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An investigation into the value of informal and experiential learning with Syrian refugees in the ESOL context.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement

of University of Sunderland for the degree of Master of Philosophy

June 2021

Abstract

This thesis investigates informal and experiential learning for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) specifically Syrian refugees in the North of England. Not typical ESOL learners, Syrian refugees have a very particular set of circumstances to overcome and traditional ESOL methods do not always support their learning. Progress can be poor making integration into British life difficult. Recently arriving refugees from Syria provide a unique opportunity to research effective models for non-traditional ESOL teaching.

This research explores how ESOL could be taught through informal, naturalistic and experiential methods. It draws on the work of Halima Ali in her 2016 report and the Casey Review (2015) which focus on integration within deprived and isolated communities. This is related to educational contexts where the purpose of teaching is not specifically focussed on ESOL but where language learning occurs in experiential and naturalistic ways. Early indications suggest that creating contextually rich learning opportunities benefit the learner and facilitate the learning process. The thesis reports on a range of techniques used to enhance meaningful learning experiences. A key challenge is to engage Syrian refugees in activities that draw on Syrian culture whilst embedding language learning. This thesis is informed by Dewey's (1916) pragmatic epistemology approach where people are encouraged to learn through experiences and hands-on, active approaches to learning. Direct observation, field notes and interviews are the primary methods employed in this thesis to bring the experiences of this group of refugee learners to light.

Findings from this thesis point to a new way for delivering ESOL learning that can be used to improve language acquisition that allows better integration into the host society.

Table of Contents

Abstract *2*

Chapter 1 .... *9*

Introduction 9

Background and problem 11

History/Policy of ESOL Provision in the United Kingdom 13

Immigration and Refugees in the North of England 18

English Language Learners 21

Refugees Educational Experiences 23

Barriers to language learning 25

Oral traditions and language 28

Formal/Informal Learning 28

Chapter 2 .... *32*

Literature Review 32

Setting the scene 32

ESOL demand 32

Current ESOL Provision 33

Integration 38

ESOL Policies/ Strategies 41

Refugee experiences 45

Informal/formal/ experiential, naturalistic learning **52**

Curriculum Design and Development **58**

Conclusion **62**

Chapter 3 .... *64*

Methodology **64**

Introduction **64**

Competing Paradigms in Educational Research **65**

Ontology **67**

Epistemology **69**

Epistemological positions **69**

Interpretivism **71**

Qualitative Research **72**

Methods **76**

Questionnaires **76**

Questionnaires with Key Workers **77**

Semi structured interviews **78**

Case Studies **80**

Qualitative Data **81**

Desk based research **87**

Ethics **88**

Privacy **91**

Chapter 4 .... *95*

Data Analysis and Findings 95

Discussions with Syrian Key Workers 122

Conversation groups. 123

Volunteering 124

Further Education 125

Adult Learning 127

Sports teams 128

Women's Groups 129

Informal learning 119

Photographs and video evidence 106

Photographs 111

Case Study 107

Snapshots of the class January 2019 108

May 2019 Start of Ramadan 109

June 2019 109

December 2019 110

December 2019 110

March 2020 111

Questionnaires 96

Semi structured interviews 99

Mary* 99

Hattie * 100

Abdallah* 101

Fatima* 102

Minnie* 103

Hannah* 103

Mohammed* 104

Philip* 104

Andrew * 105

Abdu* 105

Chapter 5 .... *130*

Themes and Analysis 130

What is revealed about the needs of the refugees? 130

Integration 131

Emotional Support 133

How are students' needs being met? 133

Self-motivation to learn English 134

Informal learning and networks 135

Material needs 137

Barriers and constraints 137

Gender 138

Social activities 139

Racism 140

Legal, education, medical and language support 140

Classroom culture 141

Peer friendship 142

Lack of language support 143

Chapter Six ***150***

Conclusion and Recommendations 150

ESOL provision 151

Recruitment of refugee learners 152

ESOL teachers 152

Childcare issues 153

Partnership working 153

Structure 154

Traditional ESOL classes 156

Sustainability 157

Soft outcomes 158

Solutions from learners 158

Funding 159

COVID-19 160

Final Comments 161

Bibliography 165

Chapter 1

Introduction

If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."
–
Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) Harper Lee

The eureka moment for my research was when I was in Italy with my daughter, I took the wrong train into rural Southern Italy felt hot, panicked, and powerless with absolutely no clue what to do, money and education were of no help because I could not communicate. I do not speak Italian and there were no English translations available. The relief I felt when we managed to find our way back to the right train was palpable. On returning to England, I looked at a group of Syrian refugees whom I was working with and thought, this is how they must feel every day. A basic human need and right is to be able to communicate. However, a significant body of research indicates that there are too many ESOL learners who are not making the progress expected of them in their language development. I have spent the past two years reading and researching in the field of how people learn, barriers to learning, ESOL provision, and curriculum design. Research suggests traditional ESOL provision is failing many refugees or asylum seekers in the United Kingdom today. Refugee Action, 2019 draws attention to how this leads to a lack of integration, often culminating in a range of social problems. In the context of my own professional practice, I noticed that my cohort of refugees seemed to make better progress when they were focussing on a practical activity, I use cooking and gardening because that's what we can offer. However, any practical activity, where the focus of the

learning is not language learning could be incorporated into this approach. In the course of this research, I have been contemplating how to formalise ways to include practical and experiential approaches to learning into the curriculum. At the same time, I realise that to do so could inherently alter the informal nature of the learning I am trying to support. In the process of this thesis, I have come to the gradual realisation that what is needed is a pre formal ESOL curriculum, “emergency ESOL” as I have come to call it, that provides a safe, non -pressured space where, as described in the base of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), a platform to step off from into the formality of an ESOL class. The success of an informal safe space is relational. By this I mean that safe spaces for learning rely on the relationships, stillness, quiet and the lack of pressure that a non -formal class can offer. I have found from my own experiences of teaching ESOL students that this type of support enables learners to feel empowered and ready to make the next step, opening up a place for ‘hand-holding’ and support which enables ESOL learners to successfully complete BASIC communication tasks such as asking for vegetables at the dinner table or ordering a prescription with confidence including just being able say hello to a neighbour. It does not matter if the grammar is correct, what is important is that ESOL learners feel able to start to communicate in the new language and how this increases their confidence. The challenge we face is how to realise this in practice in ESOL curriculum and pedagogy. This small-scale research study started with the intention of looking at the value of experiential and informal learning with Syrian refugees in the ESOL context. However, from this has come a further question, which is, how fruitful is this form of informal learning, in a wider setting, in delivering “emergency ESOL”.

+The aim of this research is to investigate informal and experiential learning for Syrian refugees in the North of England. To do this I am looking at the back -ground and problem, reading current literature written by others researching similar issues, establishing a methodology and using appropriate methods, completing the research, recording findings, analysing findings and making recommendations for further research.

Background and problem

*"The limits of my language are the limits of my world" (*Wittgenstein, 1922, p.6)

As an experienced practitioner of English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], working both with learners and their support workers, it has become clear to me that current traditional ESOL provision is not as good as it could be. Wittgenstein's observation clearly indicates that without access to language a person's world view is limited to their specific circumstances and confined to their peer group where they are understood and understand. Many ESOL learners have limited access to formal scheduled ESOL classes. Reasons include childcare issues, transport, financial and cultural restraints. This points to the need for alternatives to formal classroom-based language learning sessions, towards more informal ESOL provision which incorporates the social, physical and emotional aspects of learning a new language. Alternatives to conventional ESOL curriculum and pedagogy could include sessions where the limits of language are expanded and consequently the world the refugees inhabit could also expanded alongside the growth of their grasp of language. Having previously worked with learners in informal sessions it has become increasingly clear to me that the informal nature of such sessions, such as cooking and gardening, can improve access to and engagement in education, allow for sessions to be more

flexibly timed, and for transport to be made available. Mallows (2017, p.3) echoes Wittgenstein when he notes that:

> *"Basic knowledge of the host societies language… is indispensable to integration, enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration"*.

In many cases, this basic knowledge is not attained, and consequently successful integration fails to happen in a timely manner.If ESOL provision is accessible to all learners across England this leads one to question why there should be such a lack of progress .

My work is with learners at a small charity in the North of England. I have been a qualified teacher for many years specialising in English and ESOL with experience of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). My role as Teaching, Learning and Assessment observer has provided further opportunities to observe and speak to learners and tutors about their learning or teaching experiences. In the context of this work in ESOL it has become clear to me that even for those who do manage to attend traditional, dedicated classes, the progress expected of them is not always achieved. Halima Ali (2016) supports this notion reinforcing concerns that this lack of progress leads to learners dropping out of sessions, frustration and general resentment. This is exemplified in Piller's (2016) work where a learner notes that "constant worrying about her family left behind in Damascus makes it hard for her to concentrate" and another "frequently misses his class because they clash with appointments at the immigration authorities" (2016, p.6). The effect of this is evidenced in poor progression through levels of assessment levels, exam results, the amount of day-to-day conversation in which learners engage in the new language and perhaps most crucially learner confidence. Field notes from my own experience record how a learner comments that in class "there is too much going on,

and too many people wanting to talk for [me] to be able to learn to speak the words [I] need to be able to work in England". This learner's comment suggests that a change to the delivery method and curriculum could be implemented for the greater benefit of learners.

A recent BBC article states that "three quarters of a million people in the UK still speak little or no English" (BBC, 2019, p.1), despite attending ESOL classes. It would seem that when the focus of ESOL learning is solely based on outcomes from a prescribed curriculum which only considers and foregrounds formal language, development progress can become limited. It is therefore important for teachers to reflect on their teaching and the impact it is having on their learners. Martin Nickson (2012) reinforces this when he notes that "formal provision is influenced by pedagogical and language learning theory, but also by policy directives concerning citizenship, integration and employability" (p.105) thus creating a crowded curriculum which places pressure on a very particular set of learners.

History/Policy of ESOL Provision in the United Kingdom

This research seeks to find a better way to develop English language skills by re-examining what has become routine curriculum and pedagogical practice in ESOL teaching. In order to do this, we need to consider the history and policy of ESOL provision in the UK.

ESOL teaching was introduced in the United Kingdom after a series of migrations starting in the mid 1800's necessitating the development of a structured approach to teaching English. In the 1960's funding was allocated to support the needs of those

arriving from Commonwealth countries, however, this funding was short-term and sporadic. In the 1970's and 1980's funding became available from the European Union and by 1992 the Higher Education Act classified ESOL as a vocational course qualifying for funding from the Further Education Funding Council. This was subsumed into Skills for Life (SFL) basic skills and under this banner ESOL learners were expected to gain specially designed qualifications. Skills for Life was the national strategy designed to improve adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL launched by Tony Blair in March 2001 (Rosenberg, 2008). Hamilton and Hillier note that:

> *"ESOL is seen as a compensatory education programme to aid the assimilation of immigrant communities into what is perceived as a traditionally monocultural monolinguistic heritage*
>
> (2009, p.8).

Whilst it is vital to encourage integration rather than assimilation, this will be hard to achieve if ESOL is seen merely as compensatory, for refugees ESOL is vital to autonomy, independence and integration. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) support developing a curriculum designed to accommodate diverse voices and perspectives so that all feel that they can contribute. Hamilton and Hillier (2009) question in their work whether ESOL should be concerned with formal language learning needs or as the only point of contact with the host community and therefore informal language learning. It would seem that there is the possibility that it could in fact do both, start as an informal means to learning language and integrating into the host society, progressing into more formal language learning based around formal curricula and exams. *Breaking the Language Barriers* (Working Group for English for Speakers of other Languages, 2000) explores the range of learners, their needs and recommendations and the ESOL core curriculum describes what should be taught to achieve the skills needed to meet national standards. This focuses on three aspects,

writing, reading and speaking. These are further broken down into six levels; pre-entry, Entry 1-3 and Levels 1 and 2. Curriculum will be discussed further in Chapter 2 as it is important to recognise more fully the expectations of the current curriculum that leads to formal qualifications.

ESOL needs are reinforced in *A New Approach to ESOL* (NATECLA, 2009) where the aim is to strengthen social integration and cohesion while determining those who are most in need of ESOL provision. There is little mention of individual circumstances and how best to support learners rather the focus is again on national standards and priorities which does not seem to improve access for learners. In part this could be due to adherence to the prescribed curriculum with changes dependent on the requirements of exam boards and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Ofsted is the inspection service for all those providing education at all ages. It exists to ensure that organisations providing education and training do so to Government set standards and regulates what teachers do imposing Government policy on teaching. This means that teachers do not have the latitude to determine their own curriculum which impacts on learners who have to follow a predetermined curriculum whether or not it is appropriate to them at that particular time.

Funding has also been a constant issue, Shadow Skills Minister, Gordon Marsden (2018, p. 1) writes that:

> *"Funding for ESOL has fallen from £203 million in 2010 to £90 million in 2016- a real terms drop of 60%, already struggling colleges and other providers have seen their capacity to cut vital courses slashed".*

Adult ESOL is funded through the Adult Education budget which is no longer ring fenced, previously it was funded through the Community Learning budget. The loss of this funding in 2018 means this is no longer possible and because it is demand led

there is a lack of certainty regarding course availability. This has led to significant waiting lists and lack of funding (Spelman, 2018). Prior to 2007 ESOL learners qualified for an automatic fee remission, once this was withdrawn only certain groups were eligible for free education including those on certain means tested benefits and their unwaged dependents. Further restrictions took place in 2011/2012 when only those eligible for job seekers allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA) were eligible for funding, all others were partially funded. This means that accessibility was, and is, income dependent with learners liable for the extra costs. Learners with certain ESOL needs, such as refugees, have a relatively low income which means that the pressure to procure ESOL lessons could be a drain on an already stretched family budget. Previously, traditional ESOL learners have included a mix of migrant workers including those from professions needing to 'brush up' their existing English skills and for whom the cost would potentially be less of a barrier than for refugees or those on low incomes. Extra funding was allocated in 2014-2015 however this was withdrawn following the Summer Budget of 2015. This left many refugees needing to undertake ESOL classes without the funding or qualifying criteria to do so.

Currently ESOL is funded through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) only if, as previously discussed, learners are eligible, satisfying a demanding set of rules (Haughton et al, 2017). There are other less regular sources of funding available through the Adult and Community Learning Fund or the European Integration Fund, unfortunately this funding is also reliant upon differing sets of eligibility criteria which do not always make the provision accessible or affordable. Learners are expected to work towards national recognised qualifications which have models of delivery that generally follow discrete provision. This works well for those who need a recognised

qualification but again burdens those who are below this level and who need sufficient English to be able to go to the shops, talk to a teacher at school or go to the doctor. There has been a recent move to a more contextualised and flexible delivery in certain areas however, this has not been consistent in all education authorities (Griffiths, 2018). Blended learning has been seen to be beneficial when adopted in formal learning situations which is not always possible for learners who again do not fit the funding criteria (McIntyre, 2017). Some colleges in the North of England require the learner to have two years residency and one year's ESOL experience before he/she can join a class otherwise there is a fee. There is also the expectation that some understanding of the English language is required before classes can be accessed (Haughton et al, 2017 and Martin, 2016). If, however, the curriculum is changed to include practical experiential learning through cooking, gardening or practical tasks both social and language learning would have the potential to develop both in terms of practical skills and language development. Belgutay (2019) states that there are plans to publish a national strategy for English for Speakers of other languages in the Autumn of 2019 as there is no national strategy at the present unlike Scotland and Wales although this has not happened as of December 2020. In Scotland this seems to have made a difference Allan (2015) writes:

> "innovative and accessible approaches to provision such as the self-access ESOL hubs and the online learning offered by Northern College have helped to ensure that there is a range of ways that ESOL can access provision" (p.18).

