another*” (P.9). In addition, the researcher wanted to collect the data and study the relationship between the two data sets to find links of similarities and differences (qualitative and quantitative) (Bell and Waters, 2014 and Denscombe, 2014). The aim of the research approach was to view the research problems from a variety of different perspectives, which was important for the quality and fullness of the data collected (Bell and Waters, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2011 and Denscombe, 2014).

Therefore, the mixed method approach was used to improve the accuracy of the findings which explored the learning experiences of refugee learners studying ESOL (Denscombe, 2014). The mixed method approach gave the researcher a more complete picture of the topic that was being studied, by giving the option of seeing things from an alternative angle (Bell and Waters, 2014 and Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, the researcher had “*the choice of methods on what works best for tackling a specific problem*” (Denscombe, 2014, P.147).

2. The Research strategy

A case study approach was used for the research. Denscombe (2014) and Yin (2009) suggest that a case study strategy is an inclusive research strategy for understanding an in-depth account of experiences or processes, which also strengthens existing research and discovers new details. Yin (2009) highlights that

“case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (P.1). An efficient researcher uses a case study strategy to organise and examine events, collect information, analyse data and report results (Punch and Oancea, 2014). As a result, the researcher was able to develop knowledge of how and why events happen the way they do, and was able to highlight important areas that need a greater focus in future research (Bell and Waters, 2014; Yin, 2009). On the other hand, generalising and cross checking information is not always possible as the researcher may not be able to access the case study settings regularly. Furthermore, access to information may risk confidentiality which creates ethical problems (Bell and Waters, 2014 and Denscombe, 2014). In the current study, the analysis of the case study is on the content of ESOL courses, which has been evaluated through the students' viewpoints. Opie (2004) underlines that the number of participants and type of case study depends on the purpose of the inquiry.

Cohen *et al.*, (2011) suggests that an instrumental case study is used to provide an initial understanding of an issue; an intrinsic case study is carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the case; and a collective case study contains the study of a number of cases, which is carried out to query a particular event. An intrinsic case study design was used in the current study to focus on the opinions of the learners in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the ESOL courses at a college in the North of England. Denscombe (2014) and Yin (2009) highlight that case studies have a purpose to explore the study. The case studies are described as an exploratory case study which “*explores the key issues affecting those in a case study*

setting (Denscombe, 2014, P.57); a descriptive case study which “*describes what is happening in a case study setting*” (Denscombe, 2014, P.57) and an explanatory case study which “*explains the causes of events, processes or relationships within the setting*” (Denscombe, 2014, P.57). The focus of the study was to understand and describe the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL. Therefore, the descriptive case study approach was adopted. Overall, the case study research strategy offered access to a holistic view of the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL, and also highlighted the key issues.

3. Reliability, Validity and Triangulation

Bell and Waters (2014) suggest that data should always be critically examined to assess to whether it is reliable and valid. Bell and Waters (2014) and Denscombe (2014) define reliability as a test to measure to what extent the findings can be replicated in the same circumstances. Validity is to measure the accuracy of research findings (Bell and Waters, 2014). However, Bassey (1999) suggested that reliability and validity may be important for surveys studies, they are not appropriate in case study research. An alternative to reliability and validity is trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness in research involves credibility: how confident the researcher is in the truthfulness and accuracy of the findings (Bell and Water, 2014 and Opie, 2004); transferability: how the research findings can be applied to a similar situation (Opie, 2004); dependability: the extent of the study being repeated and the consistency of similar findings (Opie, 2004; Punch and Oancea, 2014); confirmability: the level of neutrality in the research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Opie, 2004). To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, a significant amount of time was spent with the participants to build rapport and to fully

understand the depth of their learning experiences (Opie, 2004; Punch and Oancea, 2014). The researcher spoke to the participants about the research and also observed participants using their language skills in and beyond the classroom. The participants added further information after the recording had stopped, which was written down on paper and links were made to the original interview. To support the researcher's claims, Opie (2004) suggests that to measure the trustworthiness of the research, "*a diary or a log is used to track what took place during the study*" (P.72). Furthermore, the credibility of the research was measured through triangulation (Bell and Waters, 2014).

Triangulation can be achieved through data triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Data triangulation was achieved in the study by collecting data from participants of different genders, different nationalities and a range of different educational backgrounds. Interpreting the data helped the study achieve theoretical triangulation (Bell and Waters, 2014; and Denscombe, 2014). Methodological triangulation was achieved by using more than one research tool (questionnaires and interviews) (Denscombe, 2014). Therefore, the credibility of the research was improved by the use of data triangulation, which brought together the two strengths of the data methods (Bell and Waters, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2011 and Denscombe, 2014).

4. Sampling

The selection process was to identify participants for the study (Opie, 2004). As mentioned by Gay *et al.*, (2011), the sampling approach allows the researcher to

select participants that fit the description and characteristics of the study.

Furthermore, “*...sampling is the process of selecting a small number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals chosen will be good key informants who will contribute to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon*” (Gay et al., 2011, P.142). A purposive sample was used when selecting the participants, as the researcher trusted his knowledge and teaching experience about the learners who met the study criteria. As Denscombe (2014) suggested that “*purposive sampling works where the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events and deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that they are likely to produce the most valuable data*” (P.41). The participants that were identified were learners who studied a QCF or City & Guilds syllabus (only syllabus offered) at the same centre. Thirty learners (the total number of the group, eighteen female and twelve male) were invited to complete questionnaires, fifteen agreed to be interviewed but only twelve were interviewed (eight male and four female). The three participants who withdrew from the study had other responsibilities and did not have the time to contribute their experiences to the study. Therefore, the three participants were informed and they agreed that they could not continue to participate in the research.

5. Pilot

A pilot study was carried out (on one participant) to assess whether the questions were understood, the participant answered different questions with the same answer (questions were understood) which limited the research information. A second pilot was carried out (questions were amended) on two participants to ensure the

problems with the questions were addressed. The questions were clearly understood and detailed answers were provided. The second pilot also enabled the researcher to see which questions were getting more detailed answers and which questions were not. This helped develop the research with more detailed and rich information (Bell and Waters, 2014).

6. Data collection

The aim of the qualitative data collection was to collect fifteen semi-structured interviews. Interviews were (one of two methods) used to collect data for the study. Bell and Waters (2014) and Cohen *et al.*, (2011) also suggested that interviews are commonly used in social research. As highlighted by Dawson (2002) that “*Semi-structured interviewing is perhaps the most common type of interview used in qualitative social research*” (P.28). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis to allow participants to express their opinions and/or concerns of learning ESOL, without other people hearing them. Although, the semi-structured interviews provided accurate, in-depth and correct information, arranging, conducting and transcribing the interviews became time consuming (Bell and Waters, 2014, P.178). However, “*A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do*” (Bell and Waters, 2014, P.178). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to enquire and expand on the interviews responses. (Opie, 2004). On the other hand, follow-on questions may be misunderstood and, therefore, the questions asked and the conclusions drawn are no longer straightforward, which makes the data analysis complicated (Denscombe, 2014 and Opie, 2004). Despite

the drawbacks, the objective of the interviews was to determine if the content of ESOL courses were relevant to everyday linguistic needs of refugee learners.

Before the interview, the participants were informed that they could disregard any question(s) that made them feel uncomfortable. The researcher emphasised to the participants that they could stop the interview process anytime without any consequences. The aim of the interview process was to make the students feel comfortable, so they could give honest, detailed answers that would enable the researcher to get an insight into the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL. During the interview process, the participants were asked open-ended questions to collect in-depth information from the learners' perspective. A set of questions were created to help guide the interview process. Questions were overlooked or rephrased, when the researcher thought the question(s) caused the participant to feel uncomfortable (identified through body language and facial expression). The participants agreed for the interviews to be recorded and were made aware that the recordings would be destroyed after the data had been transcribed. The participants were also made aware that the data would be analysed and the results would be used to present the findings. On average, each interview took about 40 minutes to complete and 12 participants were interviewed. In order to make the participants feel comfortable, the interviews took place in quiet locations (chosen by the participant(s)), which also helped to get a good clear recording. The locations included faith centres, their home, the library and rooms in the community centre.

The aim of the quantitative data collection was to collect thirty questionnaires (total number). Questionnaires (second method) gave participants the opportunity to express their opinions anonymously by ticking boxes and writing short answers (Bell and Waters, 2014). On the other hand, questionnaires did not provide why the answers were given which limited the research findings (Opie, 2004). It has been suggested that individuals who participate in research tend to complete questionnaires as they are quick, easy to complete and take a few minutes of their time (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Not all questionnaires are returned on time and, therefore, participants may need to be reminded which may become time consuming and troubling (Bell and Waters, 2014). Denscombe (2014) claims that questionnaires are a quick and easy method of gathering information from the participants, making this a very effective and efficient tool for the researcher. However, the layout, giving instructions, the spacing and ordering of the questions and presentation of the questionnaire had to be carefully considered in order to invite the participants to complete the questionnaires (Opie, 2004). Cohen *et al.*, (2011) supports Opie (2004) by emphasising that "*The appearance of the questionnaire is vitally important. It must look easy, attractive and interesting rather than complicated, unclear, forbidding and boring*" (P.328). The participants had other responsibilities outside of their classroom and, therefore, were always on the move, the questionnaires were used to gather data quickly by only taking a few minutes to complete. Questionnaires tend to form a pattern that can be fairly easily analysed (Denscombe 2014; Bell and Waters, 2014). As suggested by Cohen *et al.*, (2011) that "*The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information*" (P.317).