The English strategy will include the development of pre- entry resources focussing on the needs of refugee learners. Laura Dennis (2016, p.4) notes that:

> "There is very little systematic monitoring at central government level of ESOL provision, funding, teaching quality or student outcomes across different programmes. This is the same for local government. This effectively means that the

government does not know the impact, or the value for money, of its budget spend on ESOL".

This would suggest that the new strategy may go some way to addressing the lack of monitoring at all levels and flag up areas of need, or, alternatively, areas of good or successful practice. Jude Burke (2015) notes that "Sue Pember, director of policy at Holex which has been calling for a national strategy is very pleased that the government had listened" (p.1). This could lead to more funding being released for ESOL, with a revised curriculum however, whilst this could theoretically improve and standardise the curriculum, it could also reduce autonomy for teachers.

Immigration and Refugees in the North of England

Immigration and refugees are a current issue much heard about in all forms of media and political debates as the numbers of refugees entering into the country continues to grow and the Refugee councils support more people from camps around the world (Dennis, 2016). The increasing numbers of refugees means that ESOL classes can expect growing numbers of students. This new student body may well come from people who fled their home country, have been placed in refugee camps and are likely to be experiencing trauma as a result. This will put further pressure on an already pressured education system and underfunded ESOL classes as more teachers will need to specialise in ESOL and critically in teaching those experiencing trauma.

The North East of England has experienced a slow intake of refugee families over the past two years especially from Syria and Sudan, many of whom have little language experience beyond their country of origin. In one of my classes refugee learners have managed to escape Syria, either to Lebanon or Jordan, into a refugee

camp and then on to England, whilst others have escaped from war in Sudan to be caught up in the Syrian conflict. They arrive in England lacking both English language skills and knowledge of the English way of life and traditions. The priority is to gain enough English language skills to be able to function on a basic level in day to day life, making friends, acquiring a job, taking children to the doctors and helping with homework (Haughton, et al, 2017).

Once identified, the Refugee Council is charged with working with the refugees intensively in year 1 and then for minor support in years 2-5. There is also a Key worker appointed by the local Council who works intensively with the refugees aiming to get them into work or further education. Traditional classes in the area are provided by a local college and learners are mandated to attend in order to be eligible for benefits. Parents with babies are not always able to access childcare and because of this some fathers take priority in the learning process as they identify as the key ‘breadwinner’ trying to look after their family. There seems to be little recognition that these learners may suffer from trauma, violence, and chronic stress. In addition, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) recently announced that all money for ESOL Plus mandation through the JobCentre would cease making ESOL access more precarious. It would seem that changes need to be made to recognise and respond to the needs of these learners so that they can access learning, integrate into their new local area and make a positive impact on the local economy by working. Small towns particularly suffer where they:

> “have seen a recent influx of migrants or have long standing ethnic communities in which older people, particularly women feel frozen out of integration due to poor English” (2018, p.2).

Women in particular often rely on children to translate for them and are not able to access services in the way they should (Casey, 2016). This is not new as research

refers to women who arrived as new brides in the 1970's and have not moved on in terms of language learning or integration, with many women experiencing the same restrictions today (BBC, 2019). Whilst these brides did not enter the country as refugees the same constraints apply to today's refugee women. There are still examples of women being excluded from integration for example in my experience an elderly lady is still kept outside of her local community due to her lack of language skills, integration has not happened, and she relies on her family for translation services. This in turn means further isolation and inability to access social activities, appointments and day to day life events that most people take for granted. Churches and voluntary organisations provide informal support, but this is not consistent and has varying degrees of quality and effectiveness (Spelman, 2017). Some groups benefit from the experience of retired teachers who are able to plan for and support refugees effectively whilst others are entirely led by unqualified but dedicated volunteers who are not prepared to lead sessions but can provide some conversation practice. The Government is beginning to recognise the need for a new strategy for teaching English as they have outlined in the Green Paper, *Integrated Community Strategies*, published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Burke, 2018). Perhaps one of the most important initiatives detailed in the paper is the need for "a new community-based English Language programme and plans for a new network of conversation clubs" (2018, p.4). This has the potential to trial the proposed informal, experiential learning method at the centre of the project in community surroundings where there is plenty of support for learners to move on to more formal learning when they are ready. This seems to be in opposition to the lack of joined up thinking where, strategic planning involving people looking at policy rather than looking at the real progress made by learners, has been

the focus. Until both aspects are taken into consideration it would seem that there will be no real progress made in ESOL teaching. This research is therefore timely as new initiatives are being considered that could supplement provision at Colleges or Adult Education facilities and are more focussed on the immediate needs of learners.

English Language Learners

English language learners are those who are learning English language in addition to his/her first language/languages. Although there are varying stages of ESOL learning this research looks specifically at refugee learners who have been in the United Kingdom from arrival to three years. A refugee is defined as someone who has resided outside of the United Kingdom and who is being resettled here. They are unable or unwilling at the present time to return to their home country due to persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group (Complete Working with Refugees, 2018). The Syrian Refugees have left Syria because of the war, so called Islamic state/Daesh and the subsequent loss of their homes, businesses, work and families. Many refugees have been separated from friends and family, either by the Refugee Council resettling them in different areas, even countries, or, by family members refusing to leave Syria. This leads to distress and constant worry regarding their families. One of my recent learners, was distressed in class and unable to function adequately, through interpreters it became apparent that her brother had been killed in a bombing raid the previous evening. Under these circumstances, the expectations of the formal classroom are completely unworkable and of little benefit to the learner who is already disadvantaged. Refugees, unlike immigrants, are not people who choose to reside in England through economic circumstances. Migrants have the luxury of

learning about their new country before leaving their country, their research can include looking at homes, language and employment opportunities, thereby equipping them to attend traditional ESOL classes as their movement is driven by choice rather than necessity. This thesis argues that the current educational process seems to be failing refugees who are suffering from many issues such as culture shock, poverty, poor housing, poor health and psychological disorders which add to the complexity of issues around the learning process.

Immigration for many has been a long process, for example I know of a learner who escaped from the fighting in Syria and was then held for 6 years in Jordan, another had a similar experience but in Lebanon. This meant that although they had settled into life as refugees in one country, they then had to begin the settling process again in a third country whilst trying to learn yet another language. The learners I teach have life experiences that encompass all manner of deprivations whilst en-route to England. Traditional ESOL learners are frequently well qualified in their home countries, which points to their capability to learn at a higher level and they frequently speak a second or third language, alternatively, “refugee students are not always proficient in their own language, making their English language development delayed” (Crouch, 2016, p.1). The British Council acknowledges that “without adequate provision for language teaching and learning the long-term options for people forced to flee from violence and instability are limited” (British Council, 2016, p.1). Mallows (2016) supports this notion, reflecting that participants felt ESOL teaching was unsuitable and poor overall, leading to a lack of inclusion and interaction with native English speakers. Integration is a desired outcome as well as academic progress. Learners are not just learning in order to pass exams but to be more confident in accessing all aspects of daily life. Piller contends that:

“receiving societies cannot figure out how to facilitate the language learning of real people rather than the stick figures of political slogans (2018, p.8).

That is, the reality of practising ESOL with real people is very different to the abstract concepts discussed by politicians who frequently do not have real-life experience with refugees. What one reads about in reports is enormously different in reality as these are real life people with real life concerns.

Hamilton and Hillier (2009) attribute this in part to discussions about language needs being framed alongside Literacy and Numeracy after receiving unhelpful attention from the government where “short term erratic project funding has been the norm” (2009, p. 4). In part this seems to be that the needs of refugees/ immigrants is seen as a social rather than an educational problem where need has increased and funding decreased (McCallum, 2018). The needs of refugees are in fact both social and educational, they are not mutually exclusive, and both need to be addressed with equal weighting. Strategies for ESOL have been implemented in Scotland and Wales where it is recognised that the need for integration is vital. Whereas, in England the Skills funding agency (SFA) has overall responsibility however, this is divided across various departments and ESOL takes a low priority (McCallum, 2018, p. 1-3).

Refugees Educational Experiences

Refugees in England bring a wide cultural diversity to their classroom such as political, ethnic, religious, socio economic and linguistic. Whilst many refugees have arrived in the United Kingdom from varying situations, most will have spent time in refugee camps where education is limited, and life is difficult and precarious. This previous experience will affect the way refugees interact with learning experiences

and their academic performance. Many teachers lack experience in teaching refugees with trauma and therefore stick rigidly to a set curriculum which is not necessarily educationally appropriate (Hurley, et al, 2014). Students may have a limited educational experience in Syria where they may have poor reading or writing skills and therefore find it hard to perform these tasks in English. ESOL learners are expected to learn academic English and content language at the same time as having to undertake exams, which if they are not skilled in their first language they will struggle to do. Robertson and Lafond (2017, p.3) note that:

> "ESOL learners are not only learning English language they must learn how to read, learn how to follow a schedule; how to complete assignments and follow instructions; how to use college supplies, how to take a bus; how to interact with students from different cultures while trying to adjust to a new country."

It is therefore imperative that to start this process tutors need to create an empowering and supportive environment with resources that suit the student rather than the fixed curriculum. Tutors need the time to discover the needs of their students, and equally importantly their backgrounds in order to build on the challenges and experiences and the resources to create innovative ways of delivering learning. Initial assessment is difficult as language barriers do not allow for nuanced assessments that take into account both educational background and barriers to learning. Language learning takes a long time (Genishi 2019), Piller (2016, p.3) notes that:

> " the precise duration and final outcome as measured in proficiency level are impossible to predict as they depend on many factors, most of which are outside the control of the language learner."

Some may just want day to day subsistence learning, while others wanting to progress may require further learning. This links back to the required learning hours and actual hours received as discussed earlier.

Barriers to language learning

Cole (2009, p.27) defines trauma as “a response to one or more devastating and stressful events where one’s ability to cope is dramatically compromised”. The Syrian refugees have experienced the trauma of war and this has led, as previously discussed, to mental health issues (Refugee Health Technical Assistance Centre, 2017). There are stages of trauma that affect the refugees starting with pre-flight trauma which is where the refugees are still in their country anxious, confused and having to leave everything that makes them feel safe and secure behind. The flight stage is where they start the journey to their new home. Some refugees may have a journey lasting for years and some are only as long as leaving one country for another. However long the journey there is still uncertainty and anxiety. Once located in their new country resettlement comes with the assistance of the Refugee Council but intense support is limited to one year. Stressors occur when settled in a country very different from their own with limited support and limited language skills:

> “Culture shock occurs when the transition from one country to another, encompassing changes in every aspect of daily life, from the language one speaks to the ways in which individuals and groups interact is overwhelming for the individual. It includes major life events, such as the loss of social networks and changes in work status as well as ongoing daily hassles, for instance communicating in a new language and encountering discrimination (Taylor, 2017, p. 15).”

Most refugees will have experienced the aspects of culture shock noted by Taylor. Culture shock is possibly most evident in older learners who find it harder to adapt to new traditions and customs and frequently retreat into their homes as it causes less stress. Once refugees move to a new country, they can experience isolation, hostility, violence and racism in their new environment. This can lead to loss of support, discrimination, harassment, loss of social status and a constant fear of not fitting into the host country. This impacts on how the adult learns:

> “during a stressful event the sympathetic nervous system activates the flight or fight response, the stress hormone cortisol is released… in a traumatic event, excess cortisol is released …which have negative effects on the brain” (Taylor, 2017, p.33).

Difficulties in thinking, reasoning and problem solving, all needed to learn a new language, acquire skills and process new information can all manifest when under stress.

This is evident throughout the world where numbers of refugees with trauma continues to rise:

> “previous research indicates that teachers have limited experience in working with refugees and trauma, and there are (sic) a lack of resources to support these students” (Taylor, 2017, p.13).

This would indicate that changes need to be made to better train teachers and develop a responsive curriculum which fulfils the learners' needs whilst at the same time creating new and more effective resources.

The ESOL learners I have worked with most recently have been refugees who have or are experiencing all these issues. They are striving to learn English, fit in with a different culture, adapt to life without family support, overcome many hurdles and in order to do this it would seem that to ease the transition if they had a slight command of the English language the transition would be much easier. Therefore, any changes to the curriculum that would facilitate this would be beneficial. The curriculum is limiting, and it is a very skilful teacher that can bring it to life and make it relevant to the learners. I am in a unique position where I am not limited to a prescribed curriculum by my organisation and have leeway to play around with the design of the curriculum ensuring all domains of learning are included and learning is structured in context rich ways.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2018) notes that:

> “refugees and immigrants face specific barriers during their first years …special individual measures e.g language support are thus available; this also applies in other European countries where refugee language learning is also an issue” (p.10).

Language learning for refugees is complex as previous trauma or dislocation have to be considered within the learning process (Guerrero and Tinkler, 2010; Randall and Lutz,1991). Margaritis acknowledges this in her writing on trauma and second language learning noting that “after traumatic experience there are both chemical and physical changes that occur in the loss or inhibited normal brain functions” (2016, p.1) (Nicholson and Walker, 2010).

Further complications could be seen to manifest in:

> “delusions of persecution, disturbing dreams, poor sleep, states of confusion, somatic complaints, feelings of insecurity, isolation, resentment, guilt, inadequacy, bereavement, tension, fatigue, restlessness and detachment” (Kleinmann: 1983, p.211)

Chadwick (2016, p.1) states that “language skills are fundamental in order to contribute to their host communities”, in order to achieve this a refugee, need to be given the tools to achieve a voice, however fractured, communicate meaning and participate in their community successfully. Krashen (1976, p.166) is clear that “active involvement with the target language is necessary for acquisition to occur,” what is disputed is how this is best achieved. Piller (2016) suggests that 480 hours of language learning is needed to be able to speak adequately while learners are routinely offered 120 hours (BBC, 2018) which is well below the suggested 480 hours. Dame Caroline Spelman (2017) recognised the importance of language acquisition in Parliament stressing that “it is really important to get out of the house, to do a daily shop, and practise speaking the language, because practise makes perfect” (Hansard 2017, p. 3). While this discussion in Parliament indicates a willingness to consider the needs of refugees there is not necessarily a sound grasp

of the barriers learners encounter through issues such as racist abuse, money or personal safety which needs to be explored further and acted on. Through the confusion of departments, policies and priorities learners are failing to make the progress needed. This suggests that a change in practice is needed to assist refugees to develop language skills, reducing the emphasis on rote learning to informal learning and increasing the importance of acquisition. This thesis offers a unique opportunity to test out the efficacy of stealth learning in the ESOL context.

Oral traditions and language

Hos (2017, p.1) suggests that in language learning “repeated exposure to rich language can help people become successful communicators, readers and writers”. It is this pre-stage that informal, experiential learning or embedded learning can occur as the learner is free to listen, ask questions however halting and grammatically incorrect his grasp of the language and where the tutor needs the skill to be able to define learners needs and build on it, frequently as the class moves on. This is reinforced by the requirement to “create spaces where students feel safe and comfortable taking risks with their language” (Lexia 2019, p. 3). Teachers are very much aware of the necessity for schemes of work and session plans however there needs to be the awareness and flexibility to break away from this and to follow where a learner leads.

Formal/Informal Learning

Structuring learning in a context-rich way needs an understanding of formal and informal learning. Formal learning is intentional, that is the aim of the learning is to include activities included in the syllabus and the learning outcomes are measured

by tests and other methods of assessment. The curriculum is set by one of a variety of exam boards who have strict guidelines of what should be covered in order to achieve the qualifications. These qualifications can be delivered using resources provided by the exam board or produced by individual teachers of institutions. Alternatively, non-formal or informal language learning:

> "is an involuntary and inescapable part of daily life…. Emerging communicative repertoire is shaped, not by a conscious learning agenda but by their attempts to satisfy their social and material needs" (LIAM, 2019, p.1).

It has been noted that "learning by stealth', often referred to as embedded learning (Ofsted, 2008) is beneficial as studies have demonstrated that learners do well when they learn through 'doing' (Sharp, 2012, and Andromeda, 2017). A less linear approach, rich with learning opportunities, enables learning in a less pressured environment with the added benefit of improving skills. When motivated and engaged in a practical subject, multiple learning opportunities occur (Sharp, 2012). Informal learning is effective in teaching a second language and in turn can improve the prospects of second language learners in achieving their academic progression through levels, improved integration in their community and building their confidence (Refugee Action, 2016, and Thickpenny, 2017). Mallows (2017) emphasises this in his work on integration of refugees, stressing that English is a tool that is critical to inclusion and integration. Emerging evidence suggests that greater integration into the community comes with more relevant language learning rather than, as the Association of Colleges (2014) suggest, the imposition of two compulsory days a week as part of the commitment to access benefits. Informal and non -formal learning can be seen to reinforce and accelerate the formal learning process instead of organising formal language courses at the start of the learning process in the short term it would seem to make sense if volunteers were involved in the process of

organising social activities that promoted non formal or informal learning (Council of Europe, 2019).

Thickpenny (2017) clearly states that current ESOL provision does not meet the diverse needs of refugees in the U.K, instead employing a one size fits all method. This research study aims to address this statement and challenge the one size fits all assumption. It proposes to evaluate the impact of an informal experiential curriculum on the academic, social and emotional progress of ESOL learners. The key aim is to evaluate models of curriculum development using an embedded approach to social, personal and academic learning. The current curriculum does not seem to be fit for purpose and explore ways to redesign sessions to be as productive as possible. Participants will include male and female Syrian refugees who have been in the country for up to three years and have experienced both formal and informal learning encompassing discrete and embedded sessions. Arabic is their main language with some second language speakers indicating capability of prior language learning. The thesis aims to discover if an informal experiential model of curriculum design works more effectively than discrete provision. Data will be collected on the educational backgrounds of learners and the experiences of learners since entry into the United Kingdom. This data will assist me to consider key questions such as;

How can experiential and informal learning methods sometimes called 'learning by stealth' improve inclusion and mastery of the English language?

What are the aspirations and experiences of the refugee community in relation to ESOL provision?

What are the experiences of tutors in relation to both traditional ESOL teaching and an informal experiential model?

What is the impact on retention and achievement rates after the implementation of informal experiential models?

How does tutor experience impact on the learning experience?

How does initial assessment assist in planning a learner's pathway?

The research will sit within a broader body of United Kingdom and European research, but the focus will remain on the experiences of refugees, specifically Syrian refugees, and English acquisition in the North of England.

Chapter 2, the Literature review critically discusses current theory on ESOL provision contextualising my research within this body of work. It includes a section on curriculum design, how curriculum design has altered with different funding initiatives, language acquisition and barriers to learning that may be experienced by learners. It begins by considering different viewpoints which leads to discussions around further research opportunities as it highlights and exposes areas of need. Informal experiential models will be considered in further detail as will the work of Maria Montessori (Aubrey, 2018), Froebel (Aubrey, 2018), Piaget and Erikson (Aubrey, 2018), advocating constructivism where knowledge is constructed from the world around us and learning by 'play' or practical tasks.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Setting the scene

This small-scale study is concerned with exploring informal and experiential models of ESOL teaching in the context of Syrian refugees. This literature review focuses on specific areas which include the demand for ESOL, what provision currently looks like, refugee integration, ESOL policies, ESOL curriculum design and development, informal and formal learning, barriers to learning and Syrian /refugee experiences. This is a complex area of learning however a broad approach has been taken that aims to capture the debate around improving education curricula for refugees.

ESOL demand

It is accepted that English should be a priority for refugees when they enter the country and with the rise of forced and voluntary migration the need for ESOL classes continues to increase (Laura Dennis 2016, Refugee Action 2019, Mcintyre 2019). The demand for good quality ESOL courses continues to grow as a large number of refugees arrive in the country with no English skills and, before they can enter into any type of accredited learning, need to learn basic, survival English. In agreement with this Jenny Scott (2012) discusses the types of English needed to survive, live or work in England calling for improved language learning noting "there

is no point putting emphasis on grammar here, you need to have your students confident enough to be able to perform a specific task" (p.1). This reinforces the need for activities and tasks where language learning occurs incidentally and naturalistically rather than in a formal manner.

In a recent census 863,000 people reported that they were not proficient in English and that 726000 had very poor English skills with 138000 having no English at all (ONS, 2014). LGBT Life (2019) embraces this discussion as it notes the numbers of people who live in the U.K who do not have English language skills but who need to acquire some basic English very quickly in order to function in society and to start to integrate. Refugees with poor English skills are also more likely to lack, or have no, educational qualifications (ONS, 2014) this means that if learners are employed, they are more likely to have lower skilled jobs due to poor English proficiency (DEMOS, 2015). Need is great and demand on the whole for ESOL is higher than the level of provision available (Refugee Action, 2016). A 2014 survey conducted by NATECLA demonstrates that 80% of providers have waiting lists of over a year and 66% note this is due to a lack of government funding (NATECLA, 2014). This leads to many of those needing to complete ESOL courses at a very basic level regularly being turned away (McIntyre, 2017).

Current ESOL Provision

Refugee education is essential in order for families to learn how to function in a new society, make decisions that will help to give stability to the family and enable them to work to provide for their families (Refuge Action, 2019). Traditional ESOL classes do not always make education accessible to certain refugee groups and when classes are accessed are not always successful in achieving timely results

(Shepherd, 2012; Shwarz, 2007; U.K Parliament, 2018; Refugee Action, 2016). Due, Riggs, and Mandara, (2015) discuss the benefits and challenges associated with Intensive English Language Programmes (IELP) focussing on obstacles around language learning which may hinder effective language development. This model looks at benefits such as sessions acting as a safe space, fostering a sense of community and a group approach. The challenges are numerous as learners are individuals with specific needs that frequently do not fit into traditional programme' s structure. Intensive approaches, however, allow the learner to immerse themselves in the language. This is discussed further in an investigation into ESOL provision for refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester (Haughton, Lowson, Morgan and Ryan, 2017). Results of questionnaires confirm the reasons refugees need to learn English and include "to feel more a part of the community, to go to the doctors, to get a job" (p.8). Haughton et al reinforce the hours needed to speak adequately, mirroring Piller's (2016) work where 480 hours are quoted for optimal learning. Many providers are only able to allow 1.5 hours a week. This is equivalent to around 60 hours of language learning a year. If learners are able to attend every session eight years of learning would be needed for adequate progress to be made. In order to enhance this, learning hours can be supplemented with volunteer organisations offering conversation classes (Fisher, 2019, Refugee Action, 2017). The report notes that traditionally women have difficulties in learning English as they have responsibilities including looking after their children and frequently do not want to leave their immediate area due to lack of confidence and potential safety issues (DFID, 2005). Conversation classes however are better attended by the women than men as the classes are held when childcare is available. This contributes to the number of refugees living in the U.K for between 15 and 30 years with no, or very limited,

access to ESOL classes. Another example from the report notes that a woman attending classes in Manchester commented that, “after this class you forget everything for a week until you learn it again in the next one” (p.11) demonstrating the importance of more access to practising English rather than relearning the same things each week. The report ends on the recommendation that:

> “there is a need for organisations that require no application process, that provide more classes at varying times of day, that are structured on ability, and that reach out to every single person wanting to learn English” (p.12).

Clearly these requirements are not the norm at present and Piller (2016) notes while these things are unattainable in the present system “success at language learning is related to who you are and which hand you have been dealt in life” (p.7). Piller suggests that whilst the refugees are trying to find out how to improve their English the host society is equally trying to work out how to facilitate successful language learning which is not yet being done effectively (Shepherd, 2012 and Schwarz, 2015).

A Guide from Research Scotland (2017) provides guidance, advice and examples that may be useful when providing ESOL for refugees who have been resettled in Scotland. It recognises most of the challenges previously discussed but a section focusses on a participatory Third Sector noting that there is a large place for the experience and support frequently provided by this sector which enhances and can scaffold learning for when learners are progressed to traditional ESOL. An overarching theme emerging from the report is that the ‘lack’ within ESOL teaching for refugees with no, or very poor, English speaking abilities is evident but there are few suggestions as to how to resolve this. This is a frequent conclusion, that more ESOL provision is required but no solutions offered to resolve it. Refugee Action’s (2016) report centres around learning English and the struggle that many refugees experience echoing most reports. The report sets out the refugee’s experience

starting with the Government's response to ESOL provision. This ranges from loss of funding to provision becoming "split between departments each with their own objectives and priorities" (p.2) and thus weakening existing provision. Refugee Action call for:

> "all refugees that require English lessons, to have free, accessible ESOL for the first two years in England…The cost of two year's ESOL for each refugee is effectively fully reimbursed to the taxpayer following an individual's first eight months of employment" (p.36).

This is a persuasive argument for providing more targeted and effective ESOL provision rather than reducing funding which has been the norm over recent years. Enabling refugees, and indeed all migrants, to access ESOL has wide societal benefits that encompass more than language skills. When literacy is increased integration, welfare, health, and cost saving are a few benefits experienced that would enhance the economy (DEMOS, 2014). Refugees who are placed in traditional classes are not always given the support needed which in turn leads to increased dropout rates, further isolation and increased struggle (UK Parliament, 2018; Schwarz, 2015; Shepherd, 2012; Refugee Action, 2019). This is not always the best approach as it puts pressure on already pressured people (Casta, 2019). Teachers are equipped to teach but are not necessarily prepared or are able to deal with refugee trauma which can lead to a dislocation between student need and the teaching environment (Nickson, 2012). Refugee students need a caring approach that incorporates a pedagogy that is relevant to their culture. It seems that when pressure on learning is reduced greater progress can be made in a relatively short time (Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker, 2019). Benseman (2014) quotes studies that point out the inadequacies of courses available, irrelevance of the teaching content of the courses and notes there is the potential "to create an underclass of refugees who

subsequently experience significant direct and indirect discrimination” (Bensemen, p.94). Most learning for pre- literate learners is extremely slow and as the learner’s needs are complex, a recognition of their need for specialist resources and teaching approaches is needed. Bensemen also argues that resettlement issues cannot be separated from language development and therefore learning has to encompass not just the ability to read, write and speak English but also emotional and social literacies. The report goes on to note how that Sweden hosts a program for traumatised refugees which has been highly successful as it supports learners who may have dropped out of traditional ESOL provision but who were targeted for support in integrating educational, physical and psychological needs. (Overland, 2014; Arkadi, 2017). The result of this is a greater chance of successfully learning a second language. Ethno- specific learning also results in high rates of student retention and learner motivation (Edder, 2006). Importantly it points out that progress is slow and variable and can “Take four years to get to a point where they are comfortable in ‘survival English’ and can leave the class to move on” (Benseman p.99). Piller (2016) reinforces the notion that it takes around 12 years to become fluent in one’s first language, the first six of which are dedicated to becoming fluent orally (Pompano, 2019). This differs greatly to attending ESOL classes where much emphasis is placed on grammar and is limited to just over an hour a week. Piller questions what is meant by fluency again noting the differences between the types of fluency, as being fluent when shopping is different to being academically fluent. This is an important point that has been recognised in New Zealand, Canada and Sweden and could be successfully applied in the United Kingdom where much time is spent on formal qualifications rather than concentrating on learner needs.

Central Government does little to monitor ESOL provision in terms of quality of teaching, student outcomes or funding and therefore, and importantly, the Government does not know the impact that ESOL is, or is not, having on refugee learners (Dennis, 2016; Hamilton and Hillier, 2009).This means that funding is based on variables that do not include the previous criteria which would show the need for more, rather than less, funding. Between 2008-2013 ESOL funding was cut by 39.5 % while Employability and Literacy provision saw cuts of only 5.56% over the same period (DEMOS, 2014). Jude Burke (2018) notes that the British government hopes to tackle integration by preparing a new ESOL strategy. The strategy calls for further funding to be made available especially for pre ESOL where poor literacy skills are evident. Positively it advocates for additional classes for those who were in the early stages of learning English but does not look at alternative forms of provision that may enhance existing types of provision.

Integration

The Department for Communities and Local Led Government has defined integration as "Creating the conditions for everyone to play a part in national and international life" (2012 p.1) which means that until these conditions are met refugees and immigrants are not able to integrate as they do not have the capability to navigate all aspects of British society independently (Friere ,1970). The British Council's (2016) report acknowledges the importance of language learning for refugees once they arrive in their new host community. It once again confirms the need for increased resilience and opportunities offered in education, social engagement and access to services without which life choices are increasingly limited. A key issue of concern is the willingness of humanitarian agencies, donors and governments to work with

refugees and host communities. The report further notes that different communities have different language needs:

> "Adrian Chadwick said 'The great risk is people who are refugees will never recover their education, a generation whose lack of access to opportunity will leave them vulnerable for the rest of their lives... ultimately, language is potential." (p.1).

This points to the value of attempting to redress the lack of education for refugees in order to enable their integration into England and contributing to the English economy. Amin Awad goes on to say that:

> "Language is an equaliser… for adults, language skills are fundamental in order to communicate to their host communities, while language instruction also provides a bridge between communities" (p.1).

Richard Thickpenny (2017) again reinforces the notion that despite the proven importance of acquiring English language abilities "the current system for refugees does not support integration" (p. 1).

Without language development there is little hope of the integration so desired for by refugees and host communities. Joel Bubbers, Director of the British Council in Syria reiterates the importance of language acquisition when he writes:

> "Ultimately language is about communication, and without communication there can be no understanding. By giving refugees and host communities the capacity to understand each other, we can go a long way to supporting cohesion now, and in the future" (p.2).