A total of thirty questionnaires were handed to participants before the lesson. The researcher had good rapport with the participants and therefore, was able to persuade them to complete the questionnaires on their breaks or before class. Five participants asked what retention meant (the word was understood in the pilot study), the meaning of retention was written on the white board and explained. The researcher explained to seven participants (including the five) what he meant by ‘using the shops’ and ‘using the bank’ (which was also understood in the pilot study). Participants were advised to overlook any question(s) they did not understand. However, all the answers were completed. All thirty questionnaires were collectively collected by the participants after the lesson, which were put on my desk. The method of collecting the questionnaires ensured anonymity and confidentiality were practised (BERA, 2011).

7. Data analysis

The data from the findings were organised and analysed (interviews were transcribed). As highlighted by Gay *et al.*, (2011) that the researcher tries to identify themes and patterns that appear from the data. To help the researcher identify the patterns and themes that emerged the data was coded. To support the researchers' claim, Bell and Waters (2014) suggest that “*...coding allows you to ‘cluster’ key issues in your data and take steps towards ‘drawing conclusions’*” (P.239). The data was grouped together (e.g., sentences, learning preferences and quotations) to understand the meaning of the information. Bell and Waters (2014) indicate that the data collected is unusable unless you group the information together to understand

what it means. With the available codes (e.g., time spent in the UK, skills, further study), the researcher grouped similar codes together to form themes (e.g., ESOL challenges, motivation levels, critics of the course). To further narrow the themes, the researcher looked for similarities and differences, and identified comparisons that arose from the data. The data was presented in charts for them to be easily read and understood. The data analysis phase generated an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of the participants. It is important to mention that the data analysed focused on the viewpoints of the participants, rather than the researchers' personal opinion to make judgments on their learning situation.

8. Ethics

The ethics of research were addressed before conducting the research. As emphasised by BERA (2011) that participants need be treated equally and should be protected from any differences at all times. The participants were informed about the procedures and their rights throughout the study (BERA, 2011 and Opie, 2004). They were also made aware on a continuous basis that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time (Bell and Waters, 2014). Participants were not harmed in any way. The research posed no physical, social, or emotional harm in any way; nor did it involve any physical contact with the participants (BERA, 2011 and Opie, 2004), and the participants were not asked to perform tasks they were not comfortable with. The identities of the participants were kept anonymous and the information that was provided remained confidential (Bell and Waters, 2014). Although the participants were known to the researcher their names, nationalities or any personal information was not mentioned at the data collection stage and, therefore, there were no details of the participants on the data collected (including

the transcripts) (Opie, 2004). The final report did not include any information or data that could be traced back to the participants (Bell and Waters, 2014; BERA, 2011 and Opie, 2004). The interviews were audio recorded and the files were stored on a personal computer which was password protected. After the information was used, the files were deleted from the computer. When research is conducted involving human participants, confidentiality can only be maintained within the principles of the law (Bell and Waters, 2014). Therefore, it was a duty to safeguard participants and report any concerns that threatened the health or safety of any participants (BERA, 2011). However, there were no incidents to report, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

9. Positionality

The relationship between the researcher and participants (tutor/students) may have possibly affected the reliability of the research (Opie, 2004). To ensure bias was minimised, the participants were informed that the research findings had no connection to classroom practice. It was emphasised to the participants that the research findings may be used in the future to help meet the linguistic needs of refugee learners (not the current learners) and the answers provided (data collection) must be honest. Furthermore, the aim of the researcher was to become an active learner and describe the learning experiences of refugee learners from their perspectives, rather than pass judgment on them (Denscombe, 2014).

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Thirty questionnaires were handed out and completed in the classroom. All the questionnaires were handed back to me, which are presented and analysed in this section. The themes that emerged from the questionnaires were: (1) Barriers to learning and participation, (2) The relevance of the course content, (3) The support given by the teacher, and (4) The overall pattern from the questionnaires.

Presenting the data from the questionnaires

Some interesting themes emerged from the questionnaires, which were grouped together to show the patterns that emerged. Charts 1 and 2 show the number of years the participants had lived in the UK and the number of years participants spent learning English. Furthermore, column charts 3 and 4 show the different classes the ESOL participants had attended and the barriers to learning and participation.

Chart 1

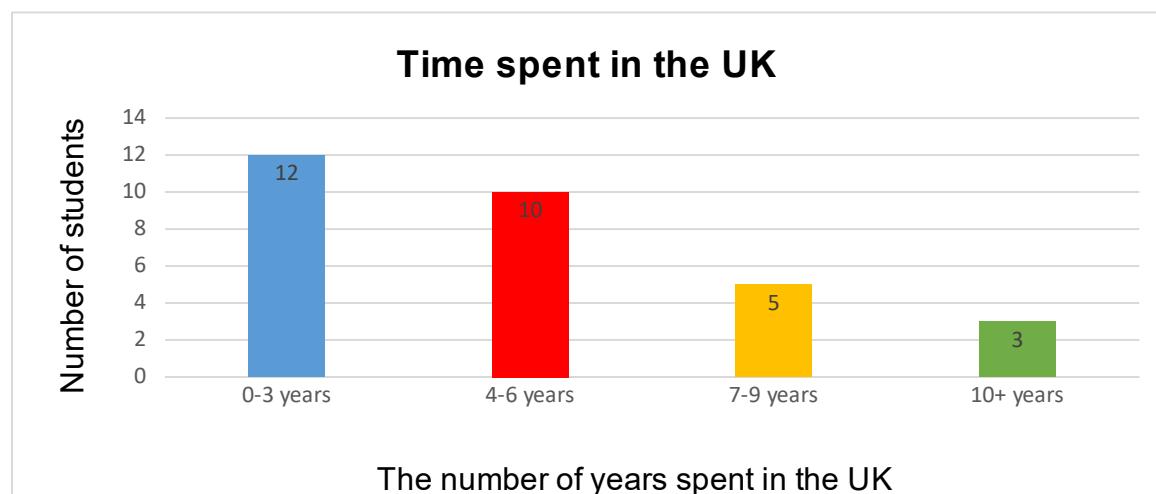
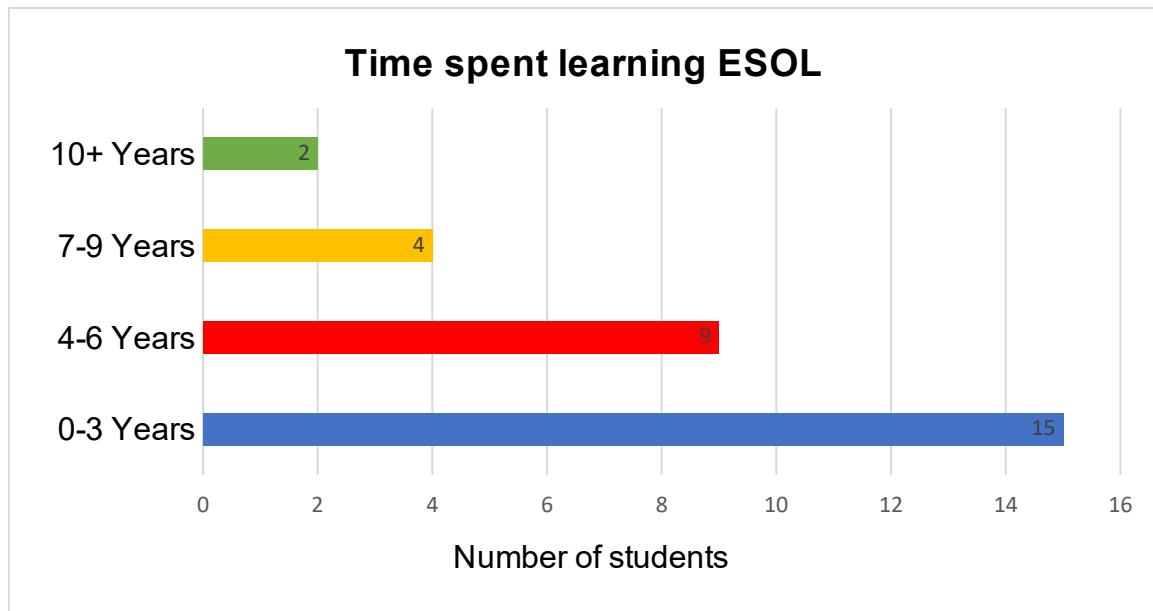
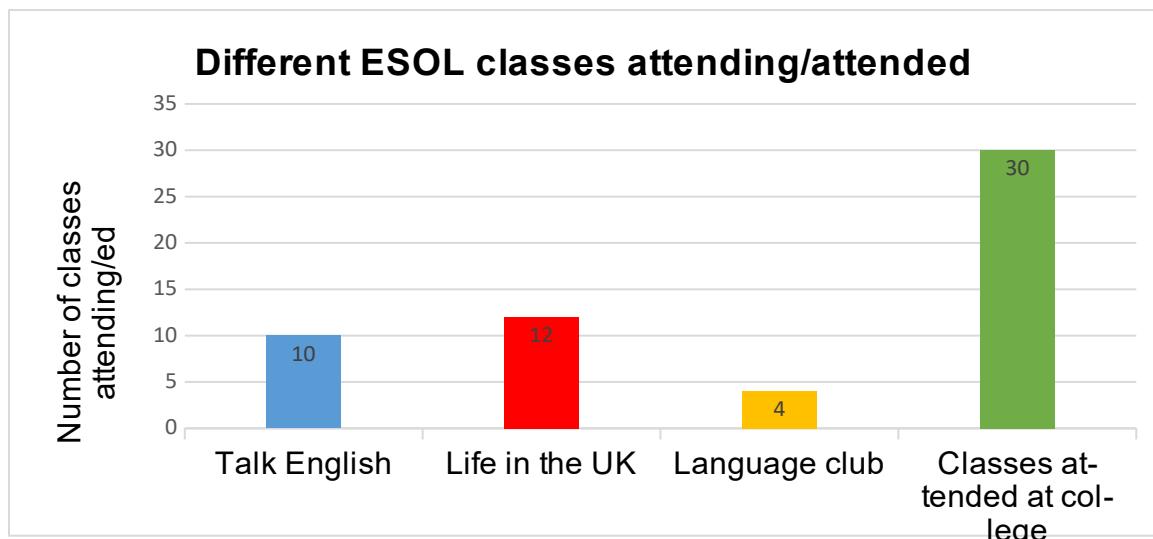