Mutual understanding is therefore vital in establishing and maintaining cohesion. Key findings include that all the languages learned by refugees matter; learning and mastering a new language provides opportunities; key language proficiency gives a voice to the refugees story; social cohesion is bolstered as is intercultural understanding; learning a language can be a supportive way of addressing the effects of loss, displacement and trauma.

Caroline Spelman's (2017) extract from the House of Commons reinforces and recognises that not being able to speak the language is isolating and without

English language skills, refugees find it hard to work, study or volunteer. Spelman further notes that without the target language of English it is impossible to “make friends with your neighbour” which again is vital to integration and improving English. The lack of skills, in Spelman’s opinion, has led to separation from those around them which has led to increases in hate crime and racist abuse. It is therefore vital to find a way to improve language skills.

In order to enhance integration guidance in 2012 advised local authorities to stop translating documents into foreign languages as a matter of course as it was costing local councils a high proportion of their budget (Carnet, Blanchard and Apollonio, 2014) . Eric Pickles, the then Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) governor supported this by noting that translating encouraged segregation by undermining community cohesion (Gov.UK, 2012). Pickles also felt that lacking English language skills was a barrier to people taking part in their local community, supporting their children and contributing to the wider economy as experienced by participants in the research. His view was that people should celebrate their commonalities, achieve their aspirations and be a part of British Society (ibid). Pickles believed that for successful refugee language learning effective provision was required in order to encourage learners to be active in the learning process. Whilst this could potentially be a positive step to forcing learners to saturate themselves in the English language (The Guardian, 2016). If, however, ESOL classes are not accessible refugees will support each other without accessing services they are entitled to. Lack of funding has further exacerbated the situation due to the lack of availability and accessibility of ESOL classes. (Refugee Action, 2019; Marsden, 2018).

Alternatively, Canada has tried to address ESOL through specifically designed provision intended to aid integration and settlement for the refugees. (Lai, 2017). This is government funded and includes programmes for both adults and children. This programme provides multicultural workers who are assigned to liaise with families in their native language and a priority is to form a sense of safety, preserve cultural identity and foster a good start to entering education. Rachel Obordo (2015) writes that “the whole idea of integration, mutual respect and understanding requires a language in which to communicate” (p.1) and in Sweden teachers have joined together to help refugees learn Swedish as they recognise that communication is vital to integration. The group is informal and has a large following who regularly attend hoping to make progress in basic survival Swedish. The teachers have a vision that will enable them “to communicate beyond their own group”(ibid p.2) and “to help them transition between their old life and their new life because that’s integral for them in order to feel that this really is their country too now” (p.2). These programmes seem to be successful as learners feel they are part of their learning and of the wider community (Lai, 2017).

ESOL Policies/ Strategies

Hamilton and Hillier’s (2009) work article considers factors that have influenced ESOL in the preceding 40 years. The chronology discusses the period following the Immigration Act (CIS, 1995) when local authorities accepted immigrants from the commonwealth. ESOL was staffed by volunteers provided by a variety of sources such as community funding or the European Union. They note that there has been a variety of influences on ESOL provision such as the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, although they note that ESOL was not included in the 1975 *Right to*

Read (University of Lancaster) literacy campaign but by 1984 the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit's remit was extended to include ESOL. Despite few changes taking place recommendations were made pointing out the need for improvements.

The main department with responsibility for ESOL in England is the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) with funding administered through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). In 2014 BIS stated that funding had declined from £210 million to £130 million (Mayor of London, 2012). This followed the streamlining of funding brought in by the Labour Government which was continued by the coalition in 2010. This was in line with net migration and allowed only for full funding to those refugees claiming active benefits (Dennis, 2016). David Foster and Paul Bolton, (2018) reinforce the need for ESOL classes in their Briefing Paper, whilst also acknowledging that as ESOL is demand led there are no future budgets set indicating levels of funding (Refugee Action, 2019; Higton, 2019). This means that despite long waiting lists and strict funding criteria people are unable to access provision with any certainty. Foster and Bolton's (2018) paper indicates that the government acknowledges that, despite the lack of funding, ESOL is important and sets out a list of proposals including;

- A new strategy for English language in England
- A new community based English language programme
- Working with local authorities to improve English language provision
- An England wide scheme of community conversation clubs

The all-party parliamentary group (APPG) recommends increases in funding which would allow refugees who "are desperate to learn English" (ibid p.2) to do so. This is complicated as whilst the Government funds classes for those in receipt of benefit for those not covered it can cost £700 per course. This means that women not in receipt

of benefits are unable to pay for classes and are unable to benefit from the support offered. This increases isolation and women can become doubly disadvantaged. This is a confusing message from the Government who want all “communities and cultures to be part of one society” (ibid p.3).

Importantly, there is a lack of funding available for those who have gained employment but who also have ESOL needs (Lucid 2018; Bajwa 2015). It can also lead to Health and Safety issues as documentation is not always translated and translators are expensive and not always available. In 2016 10 million pounds was promised to boost the funding for those under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to provide English classes (GOV.UK, 2015; Refugee Council, 2019). This scheme was expected to take in 20,000 refugees from Syria but was later expanded to encompass those who had fled the war in Syria but did not have Syrian nationality. Boosting the funding only allowed for a further 12 hours a week in traditional language classes rather than promoting and extending alternative forms of learning. Classes are timetabled at a time that fits with the college rather than with the learners, so they are not always successfully attended by parents, especially mothers. Alternatively, in some area’s classes are also frequently oversubscribed which means that individual support is not always available (NATECLA, 2017).
The Language Company (2018) note that there is a lack of an overall UK policy on languages. whilst the Scottish government is committed to language learning adopting a policy similar to the EU policy of Mother Tongue (mothertongue.com, 2019). Mother tongue promotes an aspiration for every EU citizen to learn and master two other languages apart from their native language. ‘This is Wales’ (GOV.WALES 2019) has a commitment to teaching English and Welsh equally and Northern Ireland did have a language strategy in 2012, Languages for the Future

which focussed on the need to improve the uptake of languages in wider society, however this has not been implemented (education-ni.gov.uk 2019). Julia Belgutay (2019) comments further on the lack of English policy reflecting on the government's plans to publish an ESOL strategy by the autumn of 2019 however this has not yet happened as of February 2020. Belgutay reports that the government plans a wide engagement strategy in order to shape the strategy and ultimately achieve a vision of an integrated community. There is also a focus on developing resources for learners by working with the existing network of ESOL providers investing in "developing resources for pre-entry level English language training, with a particular focus on the needs of refugee learners" (p.2).

Laura Dennis notes (2016) that it was only in 2001 that ESOL was benchmarked against national standards thus forcing ESOL to become less informal. In support of this she notes that:

> "there is very little systematic monitoring at central government level of ESOL provision, funding teaching quality or student outcomes across different government programmes. This is the same for local government. This effectively means that the government does not know the impact, or the value for money, of its budget spend on ESOL" (p.4).

This may have led in part to the disjointed nature of provision and underfunding. The Casey report (Gov.co.uk 2016) clearly emphasises the necessity of speaking English. Evidence is produced to highlight the negative impact that lack of English has in people's lives. Crucially it focuses on the emphasis placed on the language of employability whilst there is very little funding for those newly arrived, or at pre entry level which is the level of many Syrian refugees. Recommendations include promotion of language skills and improvement of language provision. This chimes with the ESOL community who have been stating these sentiments for a considerable amount of time.

Refugee experiences

Refugees face many challenges as discussed previously, including anxiety, trauma, displacement, lack of literacy skills and shock or PTSD (Refugee Action, 2016). Refugees are not traditional ESOL students as they may have had interrupted education which means that learning a second language could be increasingly difficult (UNHCR, 2013). Refugees may have little education in their first language meaning they do not have a tradition of literacy, rather one of oracy, which also makes learning a second language difficult (Refugee, Action 2016; Pompano, 2019). Expectations are also compromised in many cases with women leaving education early to marry and bring up families whilst men go to work and support the family. In cases such as this, women are less likely to be educated in their first language and therefore find second language acquisition even more problematic, in some cases being denied their rights as British citizens (Casey, 2016). Kleinmann (2012) suggests that the refugee learner needs support in order to avoid the "pattern of avoidance of, and isolation from, the target culture" (p.217) and ascertains that refugees need a supportive network who can "alleviate various stresses and facilitate socio cultural adjustment, feeding the refugees acquisition potential outside the classroom addressing the needs of refugees in survival, prevocational and occupational areas." (Kleinmann, p.217). Timm (2016) also contemplates refugee students noting that the Syrian crisis has led to new students, with unique needs, requiring language classes. As Timm remarks "this situation does not address the student's unique needs and rather focusses on an assimilation model which can prove to be damaging (p.33). This is very evident from comments by refugee learners who feel the curriculum is being imposed on them rather than their needs being listened to and co planning occurring. Timm also proposes changes to the

system including courses for teachers based on the needs of the refugees rather than the curriculum. Kristina Robertson's (2008) article offers a sympathetic discourse around refugees and their experiences in the ELL classroom which supports changes to the system. One of the main points she makes is that it is important to learn as much about the student and their country of origin as possible so that students can be helped to adjust while they are learning. Again, this is not always possible due to funding restrictions, time and class size yet a vital part of teaching a class of refugee students is to understand learners' culture and needs in their new home.

Ingrid Piller (2016) continues the exploration as to why it is so hard for refugees to learn a new language when they arrive in their new home. It is assumed that this is because they are "too lazy, too obstinate or too antagonistic to their new country" (p.2) when in reality this does not take into account that language learning takes a considerable time. There are multiple factors involved, many of which are out of the control of the learners for example, previous education, age, access to language opportunities and support at home.

De Capua, and Marshall (2015) continue this exploration when they consider why students with limited or interrupted education are likely to do badly or to drop out of ESOL classes. Many lack educational experiences in their home country and therefore lack the "the expectations, discourse styles, and modes of school-based ways of thinking and learning in … educational institutions" (p.357). Returning to the classroom as an adult when education has previously ceased at around age 14, needs culturally responsive teaching rather than as a cultural deficit which seems to be the norm. English is very different to Arabic or Kurdish which are the languages

frequently spoken by Syrian refugees and therefore it can be a slow and repetitive process.

This is a common thread as it continues the notion that the more education a learner has in one's first language the easier it is for refugees to learn in a second language and therefore De Capua and Marshall make the plea for skills to be gained in the first language before they are transferred to a second language. However, this would be extremely time consuming and expensive and therefore unlikely to happen. Refugees are differentiated from immigrants in that there is no choice in settling in a new country, they are:

> "Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion and nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR, 2010, P.14).

Refugees have arrived in England after a long journey, multiple refugee camps and trauma. Warner, (2017) notes that refugees from Syria form the world's largest refugee population fleeing to surrounding countries such as Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, then moved to European resettlement by the Refugee Councils. The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights (UNHCR, 2009) includes the right to education for refugees (ibid) however, this does not specify what type of education refugees receive or for how long. Best practice would indicate that education is an essential part of support for refugees (Ficarra, 2017; McCall and Vang, 2012; O'Rourke, 2014; Warner, 2017) including the ability to live and work in the host country whilst maintaining the cultural identity (McCall and Vang, 2012). Nicole Nichter (2018) describes a project centred around the needs of refugees, specifically adult refugees as she notes that whilst children deal more effectively with traumatic

events, adults deal with trauma in a different and often more damaging manner. (Guerrero and Tinkler, 2010 and Randall and Lutz, 1991). Nichter reinforces this noting that “adults are developmentally able to register what certain traumatic acts mean and/or are a result of in regard to political governance, war, torture, trafficking, separation and death.” (2018 p.1). Due to the negative influence of discrimination, acculturation, and socioeconomic stressors, the affective filter is damaged as focus is diminished and learning halted. Nichter discusses trauma, again noting it can be assumed that refugees have “encountered persecution of race, religion, political opinion or preference to a social group that has led them to such extreme fear that they must flee their country” (p.2). This can lead to PTSD as discussed in Coon (2005) and Westermeyer and Ueker, (1997). This leads to repressed emotions such as annoyance, irritation, uncontrollable temper outbursts, urges to harm /injure others, urges to break things, getting into arguments, shouting and throwing things (ibid p.5).

Adults are frequently reluctant to move out of their new surroundings and as children start to attend school and gain language skills parents can experience frustration, anger, depression or anxiety over the loss of their language and tradition. It also leads to children feeling distressed when they take on responsibility for translating, frequently when they do not understand, or can be traumatised by what they are translating (Casey, 2016; Higton et Al, 2019; LGBT, 2019). Jeremy Lefroy, M.P, (2017) reinforces this noting that children speak excellent English whereas the parents find English extremely difficult to master even when they have access to classes. Jim Cunningham, M.P, reiterates this and notes that children who are frequently used as interpreters are often very young and do not understand what they are being told. Caroline Spelman (2016) also notes parents using children as

interpreters of unsuitable and inappropriate information. This can lead to a correlation between poor health and low literacy skills due in part to children translating for parents who are unable to articulate ailments to the doctor themselves. This is because children frequently make inaccurate translations and therefore incorrect diagnoses are made when adult translators are not present (Narchal, 2018; The Children's Society, 2019; Apolitical, 2020).

Culture shock also prohibits learning as it:

> "leads to feelings of helplessness, a longing for persons of common nationality, homesickness, anger irritability, frustration, depression, loss of appetite, lack of sleep, refusal to learn majority language and hyper vigilance over minor discomfort" (Best Practice for Adult Refugees in the ESL classroom, 2019, p.7).

Discrimination is also noted as a factor affecting education as it leads to:

> "lower standards of self-image, self -perceived scholastic competence and less motivation to learn, it also leads to depression, further repression of negative emotions and thoughts, inability to cope, and economic difficulties" (Schunk, 2012, p.8).

This then leads to lack of progress when learning a foreign language as the refugees are unable to focus on their learning. The UNHCR and the Refugee Act of 1990 note that:

> "refugees need help to acculturate and that importantly communication, either verbally or written, alleviates some of the acculturative stresses and helps to organize thoughts and past and present traumas and negative thoughts as well as empowers people" (p.11).