Chart 2



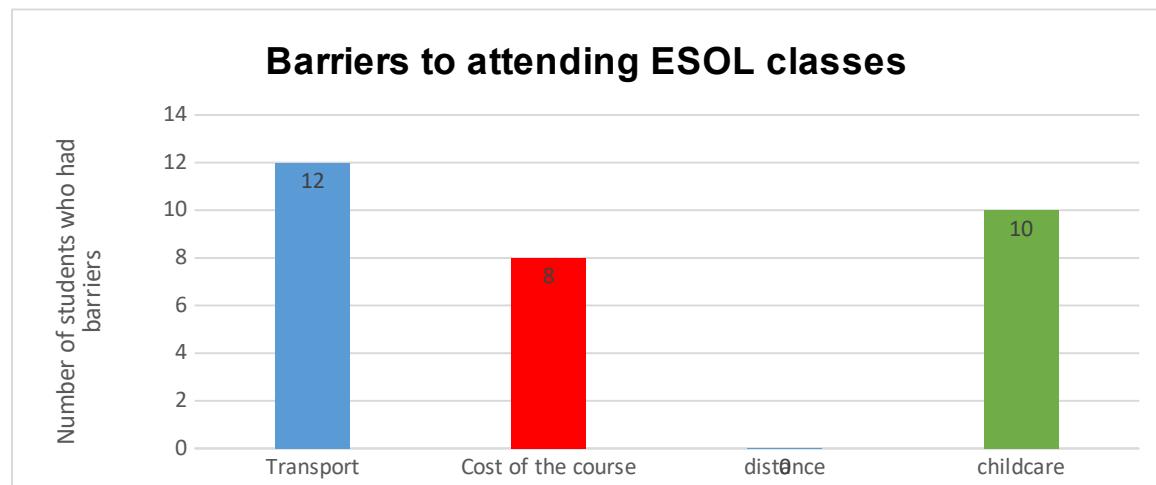
Column chart 3

ESOL classes the participants attended previously or were attending at the time of the research.



Talk English courses were introduced in 2014 and were aimed at pre-entry/entry 1 learners to develop the basic language skills. The Language club classes were informal classes held in the participants' local neighbourhoods, to help participants build oral fluency. Life in the UK courses are to help participants pass the citizenship test for them to become a British national.

Column chart 4



1. Barriers to learning and participation

The first theme that emerged from column charts 1-4 showed that a pattern had emerged between the number of years the participants had spent in the UK and the number of ESOL classes that they had attended/ing. The longer the participants had spent in the UK the more problems they had attending ESOL classes. The participants who had spent more time in the UK were attending fewer classes than participants who had spent less time in the UK. One reason for this may have been that Talk English courses were introduced in 2014 and were free to everyone who

wanted to improve their English. The problems participants faced attending ESOL classes were the cost of the course, childcare and the access to free transport to college. The free incentives were only offered to participants who were in receipt of particular state benefits.

2. The relevance of the course content

Another pattern that emerged from the questionnaires was that all the participants agreed that ESOL courses helped them in their daily lives (chart 6). However, the more time participants spent learning ESOL, the less they enjoyed the course (chart 5) as the course content was no longer as relevant to their daily lives (chart 7).

Chart 5

The column chart below shows the number of participants who enjoyed ESOL courses.

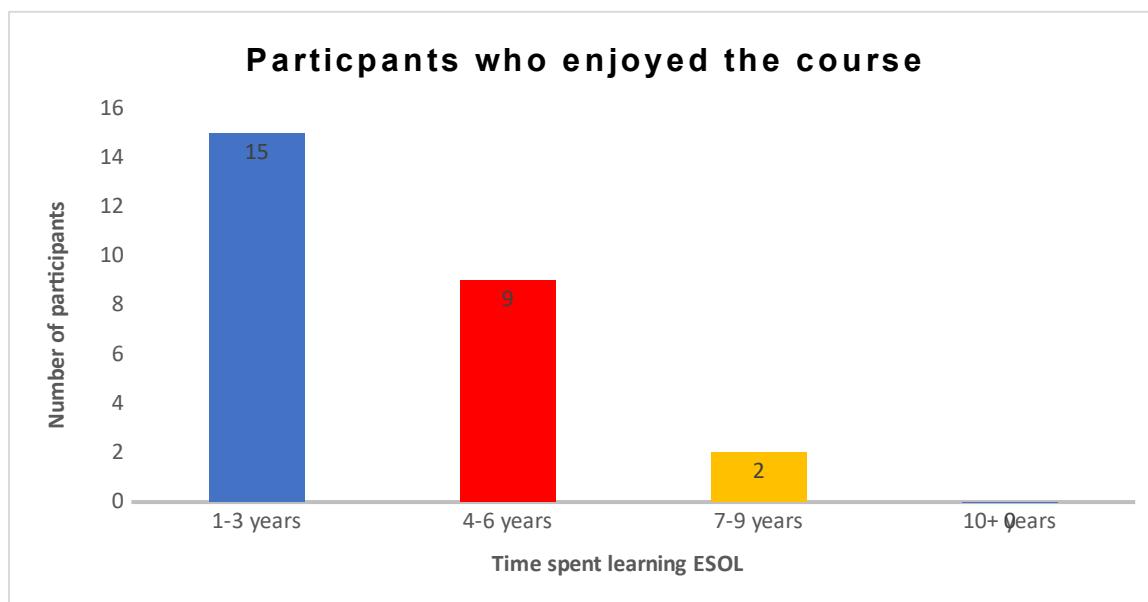


Chart 6

The column chart below shows the number of participants who felt ESOL courses helped them in their daily lives.