In support of this idea Maslow (1970) describes five components of life that are essential for all people and without these learning is dramatically slowed or does not occur (Coon, 2005). This five-tier model of human needs is frequently depicted as a pyramid. The lower four levels of the pyramid represent deficiency needs and the top one represents growth. In order to achieve growth lower-level deficit needs must be met. The deficit needs are psychological, safety, love and esteem with the growth

need being actualisation. (Mcleod, 2018). The implication of this is that when ESOL classes are being planned these factors need to be taken into account in order for progress to be made. Kleinmann suggests that the refugee learner needs support in order to avoid the “pattern of avoidance of, and isolation from, the target culture”. Importantly he closes with the assortation that the refugees need a supportive network who can “alleviate various stresses and facilitate socio cultural adjustment, feeding the refugees acquisition potential outside the classroom addressing the needs of refugees in survival, prevocational and occupational areas.” (Kleinmann, p.217)

Taylor’s (2017) research begins with an anecdote of a refugee unable to access therapy because of the language barrier, and yet, could not find an interpreter which in turn meant he could not access education to improve his English. She questions what exactly is needed to help students in this position. She notes that little progress can be made as he is unable to access learning. Equally frustrating for students is the lack of understanding of the cultures and countries that the students have come from and therefore appropriate support is not put in place. Taylor points out that immigration can be a long process for students who have spent extended amounts of time in refugee camps where no English was spoken. Tavares, and Slotin, (2012) look at the common challenges experienced by refugees during the resettlement process. Refugees mainly experience war and multiple displacement leading to PTSD and chronic stress. This can lead to poor education experiences, poor academic progress and fractured relationships. Whilst in the camps refugees will only have had access to minimal services and support this ultimately leads to dislocation and a lack of integration on moving to their now home country. Refugees also have to deal with the feelings of grief for those they have lost

and the worry about those they have left behind, either in camps, or, in the country they are fleeing from. This affects the learning process once resettled in the UK. Clark Kasimu, (2017) also looks at issues around working with refugee students, noting the additional needs of the students. Importantly he notes that refugees are not purely ESOL learners rather their needs extend further than language learning. Refugees therefore enter the country with little preparation or basic literacy skills. Learners then start to undertake some form of English classes where frequently the teachers are not experienced in supporting those with very poor levels of English and high levels of trauma which can involve:

> "delusions of persecution, disturbing dreams, poor sleep, states of confusion, somatic complaints, feelings of insecurity, isolation, resentment, guilt, inadequacy, bereavement, tension, fatigue, restlessness and detachment" (Kleinmann, 1984 p.211).

Importantly he also reports that even after a period of resettlement has passed the trauma does not ease and trauma affects the ability to learn. Kleinmann reflects on Dohrenwend who uses a model of stress, based on a case of forced relation which is:

> "affected by external and internal factors [including] objective conditions of one's life situation based in part by comparing old and new life conditions. Internal factors include subjective aspiration which have been internalized and which affect the choice of life goals" (ibid p.211).

If refugees have otherwise positive life experiences, they should experience less overall stress whereas refugees who have negative evaluations of life circumstances experience more stress.

Positive and negative experiences can continue once refugees arrive in refugee camps. O 'Rourke (2014) discusses the obligations of countries surrounding Syria, which take in thousands of refugees. The refugee camps put a strain on

educational systems, refugees lack documentation and lack of support in first language. Again, this could lead to a generation with interrupted education and older refugees falling behind their children in attaining ESOL skills. It also highlights the needs of the refugees before they enter the United Kingdom and how this impacts on learning once they arrive. Whilst there are international agreements concerning the right to education these are frequently aspirational and not enforceable.
Wahby et al (2014) focus on education in Jordan, Lebanon, Northern Iraq and Turkey as this again impacts on refugees learning once they are resettled in the United Kingdom. Recommendations include providing more funding for tutors, designing flexible training programmes for learners, offering education and training to all ages, improving teaching and learning quality, training tutors to teach Syrian refugees and to undertake further research on providing structured and non-formal education programmes whilst in the camps. This would positively impact on the refugees on their arrival in England and support their parents in ESOL classes McIntyre (2019).

Informal/formal/ experiential, naturalistic learning

Informal and community learning enable refugees to learn in an embedded and experiential learning. Laura Sharp, (2012 p.1) defines stealth learning as “when an instructor uses clever, disguised ways to introduce learning objectives through non-traditional tools, such as games, to encourage students to have fun and learn.” This also applies to learning a language, or indeed any task. It presents learning in a way that takes the pressure from the student whose focus is on the game or task so that any learning is an unexpected bonus, (Crawford, 1994). If we replace games with something enjoyable such as gardening and cooking new information can be

presented to learners throughout the session with students unaware that they are learning language. It enhances, or even in some cases, replaces the traditional, formal learning that is provided by many authorities. It can also bring together new communities of people and create support networks. It provides an opportunity for Community groups and volunteers to learn about the refugee's original community and so aid integration into the new community (Majhanovich, 2017). Importantly it allows refugees to gain insight into their new community, traditions, expectations and idiosyncrasies. Learning English can allow learners to navigate the culture and to make beneficial decisions for their family. This should empower the refugees and not place them as victims (ibid). Ledoux (1998) notes that "in order to create a memory, an individual needs to have an emotional involvement to the learning, which causes a chemical reaction in the brain" (p.44). Therefore, if an individual is engaged in a task that encourages emotional engagement more learning will occur. According to Sharp, games, or any enjoyable task such as gardening, cooking etc, can enable an individual to learn various skills including:

> "language development, spelling, vocabulary, counting, money management, history, social studies, following rules, problem solving, waiting turns, communication skills and exhibiting appropriate behaviours" (p.45).

This allows many situations to allow for the creation of naturalistic learning opportunities enabling students to benefit from learning in a less pressured manner. This resembles the Montessori method (1967) where independence is prioritised and recognises that learners are capable of initiating learning in a supported and well prepared environment. This is because learners are naturally inquisitive and want to learn. Grades and tests are discouraged which is in opposition to the traditional formal curriculum. Learners choose activities which they carry out in two- or three-hour blocks and use a discovery model rather than by direct instruction. Although

Montessori created her method for children, this method applied to adults with adult tasks achieves similar results.

Non formal learning is learning that takes place outside the formal learning environment but still within an organisational framework. It does not necessarily follow a curriculum, syllabus, or assessment. Informal learning is that which takes place when an activity is undertaken with no learning purpose in mind. It states that:

> "adult migrants engage in non- formal language learning when they participate in organised activities that combine learning and use of their target language with the acquisition of a particular skill or complex of knowledge" (Council of Europe, 2015 p1).

The report continues to note that children learn as an:

> "incidental result of their participation in family life and …similarly adults are said to learn a second language 'naturalistically' when they do so by living with speakers of the language and interacting with them on a daily basis. Their emerging communicative repertoire is shaped not by a conscious learning agenda but by their attempts to satisfy their social and material needs." (ibid).

This is important as it highlights the usefulness of interaction and practice on a daily basis for adults as well as children. Two considerations are presented, firstly how language course providers can ensure that refugees and other language learners are able to access language opportunities outside of the classroom, and if a learner has gained language skills naturalistically, might there be a way to recognise this without having to take a test.

O Erden (2016) promotes the creation of social activities that encompass informal language learning as the means of promoting a sound basis which may lead to formal learning at a later stage. Infed, (2019) notes that informal learning is "Fundamental, necessary and valuable in its own right" (2016, p.2) and "more learning needs to be done at home, in offices and kitchens, in the contexts where knowledge is deployed to solve problems and to add value to people's lives" (2016, p.2). He also comments that "too much schooling kills off the desire to learn" (2016,

p.2). This chimes with refugees who frequently become disillusioned with traditional classes and stop attending them (Brooks, 2020).

Coffield (2016) points out that while "lifelong and informal learning has much been discussed the focus remains on formal provisions accountability and qualifications." (p.2). If learners are to make progress it seems that more focus needs to be on lifelong and informal learning at a pre- entry stage, that at present lacks credibility. Veronica McGivney (1999) defines informal learning as "learning that takes place outside a dedicated learning environment" whilst Margaret Dale and John Bell define it as " learning which takes place in the work context, relates to an individual's performance of their job and which is not formally organised into a programme or curriculum." (ibid p.5). Coombs and Ahmed (1989) alternatively define it as being:

> "the lifelong process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills and attitudes and insights from daily experience and exposure to the environment -at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitude of families and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally informal education is unorganised, unsystematic and unintentional at times." (p.6),

They argue that learning occurs in many contexts and to limit the definition of learning to that of curriculum in educational institutions ignores valuable learning experiences that occur incidentally rather than formally. Eraut makes the point that the full range of learning processes or modes need to be explored. He goes on to note that between implicit and deliberative learning falls reactive learning where "learning takes place spontaneously and in response to recent, current or imminent situations" (p.11). This resonates with Donald Schon's knowledge in use, reflection on action and reflection in action (Schon, 1991). A further discussion around tacit learning is important, which Cooms and Ahmed define as:

> “knowledge acquired by implicit learning of which the knower is unaware, knowledge constructed from aggregation of episodes in long term memory, knowledge embedded in taken for granted activities, perceptions and norms” (Cooms and Ahmed, p.13).

Situated learning has four propositions that are common to the learning, these are ;

> “high level or expert knowledge and skills that can be gained from everyday experiences at work, and in the community or family, domain specific knowledge is necessary for the development of expertise, learning is a social process, knowledge is embedded in practice and transformed through goal directed behaviour” (ibid, p.17).

Informal learning is therefore linked with situational learning as a valuable mode of learning. Learners are not always aware of which skill they want to acquire but they have commitment to the process. Therefore, learners who work to a curriculum are formal and those whose primary aim is separate to the learning acquired are informal. This also applies to experiential, naturalistic learning where the prime focus may be some form of vocational task but where valuable progress can be made. The study concludes with the assertion that there are four areas that need to be explored further, these are the exploration of tacit knowledge, the support of self-education, the strengthening of associational life and the development of informal education. Furthermore, informal learning has an important place alongside formal education especially developing local forms of education and learning.

Formal learning typically offers intensive language classes before placing refugees into mainstream classes. (Smith, 2008). Unfortunately, restrictions around funding means that students frequently are unable to access classes and do not receive support to make progress possible. It specifically considers why teachers do what they do, how they do it and how effective it is, which, in the case of very basic ESOL needs to be more reactive to the specific circumstances (Bensemen, 2014). This thesis looks at the experiences of refugees who have spent time in transit

camps and at the learning needs and issues of adult learners and how their prior experiences and current contexts affect their educational participation and learning. It considers the work of Friere (1968) and Knowles (1968) and contemplates teaching based practises and research findings. The thesis acknowledges that while there is a considerable amount of general literature about refugees and particularly the education of children, there is very little empirical research on adult refugees as learners or how to teach them.

The Council of Europe's (2015) report states that educational systems are in place to promote formal learning, which is measured through tests and assignments, contrary to the previously mentioned Montessori method. Thickpenny (2017) further notes that a one size fits all method is employed in formal education which is either too fast or too slow necessitating tailored and intensive courses focussing on the needs of refugees themselves. Further barriers are entry to specific courses where access frequently involves testing which leaves the learners "feeling overwhelmed- setting people up to fail they even begin" (p.2). This can support the view of some that refugees are of low intelligence despite potentially high levels of education in their country of origin. Thickpenny advocates for change, starting with challenging the assumption that funding is needed to facilitate effective learning, suggesting instead that learners can undertake independent learning such as through community networks and English language apps. He also supports the notion that the fixed level language skills, inflexible curriculum and multiple assessments are for the college/education provider not the needs of the refugees. He wants learners to complete competency-based tasks which can be put into place in the real world, rather than just memorising and reciting language. He finishes by stating:

"the focus needs to be on a sustained approach which facilitates learning within a personal development framework and allows learners to build on their

abilities with individual flexibility… Before such a change can happen a cohesive effort across sectors must be made to tackle the structures that create and maintain inequality, and to rethink perceptions of refugees" (p.2).

Refugees uphold this as they frequently state that this does not happen in formal classes where they feel their needs are not met.

Curriculum Design and Development

Teachers are not prepared for teaching refugee students (Shreve, 2005). Instead, ESOL teachers are prepared to teach traditional ESOL students but are not equipped to deal with accompanying issues such as trauma, interrupted education and displacement accompanying refugees. Refugee learners have to learn the language, culture, traditions, coping skills and deal with issues such as PTSD at the same time as learning a language (Stone, 2005; Finn, 2010). Refugees also have their own traditions and culture which needs to be respected whilst British Values and cultural differences are promoted. Refugee learners need a caring environment in which they feel safe and secure however, budget changes and restrictions do not always make this possible. Learners also need to form trusting professional relationships with their tutors so that boundaries can be set (Moloney, 2018). Due, Riggs, and Augostinos (2016) investigate a sociocultural learning approach which acknowledges that while an establishment approach is needed to support students, this involves both social and emotional support. Challenges are found to be multiple for teachers and a diverse setting can make student distress worse

Adrienne Herell, and Michael Jordan., (2016) present fifty strategies that have been tested on learners in diverse circumstances. These are for different grade levels and cover different strategies in language and literacy development. There is much emphasis placed on resources for teachers with little reflection on the impact

of these strategies on the learners. This means that there is no difference between these sessions and the curriculum that is already in use. They do however note that:

> "Krashen states that language acquisition is a natural thing…it is gradual based on receiving and understanding messages, building a listening (receptive) vocabulary, and slowly attempting verbal production of the language in a highly supportive, non-stressful situation" (p.1).

This upholds the previously discussed view that language learning takes a long time and is in opposition to many ESOL classes where language acquisition is forced within a limited time frame of guided learning hours. There are currently six formal levels of ESOL implemented in UK provision, these are:

- Pre- entry which is a complete beginner and therefore applicable to most of the Syrian refugees.
- Entry 1 -Beginner to elementary
- Entry 2- Elementary to pre-intermediate
- Entry 3- Pre-intermediate to intermediate
- Level 1 – intermediate to upper intermediate
- Level 2 Upper intermediate to advance

There is also speaking and listening which is designed to provide a very basic level of English, reading, writing and grammatical structures. (DfES, 2001). All are based on an examination system and rely on formal classroom teaching.

Ogilvie and Fuller (2016) contemplate how Restorative Justice Pedagogy (RJP) can address barriers of trauma and displacement in the ESOL classroom as RJP encourages learners to help teachers form caring relationships with learners and to see them as more than numbers in a classroom. This can be achieved with a speaking stick, by sharing a meal together or by opening conversation without correcting grammar in order to get to know learners. Sharing can be useful however,

many students find it traumatic as they come from multiple, diverse backgrounds where they have very different experiences. As Due, Riggs and Augostinos (2016) note, this is a challenge in the ESOL classroom where numbers are frequently high and multiple ethnicities and languages co-exist together. Culturally responsive teaching has “five key components which are cultural competence, culturally relevant curriculum, supportive learning community, cultural congruity, and effective instruction” (P.38). It calls for teachers to combine individual and group responsibility, combine oral and written tasks and in this way barriers to learning may be combatted. Spiegel and Sunderland (1999) consider the importance of oral modelling/presentation and practise as paramount to the practice of literary activities. They focus on the importance of oral practice prior to any other activity which is in contrast to many sessions where oral presentation is of little importance. This in turn links with how children learn, by listening to and then mimicking their parents before formal structures are put in place. This also chimes with learners who come from a primarily oral tradition (Pompano, 2019).

Sache Crouch, (2016) utilises a case study of a former refugee to highlight five of the best ways to support ELL learners. She does this from the standpoint of having worked in the arena of ELL teaching for some years. Her ideas are straightforward and direct, such as being aware of the learner’s fluency in their native language. This is because having developed literacy skills in the first language indicates better chances of developing second language skills as research indicates that literacy skills transfer from one language to the other. Piller (2016) also notes that this is potentially why there are so many refugees who lack language skills as they are from areas where proficient language skills are not always achieved. Refugees have however developed survival and decision-making skills which, with the correct

support can aid language development. Crouch also observes a highly important point which is that language learning takes time. As previously discussed, language learning is frequently condensed into minimum amounts of guided learning hours which are not sufficient for the stages of language learning to take place. Krashen allows for five stages of learning to take place and just two of these, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) which is the language needed to interact socially and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills (CALPS), takes one to two years and five to seven years to develop (Cummins, 1984). This is clearly far longer than allowed for by guided learning hours which again comes down to funding. Refugees need to be taught about the culture of their new home as these may be very different to their own culture. This can include laws, or food and how we eat, as this can vary greatly from their home country. Refugees may have lived through times of great trauma and by teaching cultural norms students begin to feel empowered and more ready to settle and learn (Mercer, 2018). Tutors also need to support resettlement agencies in empowering refugees to become self -sufficient and to be able to navigate day to day concerns such as employment, transportation, schools, medical/health and English Language (Kleinmann, 1984). Kleinmann divides the difficulties refugees have into 3 main areas:

1. Learners are not able to take advantage of traditional formal language learning environments
2. Learners do not involve themselves in active engagement with the target language
3. The learners avoid contact with native speakers in day to day situations therefore avoiding active engagement with native speakers.

Kleinmann discusses how social and linguistic needs can be serviced at the same time noting that the majority of the research available concentrates on the more educated ESL students whilst refugees are mostly ignored. Kleinmann notes that adult language learners who are refugees “present an exception to accepted theory and technique” (1984, p. 213) as they have multiple barriers to overcome. This is important because it reinforces why formal ESOL may be failing and the curriculum model needs to be adapted to take this into account. He further notes that to understand problems around language learning one needs to consider the Krashen Monitor language model (Schutz, 2018). He notes that acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language or natural communication in which speakers are concerned, not with the form of their utterances but, with the messages they are conveying and understanding. This presents us with the assertion that exposure to English without active involvement will not facilitate language learning. Active learners “formulate and test hypotheses about the target language, which contribute to their acquired second language competence” (Kleinmann, p.214). Lack of active engagement in formal language learning settings slows progress, furthermore learners with limited education in their first language lack skills necessary to acquire a second language.

Conclusion

Syrian refugee education is difficult and multifaceted. The United Kingdom has the potential to deliver exceptional ESOL education however it does not always do this. Countries such as Sweden, Canada and New Zealand (Lai, 2017; Obordo, 2015) have highly successful refugee learning programmes. Syrian refugees have come through trauma, sometimes multiple, after fleeing their country after loss. They have

been situated in refugee camps where they have had to work to eat and where education is limited. Informal organisations provide support for their families on entry into England. Syrian families have one year of intensive support from the Refugee Council when they arrive in England. This does not include language support as this is provided in certain circumstances by local colleges. Funding for this has been cut over recent years despite growth of the refugee community. This can take the form of intensive support however this is not always the case. Research (Refugee Action, 2019; Spelman, 2017; McCallum, 2018; Halima Ali, 2016; British Council, 2016, Piller, 2018) suggests that changes need to be made to improve the effectiveness of language support offered as similar issues exist now as did in the 1980s. Learners need extended guided learning hours to be provided but there also seems to be a need for an earlier course that does not follow a formal curriculum but takes into account learners specific needs in small or one to one sessions. Informal learning has a part to play in this as community organisations can provide very basic sessions which encourage emergency language support or act as a supplement to formal sessions. Demand continues to increase yet similar issues to those identified in 1984 still exist and inhibit successful learning and integration. Students who are refugees suffer from trauma resulting from the circumstances of their leaving the country of origin. Educational establishments need to find new ways of supporting these students to access education that engages them rather than leaving them little option than to access existing education where little progress is made.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology used to research informal and naturalistic ESOL teaching in the context of Syrian refugees in the North of England.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

+The aim of this research is to investigate informal and experiential learning for Syrian refugees in the North of England.

This is a study of Syrian refugees' lived experiences of learning' on programmes designed to support the development of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). It is therefore a small-scale context-based study. It rejects Platonic ontological and epistemological positions which advocate the pursuit of the invariable objectivity which rely upon the methods of natural science and deductive logic often presented in quantitative measures including numbers and 'hard' data, in favour of an Aristotelian world view which begins with human experience in context, Alexander (2020). As discussed in previous chapters, this thesis explores the educational value of ESOL provision specifically in relation to Syrian refugees who have entered the country within the last three years under the Syrian Resettlement Programme in the north of England (Refugee Council, 2020). ESOL classes are provided for refugees by colleges, school sixth forms, Job Centre Plus and various organisations from the Third Sector such as charities and voluntary organisations (Foster and Bolton, 2018). However, as previously discussed research suggests that this provision can be inconsistent in gaining timely progress in language development (Schellekens, 2019). Traditional ESOL classes are designed for a very different type of learner to refugees. In my experience of working with ESOL students and refugees, it has become clear to me that refugee learners make more timely progress when engaged

in practical tasks where naturalistic and experiential learning occurs. The aim of my research includes evaluating Syrian refugees' experiences of informal and experiential language learning through personal accounts of their experiences (Connelly and Clandenin, 1999) and evaluating the value of naturalistic learning.

Competing Paradigms in Educational Research

According to Coe et al (2017), paradigms are beliefs, ideas, values and habits that inform our thinking regarding how we view the world. Kuhn (1972) refers to the term paradigm (Kuhn, 1972) to describe an overarching theoretical research framework. Bodgen and Biklen (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2001, p. 2) define a paradigm as, "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research". An interpretivist paradigm including constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology is the stance taken as it allows for context, rich with experiences of the people involved in the research, rather than data. A constructivist ontological perspective regarding the form and nature of the social world promotes the view that reality is neither objective nor singular but that people actively construct their social world and that there can be multiple interpretations of an event shaped by the social perspective of the individual (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011).The interpretivist paradigm is sometimes called the anti-positivist paradigm as it was developed in response to the rise of the positivist paradigm (Mack,2018). The interpretivist paradigm was influenced by hermeneutics and phenology (Ernest, 2004). Hermeneutics is the study of context and meaning in predominately historical while and phenomenology recognises the "need to consider human beings, subjective interpretations, their perceptions of the world as a

starting point in understanding social phenomena" (Ernest, 1994, p. 25). Interpretivism points to research being done from the 'inside', through accounts of experience and observation of people. From this position, social phenomena including human experience cannot be directly or objectively observed from the outside. In the context of education, this position accepts that teachers and learners construct meaning together in the classroom. Cohen (2000, p.19) notes that the "researcher's role in the interpretivist paradigm is to understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants". In contrast, the positivist paradigm relies on data which would give results in purely statistical terms but does not allow for the complexity and richness of the context of, as in this case, the Syrian refugees who are the focus of the research. Knowledge and one's view of social reality in educational research are linked to the researcher's biases, intentions, goals and philosophical assumptions (Grix, 2004). Grix, unlike Crotty (2008), who argues that research can start from any point, argues that methodology, method or research questions, are best arrived at after first identifying the researcher's ontological assumptions:

> "setting out clearly the relationship between what the researcher thinks can be researched (the ontological position) linking it to what we can know about it (the epistemological position and how to go about it (the methodological approach), you can begin to comprehend the impact your ontological position can have on what and how you decide to study" (Grix 2004, p.68).

This means that in order to undertake research it is vital to understand the philosophical underpinnings that inform the choice of methodology, intentions, methods, and research questions. This, Grix contends, lead to clear and precise research questions and an unbiased evaluation of peer research.

This research is based on lived experience where it is assumed that reality is not objective or singular. If this is the case and reality is neither objective or singular,

then direct knowledge of it comes from accounts and observations of that particular world. This means that methods have to be based on accounts and observations in order to make sense of multiple realities.

Ontology

Simply defined, Ontology "considers what types of things there are in the world and what parts or substances the world can be divided into" (Mcqueen and Mcqueen, 2010, p.151) or to simplify this further, one's view of reality and being. Blaikie defines this as:

> "the study of claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what is looks like what units make it up and how these interact with each other" (Grix,2004, p.59).

This means that a study of ontology relates to what we mean when we say that something exists.

Epistemology refers to theories of knowledge and how we develop knowledge. Peter Scales uses the analogy of whether God exists to illustrate the difference between the two (Scales, 2013). He states that the question, "does God exist?" is a question of ontology and 'how do we know God exists" refers to epistemology.

Ontology seems to be relatively straightforward and reliable for scientific research as it focuses on research of things which exist independently whether or not they are being studied. Research in education differs as it focuses on people and all their variables and differing contexts. It looks at concepts and ideas which people, with all their unique starting points and experiences, create. This can be problematic as assumptions and generalisations can be unreliable because every single individual has varying experiences, beliefs and contexts which means that one view of the

world is not applicable to all. The Syrian refugees, who are the focus of this thesis, have a complex and diverse history of their own in their journey to the United Kingdom which can complicates their ability to learn in traditional ESOL classes. Traditional ESOL classes focus on results and examinations and follow set curricula. However, it is not always the best way for refugees to learn as they have a very particular set of circumstances to overcome before progress can be made (Summers, 2016).

There are two basic ontological positions which are objectivism and constructivism. Objectivism is the belief that certain things, especially moral truths, exist independently of human knowledge or perception of them. Alternatively, constructionism takes the stance that things and situations do not have independent meanings, rather their meanings are constructed by people and therefore, with all their individual biases (Bryman, 2018). Bryman (ibid p.19) notes that:

> "Constructionism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision. In recent years, the term has also come to include the notion that researchers own accounts of the social world are constructions. In other words, the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive. Knowledge is viewed as indeterminate"

In this way the interactions between learners or the 'actors' and the researchers create opportunities for knowledge to be constantly revised as a knowledge exchange takes place. This is particularly relevant in the setting with refugee learners where cultural norms differ, as I learn from them and they from me, what we know changes as does what we think we know. It also applies to teaching methods where what we know changes depending on the specific group, resources and evolving innovative teaching methods of the day. This should be both exciting and challenging for, with every new group of learners, different exchanges should inform

changing teaching methods and practices. Alternatively, if one were to accept a positivist view of ESOL and refugees, all experiences and narratives would be excluded in favour of hard data and statistics which would give factual data but not necessarily experiential details. Taking this view would also mean that the more rigid structure of the traditional ESOL class should work for every class and every learner as the universal truth would be that this is the teaching, both in content and style, that works in all cases.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to knowledge and leads the researcher to contemplating "how can what is assumed to exist be known?" (Waring, 2017, p.34). Thomas (2009:87) says:

> "if ontology is the study of what there is in the social world, epistemology is the study of knowledge of the world. How do we know about the world that we have defined ontologically?".

Scott and Usher (1999) site epistemology as being part of the Enlightenment's dismantling of tradition and experience as sources of knowledge. This leads to then considering how we can find out what we know, or what was considered valid.

Epistemological positions

There are two basic epistemological positions which are positivism and interpretivism. Auguste Comte a 19th century philosopher believed that the scientific, or positivist route should be applied to the social world, that social research should emulate scientific research "watching from the outside as disinterested observers, trying not to 'contaminate' our findings in anyway" (Thomas, 2009, p.74-5). There is

also little room for interpretation, rather to develop a hypothesis based on the conclusions of controlled and replicable studies. Alternatively, interpretivism uses everyday life and experiences as starting points and subject matter, and how meaning for these experiences is constructed in everyday life. It takes into account multiplicity and complexity of everyday life (Scott and Usher, 1999). Mack (2018) notes that a limitation of interpretivist research is that scientific procedure for verification is abandoned and therefore the ability to generalise to other situations. I would argue against this as other teachers and findings in the literature have resonated with the findings of my research and therefore some generalities can be identified and looked at in similar groups. The generalisability of this study is limited by the characteristics of the study participants. These differences may limit the generalisability of the study to certain elements of the population.

In the context of Syrian refugees, people are not commodities in a control group as they are not identical, nor do they have identical experiences even though they share a culture and have had similar experiences when travelling to England. This means that each individual could be given the same phrase to learn in a second language, and, depending on their circumstances, because of different experiences, learn at different speeds. This indicates that studies could never be identical even within the same group. Generalised findings, however, can be applied to similar groups and the assumption that similar groups may have similar results could reasonably be assumed. As it is not possible to test the whole population, with every variable that could exist in order to gain an accurate understanding of the topic, in order to test the hypothesis a representative group is chosen to reflect the wider group and the generalisations arising from this. This allows research to go from specific observations to making inferences about broader trends and patterns

(Martyn Shuttleworth and Lyndsay Wilson, 2020). Winter (1999) argues for a validity model different to that of positivism, but which gives validity to the interpretivist research. This leads to using a different language which focuses on trustworthiness and authenticity.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism allows for what the positivist proponents would reject; that the world changes constantly and that meanings change and shift constantly. Meanings are constructed, there is not one single, universal truth to be found and meanings are not objective. Interpretivism is interested in people, how they construct their world, how they form ideas about the world, and in doing so look at the way we view the world and how our biases may affect the conclusions we come to about others. Context, and how we understand this, is the key to forming understanding about people. If again we consider the refugees, their individual experiences in Syria are totally different despite having a common culture and one which is totally different to that which exists on the West (Robila, 2018). This will obviously affect the way that the refugees learn as they have different traditions and pedagogy to the West. We need to look deeply into the research that is being undertaken and talk to people in order to develop meaning. We also need to decide on what research methods to use in order to collect data on experience and meaning whilst staying true to the interpretivist approach. Research methods are discussed later in the chapter.

The basis for my research is that learners do not seem to be making the progress expected of them when they engage in traditional ESOL classes and when these classes are combined, or replaced, with other activities timelier progress seems to be made. Therefore, quantitative data can provide a useful starting point for this as it

tells us in numerical terms how many people in England are not able to speak English, the most current data states that 864,000 people do not speak English well and 38,000 cannot speak it at all (Gov.uk, 2019; Schellekens, 2019). Further data is available on how many are attaining each level, of which there are six in formal ESOL levels, retention rates, age, class size and gender. The data provides the quantities, but this does not explain why the system is failing certain groups who are struggling to make effective progress. Scientific and data driven methods of research do not capture the totality of what it means to be human and do not take account of the importance of interpreting and understanding human experience through the adoption of a phenomenological approach. The groups of refugees, and the ones I teach, are ones who have most recently entered the country and need swift and effective ESOL interventions in order to survive on a day-to-day basis. Many of the reports noted earlier in the Literature Review such as Dennis, (2016) and ETF (2019) cite lack of ESOL classes, poor teaching and rigidity as being problematic for refugees, in need of very basic ESOL who cannot access any suitable provision for their individual needs (Refugee Action, 2019; EIN, 2017; Halima Ali, 2016; George Marsden, 2018; Jane Wharkin, 2019). The literature review focuses predominantly on qualitative research and evaluates aspects that are context and experiential based and not quantifiable in numerical terms.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research:

> "is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2).