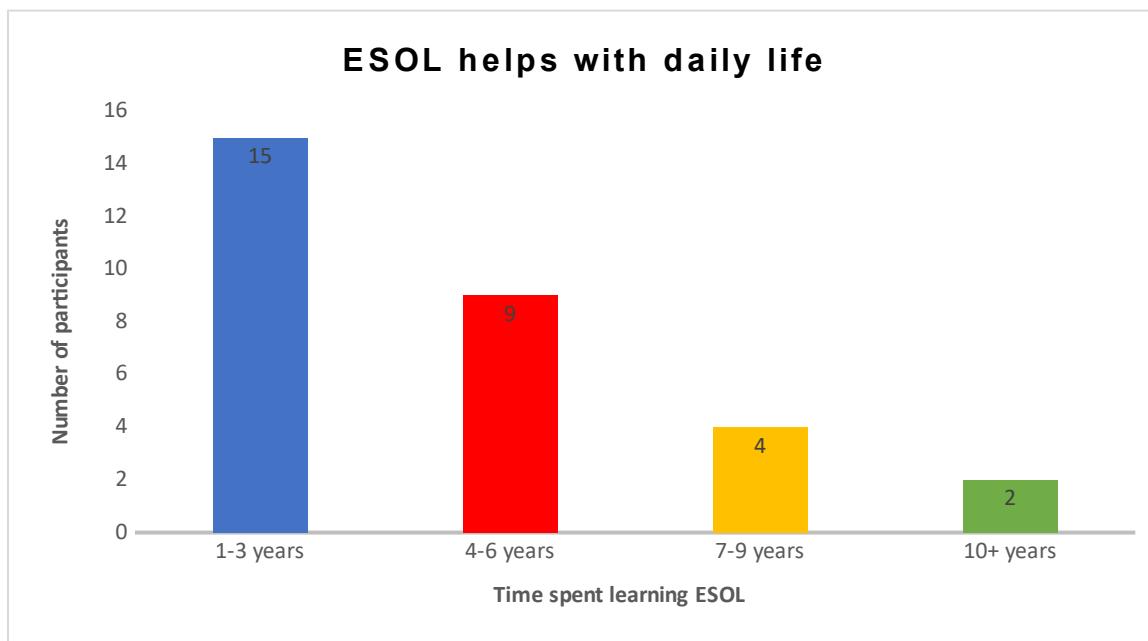
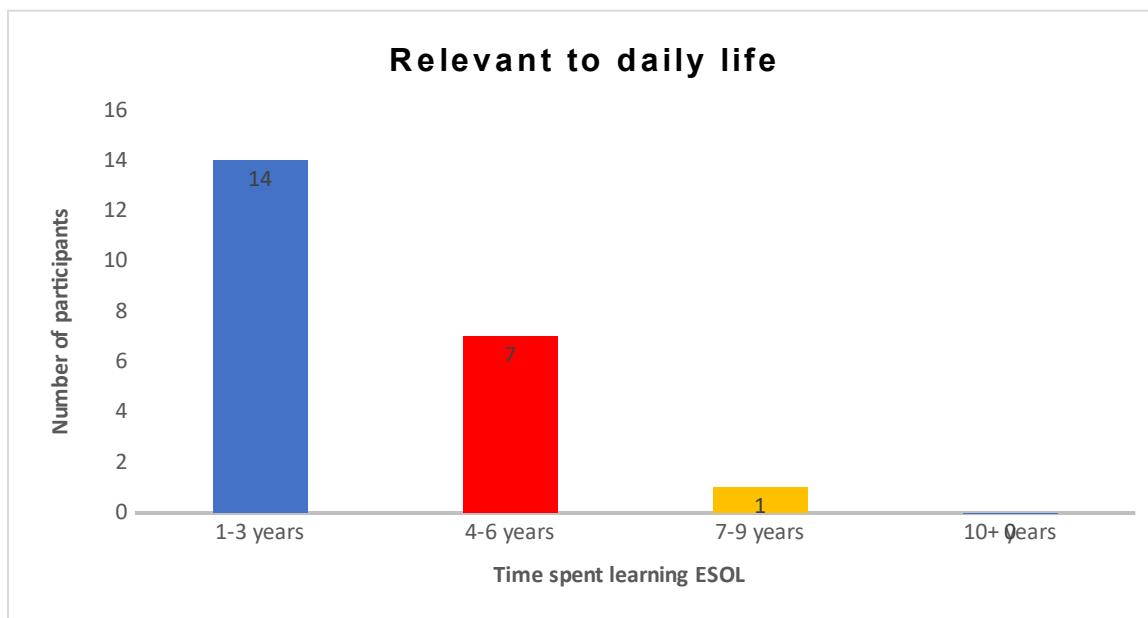


Chart 7

The column chart below shows the number of participants who thought that ESOL courses were relevant to their ESOL lives.

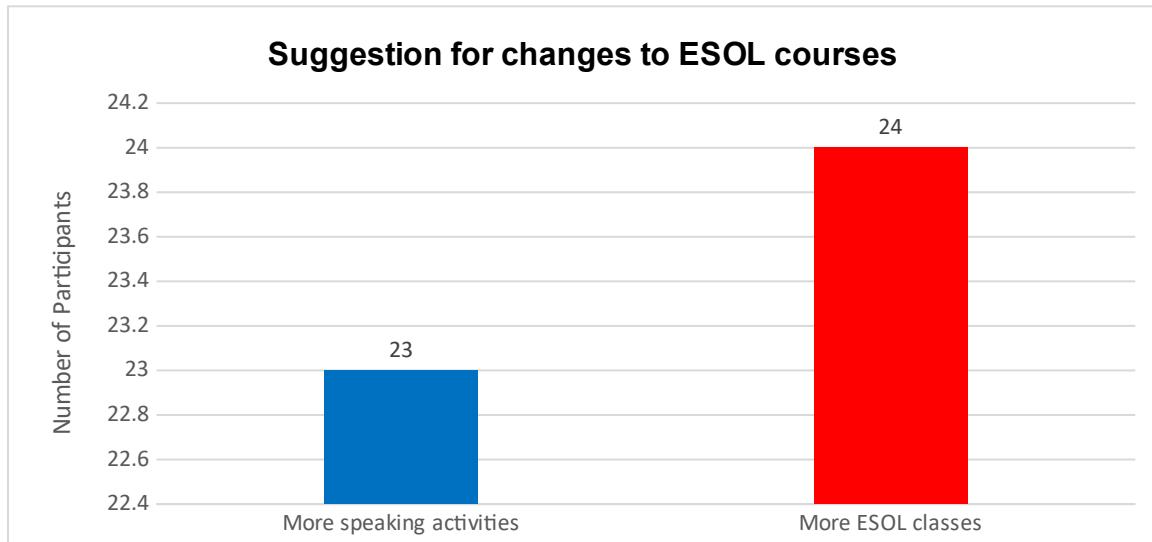


3. The support given by the teacher

An interesting pattern emerged: all the participants agreed that their teacher supported them whilst learning by encouraging the participants to give their opinions about the course content. Furthermore, all the participants liked the way they were taught. Many participants wanted changes to be made to the ESOL class, (chart 8) by requesting for more speaking exercises and some learners wanted more ESOL classes.

Chart 8

The column chart below shows the number of participants who felt that changes needed to be made to the ESOL course.



4. The overall pattern from the questionnaires

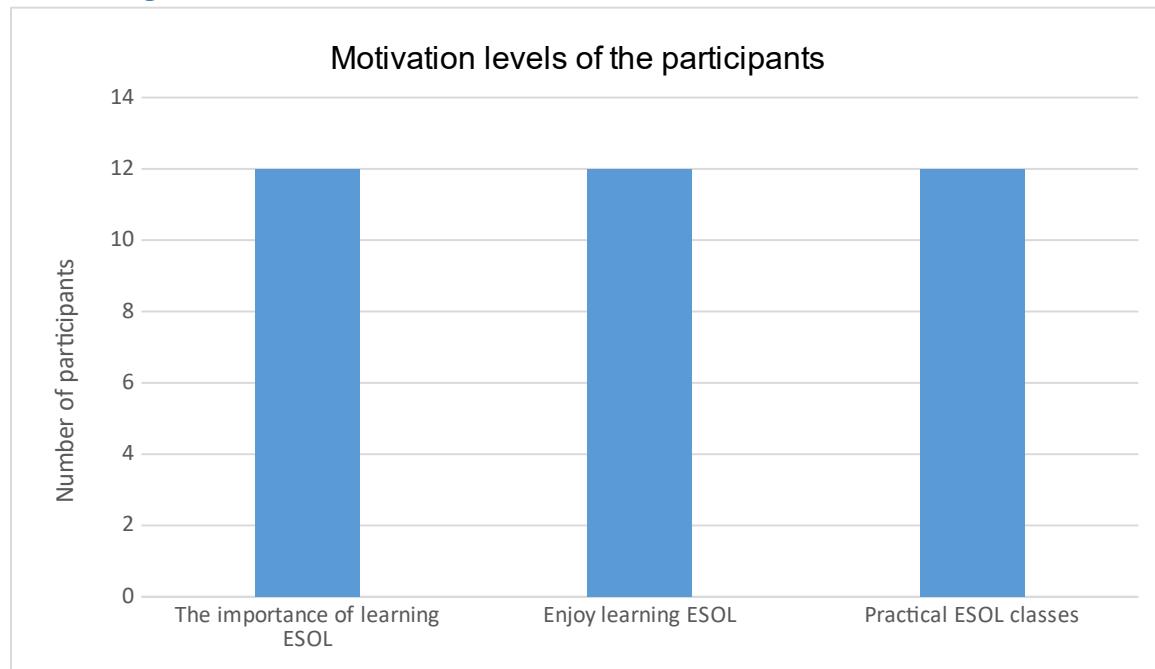
The overall pattern that emerged from the questionnaires was that the participants who had been in the UK for longer periods of time had more reservations about the

ESOL course, motivation and topics that were being taught. Learners who had studied ESOL for short periods of time had found the course content relevant to their daily lives. On the other hand, learners who had studied ESOL for longer periods of time had found that not all the course content was relevant to their everyday linguistic needs.

[Introduction to the interview data](#)

Although fifteen participants expressed willingness to be interviewed, only twelve were interviewed. Interviews were arranged and ready to be conducted but three participants were reluctant to be recorded, it was emphasised that the researcher would transcribe the interview but the participants refused as transcribing would take up to much of their time. Therefore, they decided to withdraw from the study. Out of the twelve participants, two had spent 10+ years in the UK, two had spent 7-9 years in the UK, four had spent 4-6 years in the UK and four had spent 1-3 years in the UK. The data from the interviews is presented and analysed in this section. The themes that emerged from the interviews were: (1) The motivation level of the participants, (2) Barriers to learning and participation, (3) The topics the participants would like to cover, (4) Learning outside the classroom, working in smaller groups and more ESOL classes, (5) The support received by the teacher, (6) The lack of academic support at home and the participants felt their voices were not being heard by the educators, and (7) The overall pattern from the interviews with regards to the participants skills focus.

Presenting the interview data



1. The motivation level of the participants

The participants had high levels of motivation and this became evident when discussing the learning experiences. Learners stressed that despite the learning challenges inside and outside of the classroom they were committed to improve their English skills. A participant mentioned that:

“...the ESOL class is not only, learning, making friends, learning new things, also very good I have no one at home or my neighbourhood, so this is good I learn English and I enjoy it...”. Another participant claimed “we start a new life now, learning English is good, I want to live in the UK for my life, I need English...and I like English people and English life...English people give me chance for learning EnglishI really enjoy it.”