This is important as educational research frequently asks how the subjective perception of single observers can yield knowledge that is reliable given the reliance on objectivity and generalisability of the positivist approach to social science. Yet, using natural settings allows researchers to gain insights into how learners are learning rather than how curriculum providers assume they learn as a homogenised group. Rather than designing a curriculum and imposing it 'on' refugee learners, a less structured or formal learning setting allows for the researcher to observe people in a more natural environment which in turn allows for the researcher to understand more fully the reality of groups individuals and cultures to better identify their needs. Whilst it is necessary to have a formal curriculum for learners who are at the stage where they need to gain a qualification for career purposes, learners who are newly arrived in the country need a very different approach as they need survival or emergency English, that is English to allow them to achieve day to day tasks (Summers, 2016). A qualitative approach seeks to explain how and why a behaviour operates as it does in a specific context and uses methods such as a semi structured interviews to find out how someone has experienced learning in a particular way. This method allows refugees to talk in some depth using their own words developing narratives or case studies. This in turn allows me, as the researcher, to develop a sense of the person's perspective on the situation and to use the data to ascertain whether there are commonalities across the different refugee's experiences.
The goal of quantitative research is to test, refine or reject a working hypothesis. Qualitative observations may be used to gain an understanding of unique situations. Therefore, as the researcher my assumptions shape the direction of the study and thereby influence the results that can be obtained. Qualitative research collects non numerical data such as written descriptions, photographs, videos and sound

recordings. This is largely determined by the researcher's own ability, knowledge, creativity and interpretation of results. It evolves over time and the focus can shift over the progression of the study. It is exploratory; to gain a better understanding of an unknown situation. The quality is mainly determined by the researcher's ability to design a feasible, systematic and rigorous study that will provide clear evidence to support or refute a working hypothesis. The study should be able to be replicated by an independent group and produce similar results, a sample group that is representative of the population under the study, a sample size large enough to reveal unexpected statistical significance.

Authenticity involves shifting away from concerns about the reliability and validity of research, concerns about research and that it is worthwhile while thinking about its impact on members of the culture or community being researched.

+A narrative approach was used as the story is that of lived experience, specifically that of Syrian refugees and narrative inquiry starts with experience as expressed in in lived and told stories. The strength of the narrative approach is that it is extremely flexible and it is relatively easy for learners to tell their story, reveal information about themselves and to gain a voice. This knowledge can provide one with a detailed understanding of the subject and allows the individuals to feel heard and important.

A limitation is that the narratives are based on an individual's ability to recall accurately what has happened in the past   and they also rely on the skills of the narrator to record and interpret accurately. A disadvantage can also be that stories can be difficult when decoding the relationship between the narrative account, the interpretation and the retold story. Also, boundaries can be difficult for example who authors the account, the scope of the narrative, who provides the story, the

framework influencing story and whether the elements are in one narrative. An ethnographic approach was considered however I wanted to focus on the experiences of individual refugee and to tell the stories of individual experiences. Ethnography would have been more concerned with interpreting the culture sharing group instead of the very powerful stories of the individual.

+The categories were derived from the data by looking for recurring themes and responses from those interviewed and observed. A deductive approach was used as I already had some preconceived themes that I expected to find based on existing conversations and observations (Gabriel, 2013). A semantic approach was initially used as I analysed the explicit content of the responses and then a latent approach as I considered the assumptions underlying the data as I was interested in both what people say and what those statements reveal about them and their social context (Thomas, 2006). Braun and Clark (2006) developed a six -step approach to analysis which is what I followed;

- familiarisation such as reading through the text and taking notes.
- Coding, so grouping together in a colour coded way data that matches the codes.
- Generating themes which involves grouping together codes into broader themes such as integration.
- Reviewing themes such as checking the most relevant data is under the appropriate theme.
- Writing up which includes addressing each theme in turn before making recommendations for the future.

Methods

Methods are specific ways of gathering and interpreting data. The methods chosen reflect the interpretative paradigm and offer the most effective ways of gathering relevant data reflective of the research purpose and questions.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires (Robert Coe, Waring, Hedges and Arthur, 2017) (Scott and Usher, 1999) have been chosen as one of the methods for collecting data from the refugees. This is because not all have been able to take part in the semi structured interviews due to the lockdown imposed in March 2020 in a response to Covid -19. The questionnaires are structured so as to be understood by second language speakers who are not proficient with the English language. They are structured in a way which enables participants to have the time to think about, and take time with, the answers that they give. The refugees are given the option of anonymising their answers, as, if questionnaires are anonymous the participant is more likely to give their private thoughts and feelings rather than the potentially more socially acceptable ones. In order for accurate conclusions to be drawn participants need to be encouraged to answer questions honestly without worrying about how the researcher will react. That is not to say that participants lie, they are sometimes inclined to give more palatable answers for various reasons including not wishing to upset the researcher or give the answer they think is the correct answer.

Questionnaires can take the form of multiple -choice questions, attitude scales, closed questions and open-ended questions. In my research I used a simple question format was used for the questionnaires as a starting point before moving on

to semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were also used in lieu of face to face semi structured interviews for those who were not able to attend full interviews. Despite lockdown questionnaires were hand delivered as part of an exercise to ensure receipt by the participants. If lockdown had not occurred, me, or the Syrian Key worker would have offered support, but this was not possible due to Government guidelines. Responses to questionnaires were recorded after permission has been given through a translator for those who needed the extra support. This ensures that the refugees are aware of their right to withdraw and also their right to be forgotten from the research if they do choose to withdraw at any time under General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) regulations.

Questionnaires with Key Workers

Questionnaires with key workers have been chosen because they are a practical easy way to gather specific information from particular key workers. This is especially relevant as Government restrictions prevent face to face meetings. The questionnaires were e mailed out and a request for a dated return meant they were returned in a timely manner. Scalability was not important in this instance as there were only two respondents. The information gathered allowed for a different perspective to that of the refugees and allowed for a separate picture to emerge whilst upholding the refugee's comments. Negative possibilities for the questionnaire would be if the respondents posted dishonest answers, had a hidden agenda or were inaccessible to the refugee learners. Questionnaires with Key workers were done to present their perspectives and to gain a more balanced view of the ESOL process both strengths and weaknesses. The Key workers have been working with the refugees and are able to add insights about the learning process both formal and

informal. The two Syrian Key workers work closely with the refugees, assisting with their integration into British society. They worked with me to collate a concept map illustrating the different paths to ESOL provision in the local and surrounding area and this qualitative research is included as a means of demonstrating whether other refugees have similar issues surrounding accessing ESOL.

Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews, (Robert Coe, Waring, Hedges and Arthur, 2017) which are more informal interviews took place with ten of the refugees attending in person just prior to the lockdown. The group was originally been much larger however with the restrictions imposed by COD-19 this has been amended to a reduced number due to social distancing and accessibility issues. We have attempted to continue interviewing using Zoom or Teams however the language skills have hindered this. Again, if not in lockdown some interviews could have taken place in in the learners' homes, but this has also been frustrated by COVID 19 regulations. Syrian families are extremely hospitable and would have willingly accommodated this as they have built up trust and want to be asked about their experiences rather than having an interpretation of their life imposed on them which is what frequently happens.

Semi structured interviews with students and key workers have been identified as the most applicable research tools to use in the investigation of this research. The investigation is based around student's opinions and perceptions of ESOL teaching, and this is an appropriate method to glean information, uphold focus and allow for an emergence of rich information (Drever, 1995). As the refugee's English language skills are still not well developed a set of questions have been developed that allow for understanding with minimal support from translation

services unless totally necessary. The questions have been reviewed by a peer, amended and used with the refugee learners. The questions consist of background, needs, ESOL classes, and progress. The semi structured interviews last between twenty and thirty minutes. Validity is supported as the learners and support staff are internal, and the questions peer assessed. (Cohen et Al, 2007). This research is interpretive and therefore congruency and cogency are immediate concerns (Eisenhardt, 1989; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The research methods are compatible with a qualitative interpretive approach and this means that interpretation and recommendations are one of many possible interpretations and therefore recommendations that could be decided upon.

Adopting an informal approach allows me the participant to speak freely with the availabilty of guiding questions to keep the interview moving in the right direction. As the refugees still struggle with English, questions have had to be written in an uncomplicated manner. This semi structured interview approach enabled me to ensure that specific aspects were covered. Initially recording the semi-structured interviews, was planned, however, this failed after a technical issue rendered the equipment unusable. The semi structured interview sessions went well as the learners were keen to be involved and gave thoughtful answers. It has also been challenging as the language barriers slow the process even with a translator. Using simple direct questions allows the learners to answer without ambiguity. This is important as recording the answers faithfully is important to the integrity of the research and minimise bias. Any mis-recording of the learners' comments or interpretation of the refugee's answers could form an unconscious bias and this may then change the result of the research. Learners may have their own bias towards questions and interviews depending on their previous experiences with statutory

bodies such as the Home Office, Refugee Council, Syrian Key worker and Job Centre Plus. Learners were eager to know how the research is used and comment that they do not feel relevant or listened to in many any other capacities. Leaflets were created for the refugees explaining the research and were handed out prior to the semi structured interviews and discussions. On arrival the learners were given an information sheet containing details of the research along with a brief discussion and an any questions session regarding the interview process. The learners were talked through the question sheets which the translator explained as necessary.

Case Studies

A case study was completed for both a positive and a negative outcome for the group. Observations, semi structured interviews have been used, and the interviews with the Syrian Key Workers contributed to these. The focus of the case studies is the ESOL class experienced by the refugees and whilst this is a narrow focus this allows for detailed and descriptive data. One of the most easily accessible methods is participant observation as the refugees are part of my class and are used to my being part of the group. This means that although they know that we are engaged in research they feel confident about this with me in the group. Establishing trust and confidence has taken some time but once established this is a strength although I need to be aware of concerns regarding insider bias. The observations are designed to collect data on how the group interact, how they communicate when they are together. This includes observing the language used for example, do they revert back to their native language or do they attempt to speak English, who is proactive, what positive action do the learners take to improve their English and what ways do

they initiate language learning. I explained to the learners what I am observing, and they were happy to be part of the process.

Observation has also used in the research as behaviour through the informal learning sessions varies to that of formal learning sessions. This is interesting to observe, as the group seem more eager to learn in the informal setting than in the formal setting. Observations have taken place in the usual kitchen setting in small mixed groups with translator support if necessary. The informal setting works well as the refugees are relaxed and not so self-conscious as we are completing activities, they feel comfortable with.

The refugees are keen to share their experiences and equally keen to make suggestions for improvements to ESOL courses. The learners have been working with me for between three years and six months and as such we have built trust. This has minimised participants withdrawing from the research as no one dropped out. Originally participants were concerned that their communication was lessened with their limited English however using a translator ensured this did not become an issue. Although the level of English spoken varies markedly between the learners most have responded in similar ways with a desire to improve the service for others.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data methods in this research utilise more than words or text, they include photographs, videos and sound recordings which lend themselves to being interpretive and creative. Photographs have also been used as a research method. These have been developed, with the consent, of participants, over the course of two years with three different groups of refugees. I also had some live vide film which was used. Analysis of images is usually in four stages and relies heavily on objective

description of the image, discussion around how it was created, explaining the purpose of the photograph and conclusions drawn from the analysis of the photo. Photographic evidence allows for the researcher to respond to the photos and to interpret what the pictures mean (Gillet, 2003). Through the course of the research many photographs were taken of the refugees engaged in the practical tasks. Analysis of image-based data is concerned with factual information contained within the images or for symbolic meaning and cultural significance. It also involves analysis of the image itself, the intentions and context and the interpretation and context of the image. Collier (2001) argues that images are “frozen in time containing evidence of things which words could never hope to match” (p.59) and Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001, p.4) call photographs records of reality whose analysis is a matter of extracting information such as people, places, things, actions and events. Analysis of images are not neutral depicting only one reality (Rose, 2016), rather they are open to interpretation depending on the biases of the researcher and, as Denscombe (p.323) notes, “the meaning of the image is the thing of value for the researcher, the meaning as given within a particular culture, within a given time, within a social context within which it was produced.” It is therefore important not to take the images out of context rather to present them with a clear presentation of events preceding and after the image was taken.

The effectiveness of this type of data use can be seen to good effect in *The Seventh Man* (Berger and Mohr, 1975). Berger and Mohr utilise imagery to good effect in their book on migrant workers in Europe as they intersperse photographs and text. Their text is based on migrant workers however the same principle can be used with the Syrian refugees who have been engaged in practical tasks such as cooking. Cooking has been the focus of sessions held with the refugees, as it is

something that unites and is useful for observation purposes but could easily be extended to any practical situation. It has also allowed for discussions around culture and tradition which in turn has increased opportunities for learning opportunities, both for me as the researcher, and for them, as learners. This visual data is analysed in terms of the meanings it holds (Denscombe, 1998). This requires knowledge of the subject and the activity the participants are engaged in. The refugees have been working with my organisation for, in some cases, three years and so a good subject knowledge has been built up and a depth of understanding of how the refugees work together and the journey they have made.

Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data is constructed, and various techniques can be employed to make sense of the data. These methods include content analysis (Berelson, 1952), or a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) or discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989). Content analysis is where the goal is to research surface level characteristics of media texts (Coe et al, 2017), thematic analysis is analysis of themes where the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly and discourse analysis which is “the analysis of language in use” (Brown and Yule, 1983, p.1).

The task of qualitative research is to interpret and elaborate the traditions of thought and practice and to explore ways in which these ideals can be transmitted across the generations (Alexander, 2020). Paradigm shifts in education occur as policies change depending on the biases of the Government at the time and their changing priorities. This can be seen if we use the example of Ofsted who used to rely heavily on quantitative data around recruitment, achievement and retention.

Ofsted visits in the post compulsory sector required sheets of statistics and data, which could be manipulated to reflect current thinking and trends. This has now changed, and data plays a different role; current thinking now relies on the learner experience and context as being as important as statistics. Numerical data frequently represents money and funding whilst learner experience does not seem to rank as highly yet this is important in order to retain learners and therefore funding (Burton, 2019). As previously stated, because the refugees are unhappy with the formal ESOL provision provided for them they often leave the courses before completion. This in turn has an impact on retention rates and financial projections. Qualitative research aims to encourage learners to speak for themselves and through their actions. In this way the interviewees teach the researcher about their lives and experiences. Qualitative researchers are an integral part of the research as without the researcher the data would not exist, they do not just collect the data, they are in fact part of it.

Qualitative data is generally time consuming and expensive and therefore does not traditionally draw samples from large data sets and so there can be an issue of adequate reliability or validity. Preferred terms are authenticity and truthfulness which better reflect the move to reflecting on the worthwhile nature of the research or its impact on the community involved in the research. The subjective nature of qualitative data and its origins in single contexts means it can be difficult to apply conventional standards of reliability and validity. This means that, for example, because of the central role played by the researcher it is not possible to replicate studies as it is time and context specific. Contexts, situations, events, conditions and interactions cannot always be replicated to any extent nor can generalisations always be made to a wider context other than the one studied with any confidence.

However, to move forward in research, studies need to be completed and substantiated generalisations made. Data collection, analysis and interpretation are lengthy and time consuming and a good knowledge of context is required in order to make interpretations of qualitative data.