A participant highlighted that he had an ambition “*I enjoy ESOL, ... after ESOL I go to university and do mechanical engineering, back home, no money, no education, here I have good opportunity I like this*”.

Another pattern that emerged from the semi-structured interview process was that the participants emphasised the importance of learning ESOL. Participants highlighted that although there may be problems with ESOL courses, the courses help develop English language skills that could be used in the real world. As a participant who spent 1-3 years in studying ESOL highlighted:

“It’s very important.... I come to England I speak little English. Now I think every day I speak more... better to speak English. ESOL helps me to speak better English and I and many refugee find living in the England more easy with ESOL because we can speak now”.

Furthermore, many participants highlighted that ESOL courses are not only important to develop language skills but also important for the daily interaction, as one participant mentioned:

It is important . . . with ESOL you have skill to speak to people, how to mix in with neighbour and different people.....and people in town, like bank people.... English is main thing for me look for a job and everything.

Participants expressed some language problem they had before they attended ESOL courses:

Before I had big problems... I don't know English I don't know the yanee (meaning) instructions, the directions of the UK. It is the main thing to know. Now, good I can speak and listen, if I go to hospital or doctors okay. Before, I need interpreter to come for appointment too, and no interpreter available, you wait for a long time. Now my English is not too good but okay, this important for me.

2. Barriers to learning and participation

A theme that emerged in the questionnaires and interviews were the barriers to learning and participation. The participants highlighted further learning barriers: '*It takes so much time coming to class, I catch bus to town and then I change bus for coming college. May be 45 or 50 minutes and then same when I go home*'. Another participant claimed it was beyond his control "*bus come late, so I am late and missing class work. Also I am tired because I have long journey and I miss important class work*". As many of the participants were relatively new in the country they found the teaching strategies a barrier. As one participant mentioned that "*learning is new for me, back home I don't go to school, everything new here, sometimes this is hard*". One participant highlighted something interesting, "*I want to learn real life, by talking to people and practice my English, not all time in classroom, this not help me*".

3. The topics participants would like to cover

The participants expressed interests in sports, jobs, local events and activities. As a participant mentioned in the interview “*I want to study for job, learning about different jobs will help me*”. Many participants also expressed interests in the different sports facilities available in college and their neighbourhoods. As one participant mentioned “*college offer sports to me like volleyball, I also learn English by talking to my team*”. The participants wanted to learn the technique of getting involved in activities and events in their neighbourhoods. As one participant claimed, “*I learn more English, I go to community centre and do things like helping, I talk to...like friends and no get boring at home*”.

4. Learning outside the classroom, working in smaller groups and more ESOL classes

Although the participants would appreciate more classes outside of the classroom (sessions where learners interact with the public, e.g. having a conversation with a staff member in the supermarket), many of them stated that both the learning strategies were important to help them progress with understanding and improving their learning. As stated by a participant “*...practical is also needed so you're getting the understanding of the real life situation whereas work is needed so you've got that vision with you when you need it*”. Furthermore, participants expressed their desire to have more group work activities. According to all the participants, working in

groups was more preferred than individual activities as the participants got the opportunity to practice their speaking and listening skills. Participants also highlighted that group work gave them an opportunity to ask their peers for help with understanding instructions, meanings of words and sharing ideas. As a participant highlighted “*group work is better, we talk, this is good for speaking and we can speak Arabic also, if we don't understand*”. Furthermore, another participant claimed “*group work is good ...sometimes I didn't know the instruction, I ask friends, ... so group work is good*”.

All the participants emphasised that they wanted more ESOL classes which would allow them to improve their language skills more quickly. Therefore, the participants felt the number ESOL classes that were offered to them did not meet their needs:

“*More days for ESOL. 3, 4 days is better than 2* (a participant). “*There is less time for class, Only 2 classes...not enough. I would like more ESOL classes*” (a participant). “*Erm, I would like more . . . learning time, more ESOL classes would be good, may be 4 classes a week, so I remember English*” (a participant).

I don't like the number of classes. Because we only have classes two times a week. And.... only 2 hours a class....it must be more than 2 days, at least 4 days, and 3 hours.... by the time I get to class I will have totally forgot what I learned last week. More classes will help me remember more better. (A participant).

5. The support received from the teacher

The participants claimed although they were not nervous or shy talking to their ESOL tutor as they had good rapport. The participants claimed that the teacher supported their learning but they could not express themselves in English. A participant expressed that communicating to some teachers was difficult as they would not be able to translate all the words into English. Therefore, they would ask peers for help. “*I tell my class friends my problems, they explain to the teacher*” (interviewee 12). A participant claimed he feels more confident to talk to his tutor but did highlight that it took him a while to become comfortable and express his concerns. As his confidence grew he felt much happier when he expressed his thoughts to his teacher. “*I am learning ESOL for 5 years, this is my first time actually talking to the teacher and telling him what my challenges are, what I need, what I don't need, my learning is good, my learning not good, I learn the easy way, you go easy, step by step, and I learn good*” (interviewee 11). Despite the challenges the participants faced they all agreed that their tutor supported their learning process. Although the teacher supported the learning process, the participants wanted to improve their language skills at home.

6. The lack of academic support at home and participants felt their voices were not being heard by the educators.

Participants mentioned that they want to improve their ESOL skills on every level but do not receive help with their written homework. Participants highlighted that they try to speak English with their children, who have good English speaking skills as they

attend school. The participants who had no previous schooling found homework tasks more difficult to complete. A participant stated that “*back home, I never went school, now I have big problems*”. On the other hand participants who had previous education claimed “*reading, writing little problem, big problem speaking and listening*”. One participant highlighted that he had a degree from his own country and English here was different “*... this is not English, English has structure, when people speak they speak bad English, no structure, no rules, this is the problem for me...*” Furthermore, participants wanted to choose the learning activities but felt they were not being given a choice.

The participants expressed how important they felt about their voices being heard. Participants wanted the teachers to know their past educational experiences. As one interviewee claimed “*some of us have no school before but Syria people have school they know more English, they understand better...I want to understand myself not help from friends*”. The class had learners from a range of educational backgrounds which affected the choice of language skills that were being taught by the teacher. One participant highlighted “*other people have good education before, so they like reading and writing, I want speaking....teacher choose reading and writing, this no good for me*”.

7. The overall pattern from the interviews with regards to the participants' skills focus

The overall pattern that emerged from the interview process was the participants who had developed good speaking and listening skills were more motivated to develop their reading and writing skills. Many participants had the intention to go

onto further study and, therefore, wanted to develop their reading and writing skills. Participants who had little formal education or had spent less time in the UK wanted to develop their speaking and listening skills. Some participants had graduate qualification from their home country and felt they had sufficient reading and writing skills but had difficulty understanding the different linguistics. Participants who spent less time in the UK felt that speaking and listening was more important to help them interact with other people. Therefore, the course content may be relevant to the everyday linguistic needs of the learners.

Chapter 5: Discussion

[Introduction](#)

The discussion chapter discusses important and unexpected findings in relation to the two research questions mentioned in chapter one. The discussion begins with: (1) The research questions, (2) The motivation level of the participants, followed by (3) Barriers to learning and participation, (4) Learning outside the classroom, working in smaller groups and more ESOL classes, (5) Support given by the teacher, (6) The lack of academic support at home and the participants felt that their voices were not being heard, (7) The relevance of the course content and content topics participants would like to cover, and (8) Professional development for teachers. The discussion highlights recommendations to help improve ESOL courses that are delivered to refugee learners.

[1. Research questions](#)

- Is the content of ESOL courses currently provided relevant to the everyday linguistic needs of refugee learners?

With regards to the research question above, the course content that was provided met the everyday linguistic needs for some (not all) of the refugee learners. Learners who spent shorter periods of time learning ESOL found that the ESOL course was helping with their linguistic needs, as some participants valued work on grammar and accuracy more than other participants. The correct sentence structure and tenses were taught on the ESOL course that allowed the participants to follow and apply the

rules of grammar and accuracy. In addition, participants were able to develop the correct use of sentence structure and word order to communicate in English. The pattern that emerged from the questionnaires showed that participants who spent longer periods of time learning ESOL had more reservations about the course content that was provided. Therefore, the course content did not provide some participants with the relevant everyday linguistic needs. In the literature review, Gibbons (1997) mentioned that the English language does not always follow rules and structure which affected the motivation levels of the learners. Participants who spent longer periods of time learning ESOL showed frustration as they were not able to apply the rules when communicating in English, which may be one reason why the course content was not relevant for all the participants. From this research, the course content did not meet the linguistic needs of all the refugee learners, as with time participants felt that the content was less relevant.

- What course content and approaches are more effective for the learners in the study?

With regards to the question above, improved course content and new/different approaches would become more effective for refugee learners. Although the teachers built rapport and seemed prepared to teach refugee learners, the content and approaches may need to be considered. The improved content and approaches would also ensure the course content meets the linguistic needs of all the refugee learners (the first question). ESOL teachers and course coordinators may not be familiar with refugee learners' past experiences but need to ensure that learners are

given the opportunity to meet their learning potential. In the literature review, Roxas (2010) highlighted that teachers need to find effective ways to teach refugee learners to ensure they stay motivated. Furthermore, Taylor and Sidhu (2012) emphasised that it was important for ESOL teachers to know the background of the refugee learners so they could provide the appropriate support/content. In the interviews, participants mentioned that the content they required was not always provided. Therefore, it is essential that ESOL teachers are provided with the training and professional development opportunities to ensure they offer the best education practices for supporting refugee learners.

In addition, improved practice will improve opportunities for the learners. In the literature review, Adams and Kirova (2011) suggest that mentoring and in-service training increases knowledge and develops skills to provide best practice and support the learners. In the interviews and questionnaires, refugee learners showed interest in the ESOL course but they expressed their concerns and opinions of the current teaching approaches. The critics of the current approaches to ESOL were also mentioned by Roberts and Cooke (2009) who claimed it was difficult for teachers to select the correct teaching materials that learners could use outside of the classroom. In the interviews, participants highlighted that they felt they had the reading/writing skills and only wanted to develop their speaking/listening skills but had to also complete reading/writing tasks. From the interviews, learners not only showed frustration but possible signs of disengagement with their learning. To overcome disengagement and learning frustration that was highlighted in the interviews, teachers should give the learners the opportunity to choose learning materials. Little (2016) and Yagcioglu (2015) both agreed that learner autonomy

generated positive energy, the learners appreciated their purpose of learning and accepted responsibility of their learning, in return teachers are able to provide effective and efficient classes.

- Are refugee learners offered academic support to overcome any learning barriers?

Although the teacher supported the learning process, he tried to help learners overcome learning barriers by starting classes later for learners who could not attend on time. Learners who had to leave class early were asked to complete class work as homework so the learners did not fall further behind the rest of the group. In the interviews, participants expressed they would attend lessons late due to their journey time or the bus being late. The teacher supported the academic learning but could not help all the learners overcome their learning barriers (childcare, transport). As mentioned by Doyle and O'Toole, (2013) that refugee learners with children are unable to find suitable childcare and therefore are unable to attend ESOL classes. Furthermore, Miller (2009) suggested that refugee learners encounter barriers when teachers generalise. The teacher did not generalise the group and was aware that each learner was at a different level in the same group but some physical learning barriers of the learners was beyond him. The college could assist refugee learners by offering them ESOL classes in their neighbourhoods. Thomas (2013) also suggests that ESOL lessons should be delivered in the community to help learners overcome learning barriers. To help decide who would attend ESOL classes in the community or whether to measure if it is feasible, learners should be asked whether they will have any learning barriers (transport, childcare) before enrolling onto an

ESOL course. Learners may then be placed into the correct learning centre (community or at college) depending on the demand of the centre.

2. Motivation levels of the participants

Throughout the research, refugee learners showed interest in the research topic, shared their opinions and experiences but overall showed willingness to participate in the topic. The learners had high motivation levels for learning ESOL despite the learning barriers, and were adamant to improve their English. The motivation of learners was highlighted by Shepherd (2012) in the literature review. Furthermore, Han *et al.*, (2010) and Thomas (2013) also mentioned that refugee learners were motivated to learn ESOL. In the interviews, participants had a positive attitude and emphasised that it was important for them to learn ESOL, which indicated that the participants were self-motivated. In the literature review, Karaoglu (2008) also claimed that refugee learners had intrinsic motivation. The high levels of motivation may be the fact that some of the course content may be relevant to the linguistic needs of the learners, in relation with the research question.

Furthermore, Goddar (2017) and Paton and Wilkins (2009) suggested that refugee learners want to continue their academic lives and therefore ESOL is important for them to restart their education. Participants had mentioned that the ESOL courses were helping them to build self-confidence. Some participants suggested that they were using English more commonly outside of the classroom, which was giving them the feeling of success. The motivation levels of the participants suggested that ESOL teachers need to support and encourage the learners to build confidence.

3. Barriers to learning and participation

Participants emphasised that transport, childcare and the cost of the course was a barrier to learning. Some participants claimed that attending class on time and leaving on time was affected by childcare responsibilities, which limited their participation in class. Participants mentioned that they had free transport to and from college, therefore they did not find the distance to college a barrier. In the questionnaires, participants emphasised that if they were not given free bus passes they would unable to attend college. Participants showed more interest in attending community centre ESOL classes than the one offered at the college, as ESOL classes in the community would save their time, provide childcare and they would not need transport. In the literature review, Crouch (2016) and Thomas (2013) mentioned that refugee learners come together not only to learn English but also have a sense of belonging. Furthermore, Candlin and Mercer (2001) also support teaching ESOL in the community centre by suggesting that refugee learners develop employment and language skills. Teaching in the community centre may help to answer part of the research question two.

In the interviews, the participants explained that they had further learning barriers of participation. As one participant claimed "*It takes so much time coming to class, I catch bus to town and then I change bus for coming college. May be 45 or 50 minutes and then same when I go home*". The additional barrier of time affected the learners' participation levels as learners arrived late to class. From the researchers' observations, learners would arrive up to half an hour late which would not only disrupt their learning but the learning of the class. As one participant highlighted "*bus come late, so I am late and missing class work. Also I am tired because I have long*

journey and I miss important class work”. The effort participants had to attend class showed they took their learning seriously and valued their time learning English. In the literature review, Refugee Action (2016), Summers (2016) and Thomas (2013) all highlighted that learning English was the most important tool for refugee learners to interact and live in society. Furthermore, some participants had enrolled straight onto the Entry 3 level, and they may not have been familiar with the teaching strategies and methods which may have been a learning barrier. As one participant highlighted “*learning is new for me, back home I don't go to school, everything new here, sometimes this is hard*”. In the literature review, Nunan (2003) highlighted ESOL teachers may need to support the learning process by help the learners to identify their own learning styles and strategies.

Furthermore, Thomas (2013) suggested that ESOL classes may be completely new for some refugee learners as they may be the first interaction with learning. A combination of different teaching strategies may help learners stay engaged and motivated. As one participant highlighted, “*I want to learn real life, by talking to people and practice my English, not all time in classroom, this not help me*”. In the literature review, Lightbown and Spanda (2004) emphasised that language was learnt through behaviourism and language habits. The different teaching strategies helped answer part of the research question two. One approach to effective strategy may be more practical lessons. Participants expressed that more ESOL classes would help them with retention as they would spend more time interacting with English.

4. Learning outside the classroom, working in smaller groups and more ESOL classes

Participants felt using language in real world situations would help them develop their language skills quicker. In an interview, a participant expressed that “*...practical is also needed so you're getting the understanding of the real life*”. Teachers could encourage learners to participate in extra activities, such as sports teams or joining extra-curricular clubs at the college. The extra participation may be a great way for refugee learners to build their self-confidence and integrate into the city’s sports culture. Furthermore, extra-curricular activities may provide refugee learners with an opportunity to practice their social skills, learn how to build relationships with other learners in the college, and develop problem solving skills. BNCN Community Researchers (2007) and Thomas (2013) suggested that events and activities help refugee learners improve their vocabulary and phrases related to their daily lives. Furthermore, Little (2016) supports social learning by suggesting that learners are able to practice their language skills by taking their learning beyond the classroom.

The group work finding highlighted that participants feel they would learn more effectively by working in smaller groups. Learners would be able to work with same level learners, which would not interrupt or slow down the learning process. Group work would give the teachers more opportunities to observe the learners and use the correct differentiation tasks. Furthermore, learners could work at different levels as teachers would be giving instructions to individual groups. The group work theme highlighted a more effective way to help learners progress, which also answered part of question two.

Smaller groups would also help ESOL teachers meet the needs of refugee learners. As mentioned by Ayoub (2014); and Solis (2016) that ESOL teachers find it difficult to meet the needs of refugee learners who have different levels of English skills in the same class. Refugee learners who attend ESOL classes may have different levels of academic experiences. As mentioned by a participant in their interview, “*some of us had no school before but Syria people have school they know more English, they understand better....*” learners could be grouped together as they may have more confidence to complete tasks/activities. In addition, Taylor and Sidhu (2012) emphasised that ESOL teachers should be able to provide educational programs that are responsive for the different needs of refugee learners. Learners who progress quickly in groups may also be given learner autonomy to help motivate them to complete activities more effectively.

The participants were offered two ESOL classes a week over eighteen weeks. The participants emphasised that more ESOL classes would help them develop their language skills more quickly. Participants had problems with retention as one participant mentioned “*because by the time I get to my class, I will have totally forgot what I learnt last week, it should be more hours and more days*”. More ESOL classes would not only help the participants with retention but also keep them motivated and engaged. As Summers (2016) highlights in the literature review, refugee learners are the most vulnerable members of society due to the insufficient provisions of ESOL classes. In addition, Morrice (2016) and Summers (2016) suggested that problems arise when the government generalises and uses the one size fits all model when organising ESOL classes for refugee learners. Furthermore, Summers (2016)

claimed that government cuts and classes allocated are further learning barriers for refugee learners.

5. Support given by the teacher

Participants found it difficult to express their learning problems with the teacher. In an interview, a participant mentioned that “*...I tell my class friends my problems, they explain to the teacher.*” In the study, participants relied on other learners in the classroom to help them translate their learning problems to the teacher. Teachers of Monolingual classes should try to learn the language or use other students in the classroom to explain learning problems to the teacher. As Little (2016) mentioned in the literature review learners may find it easier to develop language skills through effective communication. On the other hand, teachers who are able to communicate in the learners’ first language should teach monolingual groups. In addition, teachers who speak Arabic may be hired to teach refugee learners as they could communicate more effectively.

6. The lack of academic support at home and the participants felt that their voices were not being heard

To provide support at home may be a difficult task for the teachers. One way may be that providing online links to resources may encourage learners to try learning English at home. Online learning will also help refugee learners build their IT skills, their knowledge of searching for information and more importantly keep them active in their learning. In the literature review, Kilbride and Anisef (2001) suggested that refugee learners found education frustrating due to the academic challenges they

faced. Teachers should encourage the learners to use their mobile devices in the classroom to develop e-learning skills. Learners will be able to learn at their own pace, whilst teachers have more time to monitor the learners and meet the needs of differentiation. Learners could use the online learning resources to improve their language skills at home or complete tasks that were not completed in class. Moreover, teachers may also meet the needs of the learners more accurately. As Roxas (2010) mentioned in the literature review, teachers need to find effective ways to teach refugee learners. In an interview, a participant stressed that "*English has structure, when people speak they speak bad English*". Learners are able to compare writing text to spoken text and find similarities and differences which may then enable them to speak better English.

Participants expressed that their voices were not being heard by the educators. Activities and tasks are usually given collectively to the group which may not meet the needs of the learners. As highlighted by a participant in the interviews that "...*I want speaking...teachers choose reading and writing, this no good for me*". In the literature review, Ayoub (2014) suggests that refugee learners have different levels of language proficiency in the same classroom, which was also the case in this research. Solis (2016) supports Ayoub (2014) by suggesting that teachers need to hear the voices of the learners as they are unable to comprehend the challenge refugee learners' face whilst attending ESOL classes. To give the learners the opportunities to express themselves teachers are able to understand the challenges, interests and intentions of the learners.

ESOL teachers need to consider the learners' past educational experiences, which will enable the teachers to provide the right learning program. Furthermore, the correct learning will reduce the risk of disengagement and keep the learners motivated. Teachers who encourage refugee learners to express their opinions have the ability to gather more information about the participants, where they could provide the accurate learning materials. In addition, teachers and refugee learners could build a strong relationship, which teachers could use to encourage the learners to succeed in ESOL. Teachers will also be able to provide refugee learners with better support and the learners will be able to confide in the teacher. Furthermore, the teacher may be able to understand the actions and behaviours of refugee learners.

[7. The relevance of the course content and content topics participants would like to cover](#)

The course content that was provided was relevant to the participants who had spent less time learning ESOL. In the literature review, Phillimore (2011) suggested that choosing the correct course content was vital for learners to stay engaged in their learning. Furthermore, BNCN Community Researchers, (2007) and Thomas (2013) suggested that lessons based on daily life and real events help refugee learners improve their vocabulary retention. Karaoglu (2008) also supported the course content by claiming relating classroom topics to the interest of refugee learners made language learning more relevant. The first research question was answered for learners who had spent less time learning ESOL but was not answered for learners who have spent more time learning ESOL. One of the reasons for this may be that ESOL is taught by using the rules of grammar. As learners start to interact

with locals they realise that they not only have different dialects but do not use the rules of grammar. This was highlighted by a participant in the interviews, he claimed “*English has structure, when people speak they speak bad English*”.

All the participants showed a keen interest in learning about jobs. As highlighted by a participant “*I want to learn jobs, where to find jobs, no time for Job Centre... I want to work, need money for family*”. In the literature review, Lawrence (2017) highlighted that refugee learners came to the UK and wanted to start new lives. Many of the participants expressed that they would go on to further education, which would enable them to gain the qualification to get professional jobs. As one participant suggested “*I want to be a dentist, ...in Syria I worked as technician in dentist surgery... I have 16 years' experience, after ESOL I go to University*”. Goddar (2017) and Refugee Action (2016) also suggested that refugee learners were determined to learn English so that they could go onto further study. A participant expressed that he had applied for many jobs but did not get a response, his concern was what he had to do in an interview. The participant claimed that:

In Syria, you go with someone who works already there, or you know big people in the company. You get job easy, here you have interview, what do you say? I'm a refugee I don't have power to speak like English people.

ESOL teachers need to plan their lessons around employment to encourage refugees to stay engaged. As highlighted by Thomas (2013) that despite the

high levels of qualification, refugee learners still struggle to find employment. Summers (2016) supports Thomas (2013) by suggesting that ESOL classes are inadequate for refugee learners as they lack routes into employment and training. ESOL classes that are centred on teaching about jobs will not only help refugee learners with building knowledge about employment, but also help them build the language skills needed within the work place. Furthermore, ESOL administrators should consider agreeing contracts with local companies where refugee learners may have the opportunity to practice employment skills and get an understanding of the working life in Britain.

8. Professional development for teachers

Despite all the motivation, refugee learners are underachieving in the ESOL classroom, which is creating potential barriers for employment and integration into society (Phillimore, 2011). The underachievement of refugee learners was also highlighted by Loerke (2009) and Nykiel-Herbert (2010). ESOL teachers try to build rapport with the learners to encourage refugee learners to accept assistance (Segal and Mayadas, 2005), however, the appropriate support is not always given (see findings). Furthermore, in the findings, participants emphasised the need for more ESOL classes to assist them with more interaction with English. Refugee learners bring unique experiences to the ESOL classroom, (which was mentioned by Taylor and Sindhu, 2012) that could contribute to the teachers' knowledge. Therefore, it is important for ESOL teachers to receive in-service training and professional development (also recommended by Adams and Kirova, 2011) to ensure that the best

teaching practices are provided to refugee learners. Professional development opportunities may help ESOL teachers understand some of the challenges faced by refugee learners, which may better prepare teachers to support refugee learners (Ayoub, 2014). With the increasing number of refugees (potential learners) arriving in the UK (Edwards, 2016), it is important for teacher training courses to prepare pre-service ESOL teachers for teaching refugee learners. In addition, pre-service teachers may realise some of the potential challenges and barriers that refugee learners may bring to the classroom.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

[Introduction](#)

A very interesting, challenging and rewarding topic that has highlighted some key issues (see findings) when teaching ESOL to refugee learners. The ESOL courses may facilitate some refugee learners but not others. To ensure all the learning needs are met ESOL teachers may need to develop their own understanding and skills about teaching refugee learners. The significant findings are discussed in relation to the research questions. A critical reflection is given about the research and what has been learnt. A scope and limitations of the study highlights some potential areas that may need to be addressed in future research.

[Significant findings](#)

Although the motivation levels of the participants and learning barriers were highlighted in the literature review, the most significant findings were: (1) The relevance of the course content, and (2) Working in smaller groups and more ESOL classes. Some participants felt that course content was relevant while others disagreed. However, all the participants expressed that learning about jobs would make the content more relevant to their daily needs (Research question one). Teachers need to ask learners, which topics are of interest in order to meet learner needs. Working in smaller groups was a preferred approach by the participants (research question 2). The participants preferred approach would enable them to work more productively in smaller groups. More ESOL classes would enable the

learners to interact more with the English language which would help them with retention (research question 3).

Critical Reflections as a Researcher

As a lecturer, the research has helped me develop an in-depth knowledge and understanding into the experiences of refugee learners studying ESOL. I have learnt that refugee learners have barriers to learning that are overlooked due to their efforts and high motivation levels. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to help learners overcome the barriers before the learners are able to make any significant academic gains. The research has taught me to understand that it is important to listen to the voices of refugee learners and to give them the opportunities to share their opinions. To hear their voices and understand their learning preferences, ESOL teachers may be able to provide the learners with a teaching strategy that is effective and meets every learner's specific needs. The research findings highlighted some important issues when teaching refugee learners, which are intended to be shared with the ESOL department at work and the wider ESOL community.

Therefore, the information from the research may benefit ESOL teachers and could be used to support their teaching strategies or methods. As a researcher, the study focused on learners' perceptions, experiences, and challenges as participants shared their opinions about the ESOL course that was provided by the college. Furthermore, listening to the participants' views developed skills to support the learners rather than using a one size fits all approach (also mentioned by Moorhead, 2015). As the participants were treated with care and respect, and their opinions were valued, this allowed the researcher to establish a positive connection with the

learners. The research topic was of great interest and has encouraged the researcher to perform more research around refugee learners and their experience of learning ESOL.

Scope and Limitations for the Study

Although the study highlighted new and interesting information (see findings), the limitations also needed to be considered. The first limitation was the accuracy of information provided by the participants. The participants were individuals that were taught by the researcher and there was a possibility that the participants may not have provided accurate opinions or experiences. Participants may have felt that providing positive information may have built a better relationship with the teacher. On the other hand, participants may have been afraid that sharing their real experiences or opinions would have led to a negative teacher/learner relationship, or the participants may have felt they would have been perceived or treated differently after the research. Furthermore, participants may have felt insecure and may have felt the need to protect themselves by not sharing their personal opinions or experiences. Although a positive rapport based on trust and respect was established with all the participants, the limitation to the study was beyond the researcher's control. The second limitation was the ability to generalise the results beyond the context of this study. The participants that were selected for the study may have had unique experiences and opinions that differed from the rest of the refugee learners attending the same college. Therefore, the sample of participants may not have represented the experiences or opinions of all refugee learners accurately, and it is not be possible to generalise results to all refugee learners attending an ESOL course and the same college. The third limitation was the number of participants and

their time in the UK, which may have produced the findings from a single dimension and understanding of an ESOL course. It is important to mention that this was a small scale study that also limited the research.

[**Areas for Future Research**](#)

The findings in the study highlighted that most participants were motivated to learn. However, the participants experienced barriers to learning and felt that their voices were not being heard by the educators, which limited their ability to improve their English skills. From the research, there is a need to improve teaching strategies to help refugee learners become more effective with their ESOL skills. Although ESOL courses provide linguistic needs for refugee learners, it is not clear how effective the courses are in preparing refugee learners integrate and live a normal life in the UK. Therefore, there is a need for a further study to determine the effectiveness of ESOL courses that are provided to measure the progression the refugee learners make, and how they develop and use the English language over time. The research could help ESOL teachers determine the effectiveness of the courses, and whether additional contents or courses need to be developed to better support refugee learners. An additional study of an Action research project could follow on from this study, which may highlight what needs to be changed on the ESOL course to ensure the course content meets the needs of refugee learners. In addition, involving refugee learners to design and trail an ESOL study programme may highlight the topics and activities they want to learn about.

A further study may determine if ESOL courses provided to refugee learners in multilingual classrooms are more effective than ESOL courses provided to refugee learners in a monolingual classroom. The additional study will help ESOL teachers

determine whether refugee learners should be only taught in multilingual classrooms, where the specific needs of refugee learners are more easily met. The focus of the study was to explore the learning experience of refugee learners of ESOL in a FE college. Some participants mentioned that they asked their children for help at times but they got through their day-to-day activities. I feel there is a need to research and investigate the experiences and challenges faced by refugee children and their integration into a main stream school. I feel refugee children will express themselves more and they may have additional challenges that may include making friends, adapting to the school culture and being exposed to an education from the beginning.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is investigate the learning experiences of refugee learners of ESOL. The questionnaire will also help the research find out new ways of motivating learners and what course content and approaches are effective for the learners. The answers to the questions may help highlight what ESOL teachers need to change to improve learner retention.

The questionnaire should take no more than 6 minutes of your time.

Thank you for your time!

1. How many years have you lived in the UK?

Please tick...

<input type="checkbox"/> 0-3yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 7-9yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 10+yrs
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2. How many years have you spent learning English (ESOL)?

Please tick....

<input type="checkbox"/> 0-3yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 7-9yrs	<input type="checkbox"/> 10+yrs
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3. Which sorts of ESOL classes do you attend?

Please tick all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Life in the UK	<input type="checkbox"/> Language club	<input type="checkbox"/> College	<input type="checkbox"/> Talk English	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Other ...

4. Which other classes would you like to attend?

Please tick all that apply.

Jobs skills

Citizenship classes

Activity classes

Conversation club other.....

A conversation club: The teacher chooses the topic from the newspaper and asks you to express your views.

5. Do you feel that what you learn in your ESOL class, helps you in your daily life? Yes/No

6. How easy do you find attending ESOL classes? (Transport/cost/etc.)

Please circle

1 (No) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Yes)

7. What problems do you have when you attend ESOL classes?

Tick boxes that apply

Transport cost distance other

8. Do you like your course?

Please circle

1 (No) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(Yes)

9. Which topics would interest you? Please tick all that apply.

- Shopping skills using the bank/pay bills
- using public services computer skills other.....

10. Do you like the way the course is taught?

Please circle...

1 (NO) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

11. Does the teacher ask you in class what you want to learn?

1 (No) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(Yes)

12. Does the teacher encourage you to ask questions?

Please circle....

1 (No) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(Yes)

13. Are the classes you attend relevant to your daily life?

Please circle....

1(No) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(Yes)

14. Which skills are more important to you?

Please tick boxes that apply

Reading skills

listening skills

Writing Skills

speaking skills

Other.....

What would you add/change in your ESOL classes to help you

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

15. Would you be happy to be interviewed? Yes/NO

Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

Appendix 2

Semi-structured interview questions

The interview will help determine if the content of ESOL courses are relevant to everyday linguistic needs of refugee learners.

1. Is learning English important in England?
2. Are the topics taught in ESOL classes helping you in your daily life?
3. Do you like to learn English?
4. Do you like everything about your course?
5. What don't like about your course?
6. What topics and skills are most useful and relevant to you?
7. What topics and skills they would like the course to include?
8. Which skills are more important for you to develop? Speaking, listening, reading or writing.
9. Are there any chances for you after this course e.g. work, different course?
10. In your opinion, what strategies/methods could teachers use to help you learn?
11. Are you confident to talk about ESOL challenges with your teacher?
12. Does your teacher encourage (push you) to learn ESOL?

13. Do you think more ESOL classes outside would help you prepare for 'real life' situations?

14. What will you do after this course?

15. Do you feel the language you learn helps you understand and use English in everyday situations?

16. Do you prefer to learn in the classroom or out of the classroom activities?

17. Which type of learning strategy do you prefer?

Using authentic material/ realia/ course books/ textbooks/Speaking with peers?

Why?

18. Is there anything you would like to add to help teachers provide you with the correct topics and skills that are most useful to you?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3

Participant Consent Form

University of Teesside

School of Education and Professional Development

Title of Research Study: Exploring the learning experience of refugee learners studying ESOL.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant Information sheet related to this research, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
- I understand that all my responses will be anonymised.
- I give permission for members of the teaching team to have access to my anonymised responses.
- I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Name of Researcher: Saeed Zahid

Signature of Researcher: Saeed Zahid

Date: 18/11/17

Appendix 4 A transcribed: Semi-structured interview

Thank you for taking part in this interview. Can I begin by asking do you think learning ESOL is important in the UK?

Yes it is important because I live in the UK so umm I need erm better my English

Improve your English. OK. Are the ESOL topics helping you in your daily life?

Um, yes erm I think it is a umm, er, umm I will learn umm a different umm topic because umm is a umm a different ESOL topic is a helping ah um my er daily bish help

How?

Um because I learn er English in every er today erm no sorry every day er different er topics help me

Do you enjoy learning English?

Yes I er enjoy er because its erm every person speaking English in here and erm every day I learn new erm topic so I enjoy it

Ok. What do you like about your course?

I like about course is erm a new place err in ah UK in ah new peoples meet err in my class and course errm everything of new new for me and I like it

OK. So you get to meet new people every day?

Ye

Ok. What don't you like about your course?

I don't like because its a very short time in class err in a week err just 2 err 2 day err per week I spend my class err I need a more time more class a week err because err I spend more time in more better my English umm n er my class is err more time spent err reading or writing erm but I need is a speaking is a better for us because improve my English

Which topics would you like to learn about?

I learn about English err cultures because I'm living here in my culture cultures are different in in here cultures are different so I will learn about the English culture.

Ok. So you want want to learn more about the language culture in the UK.

Yeh

OK. Which skills would you like to develop more and why?

Umm, listening or um speaking.

Why?

Um because I er go everywhere an umm every er person speak er speaking a different er style umm for example is a bank or umm umm shops and everywhere so I um I think is important for me is listening or speaking.

OK, very good. Are there any opportunities for you after this course?

Err first off I complete my er this course and er then I er when my English is improved I try to more improve my English and I choose the next course

OK. In your opinion what do teachers need to do to help you learn?

Teacher er should give more time er give for me and er um a different topic and give um give us I think

Do you feel confident to talk about ESOL problems with your teacher?

Er (pause)

Ok er I'll ask you that question again. Do you feel confident to talk to your teacher about ESOL problems?

Yes I confident er because is erm when er I feel difficult er so I um every time I speak my teacher and teacher help me

OK. Does your teacher encourage you to learn English?

Yes er my teacher always erm help me er learn English er an when er I er feel difficult my teacher erm different er types er help different, different type help er for English

It helps you in different ways.

Yes

OK. Do you think more practical classes would help you prepare for real life situations?

Yes obviously um is um when er I go everywhere an meet a different people and are different ere r style speaking an er different type of things so every day I think I need a different people and learn the different thing

So practical classes would help you very much?

Yeh of course

What will you do after this course?

After complete um my course er I search er jobs and um I will learn er more er course about in English an because improve my English

OK. Do you feel the language you learn helps you understand and use English in every day situations?

Yes every day um I um learn a new er topic an er when I go everywhere um there is different help for me

So you can use the language you learn.

Yes

Do you prefer to learn in the classroom or out of the classroom activities?

Yeh I like is er both because is er both are different er type er learning erm in classroom I erm just a few student in erm learn is erm how come full concentrate but is erm not enough of us erm in erm when I go everywhere in learn is different er types so I learn both

Ok. Which type of learning strategies do you prefer?

I learn er on books because is er um book er I think is a better for us

Why?

Um because is um books er books read and erm books read a different types of books...so I like books

OK. Is there anything that you would like to add to help teachers provide you with the correct teaching content?

I think its um er um um er when my er class er we can end erm as a different nationalities peoples erm make a group, a different groups andis a speaking er comparing other er another student so I think is er um different peoples, different nationalities, different er speaking style so is erm learning is better for us

OK . Well thank you very much for your interview.

Thank you very much