Despite the limitations of qualitative data research, there are many strengths. The researcher has close engagement with the research and therefore gets a close and intimate view of the research participants. This gives the researcher unique opportunities to gain insight into issues that are often missed by scientific positivistic inquiries and qualitative interpretations and descriptions can suggest possible relationships, causes, effects and dynamic processes. Denscombe (2010) suggests that qualitative analysis allows for ambiguities/contradictions in the data, which are a reflection of social reality. A descriptive and narrative style when used by qualitative researchers, which can lead to new insights that quantitative data cannot provide. Events can only be understood in context if they are to be interpreted adequately. This means that the researcher immerses themselves in natural surroundings, such as the kitchen, trying not to interfere with events. There is nothing that is predefined, predetermined or taken for granted.

A systematic approach to qualitative data analysis is one which has been used to analyse the semi structured interviews with the Syrian refugees. The systematic approach to qualitative data analysis allows for an evolutionary nature of research where preconceived theory is not the starting point of the research, rather data shapes the research process and data is “identified, discarded, clarified and elaborated upon through simultaneous data collection and analysis (Coe, Waring, Hedges and Arthur, 2017). Narrative analysis is also useful as it relates to a story and relates to images as well as text. It contemplates how and why groups,

individuals and organisations portray themselves. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) is a method for analysing, identifying organising and reporting themes found within a data set and as noted by Boyaziz (1999) acts as a translator enabling data sets to speak to each other. Alternatively, it is noted that “flexibility can lead to inconstancy and coherence when developing themes derived from research data” (Holloway and Tedres, 2003). This means that trustworthiness is a means to persuade others that research findings are credible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility, which is part of the process, can be determined when others are presented with the experience or research and can recognise it (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Transferability refers to the generalisability of the enquiry and case to case transfer (ibid). Dependability involves the “the research being logical, traceable and clearly documented (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the findings are clearly aligned to the research. Researchers need to include why they have chosen the theoretical, methodological and analytic choices made so that others can understand how the choices were determined (Koch, 1994). Audit trails are a way for other researchers to understand the choices made and keeping records of raw data, field notes, transcripts used and a reflexive journal can aid the process of cross referencing, data as well as easing the reporting of the research process (Halpren,1983,3). Reflexive journals are also a useful way of recording daily logistics of research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The specific purpose in the case of the Syrian refugees was to find out the refugees’ educational experience in Syria, the refugees’ journey to the United Kingdom in terms of ESOL teaching, whether formally or informally and refugee experience in the United Kingdom. This included whether they had been offered ESOL classes, where the classes were, the duration of the classes and the length of accessible classes,

whether support had been offered, progress made and drop off rates in the selected group of learners. This enabled me to make a tentative connection between educational events in the past and ones in the present. Clearly the human element was strong as there was a strong correlation between feelings, experiences and social events (Denscombe, 2014). Denscombe (ibid) points to various ways of interpreting stories one of which is that people use stories to construct a personal world. It is concerned with how people use stories to describe and explain themselves and importantly their circumstances and how that influences their existence. Returning to an earlier comment, the way the refugees see themselves is very different to the way we see ourselves in the West and this has a bearing on how to set up classes for them most effectively in order for them to make the best progress. The imposition of Western teaching and learning methods are not necessarily the most effective ones for the refugees.

Desk based research

Desk based research has involved a literature review including reports, policy documents and other relevant documentation to provide background on ESOL, formal and informal learning and the refugee situation. Reports formed the basis of the Literature Review as they gave an up-to-date picture of the ESOL situation. The literature review gave a starting point that reflected the data gathered by others researching ESOL provision in the United Kingdom. The literature review also pointed to other learners' reflections on ESOL in the United Kingdom.

The research was undertaken after general research training and qualitative interviewing. This ensured that the concepts of rigour, validity and reliability issues around bias subjectivity, interpretation and ethical issues were considered. Things to

think about were creating and asking open questions, how to probe and how to explore themes in detail with the learners. Areas considered included;

- What were the refugee's educational experiences whilst at home in Syria, or in Lebanon or Jordan whilst waiting to be brought to the United Kingdom?
- what are the main issues encountered when attending traditional ESOL classes, how did refugees gain access to ESOL classes, what were the difficulties surrounding trying to access classes?
- What are experiences of ESOL classes and what opportunities have refugees encountered or barriers to learning?
- What did the refugees want to gain from the classes?
- How did the refugees gain access to non-traditional classes?
- What do they feel they have gained from these non-traditional classes?

Do the refugees feel that they have learned English more readily through informal practical sessions?

Ethics

It is essential that, in line with British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2018), research ethics are always adhered to. Prior to the commencement of my research forms were submitted to the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group as the research involves human participants and personal data. Research ethics can be interpreted as values that can be applied to the research being undertaken. These can be broken into two categories epistemic and practical. Epistemic is concerned with knowledge and therefore, as the goal of educational research is to produce knowledge, the researcher must be in search of, and be able to, disseminate knowledge. Truth is

central to epistemic value and this includes a total commitment to honesty regarding the research carried out, and in presenting the data. It is acknowledged that truth is not universal and therefore one interpretation is not always universal. It can also be argued that the pursuit of knowledge is not of value, rather that there should be a practical goal such as the improvement of education which is the focus of this research. Researchers must therefore take note of both practical and epistemic values; these focus on how researchers should undertake their work (Coe, Waring, Hedges and Arthur, 2017). Ethical principles can be seen as what, or would not, be ethically acceptable in any given situation. Principles include, doing no, or, minimising harm, respecting privacy and respecting autonomy. It is important that the risk of harm from the research itself does not adversely affect the learner and /or refugee. This means that no harm is done to, or, by the learner. In the case of the refugees this does not entail physical harm, rather it could be emotionally damaging as learners might recount their difficult journey to the United Kingdom from Syria or experience embarrassment as they try to articulate their ESOL experiences. It is therefore important to ensure that the participants are not identifiable in the research. Participants in this research chose their own pseudonym. This was a name they felt related to them but did not identify them in any way, in some cases the refugees chose an English version of their name, or an English or Syrian name that they felt an association with. Complete autonomy over the choice of name and that they were not influenced in any way was assured. Questions in any situation including semi structured interviews may cause distress and observations can be intrusive or distracting. Therefore, questions need to be clear and unambiguous but also sensitive.

+Whilst I tried to distance myself from the questionnaire completion and consent, it became clear that I was unable to do this for various reasons. The refugees had worked with me for some time and so the research relied on the relationship they had formed with me in that they trusted me to listen to their stories and to record them accurately. Consent was given at the start of the research after explaining what this meant and was revisited through the research process. This was important as, whilst it is important in every case, these refugees were from a tradition where speaking openly could lead to persecution and death and where in their own words trust is not always easy to give. So, it was also explained that even though they had said yes to taking part in my research they could change their mind at any time, and it would not disadvantage them in any way. Privacy and confidentiality also has to be taken into consideration as insider research can allow people to make the connection between researcher and participants. This means that participants need to have their identity protected which is why pseudonyms have been used, chosen by the refugee learners. Insider research, undertaken by someone, me, with an 'a priori' intimate knowledge of, but not necessarily part of the group has become more common in the field of education and determines the research design, type of date collected and the way that data is analysed. Insider research has to have rigour and transparency in the methods of data collection. This is because participants may be influenced in an interview by how they perceive their interviewer and the relationship they have with them. This can be difficult when one is working alongside the participants on a day-to-day basis, yet they are aware of the role of researcher. Alternatively, being an insider researcher can allow one to "see more" of the day to day experiences of

the participants. This can in some cases lead to premature conclusions in fact be too familiar. Mercer (2007) notes that insider research is,

"like wielding a double edged sword, as what can be gained in terms of extensive knowledge and familiarity with the context may be lost in terms of an insider's inability to make the familiar strange" (p.7).

Conducting insider research does provide a valuable perspective on the research and allows for a potentially different conclusion to that of an outsider.

Privacy

Privacy, not only of identity, also needs to be protected when undertaking research and this includes settings and topics. In research privacy can be defined as when participants have the autonomy to decide what information to share and with whom (Hammersley, 2017). Whilst participants may feel freer to speak in their own home, the home is frequently seen as a private space and therefore the decision was made to conduct the research within the work setting either in the teaching room, or kitchen, where the participants as learners are comfortable. Whilst learners may disclose information that is out of the control of the researcher the limits of confidentiality are made clear to the learners and at any point if they, or someone else is found to be in danger of harm, the information would be passed on and research with that particular participant stopped. As a researcher it is also vital to anonymise places and institutions in order to maintain the learner's anonymity therefore, we are termed a centre In the North of England. The use of visual media may cause issues with this; however, one remedy is to blank out faces. This is slightly contentious as people's faces are expressive and nuances may be missed if this is completed (Flewitt, 2005; Nutbrown, 2011). If clear consent for images is given this becomes less of a concern. Data is anonymised on collection and a key

assigned; everything stored online is password protected and hard copies are stored in locked, fireproof cabinets. Written consent was approved by every participant at the start of the research and it was made clear through consent sheets that learners have autonomy and can choose to take part in the research or withdraw at any time. Informed consent is noted by Ellis et al (2013) as a Western concept, based on autonomy and self-determination which is not necessarily familiar to refugees who have come from a different culture. This is especially pertinent with the refugee learners who have been used to suppressing individual opinions due to the Syrian government's regime. Trust is especially important in order to circumvent this fear, and real opinions gleaned, rather than ones that reflect official propaganda. Furthermore, refugees have frequently arrived from areas where they are subject to mandatory co-operation and reprisals and recrimination. It is therefore essential that learners understand that consent is a totally individual decision that has no reprisal for the individual. This means that a clear mapping of the research being undertaken needs to be made available to the participants. For this research language barriers are also an issue and provision has been made through translators. Like all research, research with refugees has to be based on empathy, care and trust. Researchers must also inquire and respect the experiences, perspective and values and beliefs of the refugees even if they are widely different from their own (Rasanen, 2011). It is vital to challenge our assumptions, or biases, regarding refugees, in this case their education needs, and to engage with contextually, temporally and socially flexible ethical considerations (Bourn, 2014). Refugees may have past experiences of trauma, completely different social structures and various interlocking and overpowering transitions to navigate (Eide and Hjern, 2013; Correa -Velz, Gifford and McMichael ,2015; Kohli, 2011) along possible poverty, housing insecurity and

discrimination which means they enter the education setting with multiple and complex challenges. Drake (2014) notes that formal ethical processes offer guidance on what constitutes formal ethical practices. Inherent in these are questions of respect, beneficence and justice (The Belmont Report, 1979). Respect ensures the refugee participants are treated as autonomous, as capable of making decisions, beneficence is minimising harm whilst maximising the benefits and justice to the fair treatment of people, the sameness of people without bias (Gillam, 2013). Study design and methods have been approved in line with the University and BERA guidelines and participants in the research sign and understand consent forms. Lanas and Rautio (2013) discuss relational ethics as a means to reject universality, emphasising reciprocity in research interaction, a never ending, dynamic and relational process which finds its form in the interaction between the researcher and their participants in the space and time they share (Kaukko, Dunwoodie and Riggs, 2017). This allows me as the researcher to amplify voices of those who have previously been silenced. The refugees were initially sent for support by the Refugee Council which means that mediation originally came through them as the gatekeeper. Once established with our organisation the independent mediator has become the Syrian Key Worker who ensures translation is available and that learners understand the reason for the research and that they are clear with informed consent. In line with the previous discussion on informed consent the participants were happy to give consent. One issue did arise when it was discovered , that they had previously experienced people who did not explain things clearly and a case of fraud was exposed. The refugees were understandably concerned that the same thing might happen again. This highlights the importance of clearly and thoroughly explaining every step of the research, the interview and consent process.

Chapter Four, data analysis continues the research story as it looks at the findings gleaned through the research methodology and methods discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

This thesis explores informal and experiential learning for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes with refugee learners and is therefore concerned with their lived experiences of life and learning. This means that the focus of the enquiry lies squarely with the refugees themselves and their personal experiences. This chapter details data collection and the narrative account of the refugee's experiences of education in the north of England. It acknowledges the importance of providing ESOL programmes which support refugee learners particularly those who are unable to speak English in order for them to integrate and communicate in their new country. However, as argued above, a one size fits all curriculum does not take into account the difficult circumstances experienced by the refugees, the context prior to their arrival in the United Kingdom, cultural differences or previous levels of their ability in their native language. I have been working with refugees for a number of years and it has become increasingly obvious to me that there is a mismatch between ESOL provision in general and learners' needs.

Data collection methods discussed in Chapter Three, include Methodology, and the rationale for these choices. Observation, and the collection of photographic and video evidence were completed in the main before the Covid 19 lockdown was imposed, however, the semi structured interviews and questionnaires were more problematic due to ongoing restrictions. As discussed previously the participants were engaged, eager to speak to me and chose their own pseudonyms – some chose English, some Syrian, either way they were the learner's choice. The names of localities have been changed to preserve anonymity and likewise staff participants have also chosen their pseudonym.

Questionnaires

+ The questionnaire was initially going to be conducted with the refugee learners in house, who, due to lack of English speaking skills needed further support. This had been arranged with the Syrian Key worker however, COVID 19 meant that face to face contact had to be halted for some time which complicated the data gathering process. The questionnaire was designed to encourage detail which could be expanded on later but had to be simple enough to be understood by those with limited English skills. The refugee learners completed the questionnaires but as we were unable to talk through these face to face we had to either use a telephone conversation or zoom for those who felt confident enough to access this. This meant that the discussions around the questionnaires were more complex as nuances were undoubtedly missed due to the reduced access to the refugee learners and language issues. +

Initially I had not planned to use questionnaires due to language barriers but when the national lockdown happened it became clear that there would be a need to do

so. I drafted questions which made the process difficult, again due to the language barriers. It was a slow process, however, because we had worked together for some time the refugees were comfortable to speak to me. These were a further five refugees who completed the questionnaires with information we had previously talked about. Questions and answers I received are below (Refugees 1-10, 2020, ESOL Questionnaire. Sophia White. March 2020).

- **Tell me about your schooling in Syria,**

One refugee has completed the full 12-year system of basic and secondary education, she then attended a Higher Institute where she gained a four-year degree in teaching. She had also had nursery education which had to be fully paid for. Four other female refugees have had little schooling as they were from more remote areas where it was difficult to stay in school. Literacy rates in Syria are 74.2% for women and 91% for men, the dropout rate being highest for women and only 29% of females over 25 have had access to secondary education (United Nations, 2020) which is representative of the chosen group.

- **What support was offered for learning English in the refugee camps?**

Two refugees were in refugee camps in Egypt, one in the Lebanon and one in Jordan, there was some basic provision however, none of the five ladies felt safe to attend without their husbands. This meant that they were not able to attend as childcare was then an issue

- **When you arrived in England how did you communicate? Were you offered translators?**

All the refugees responded that on the plane an Arabic speaker informed them of their rights once in England, and again this was the case once in England when transferring to their new home. One lady reminded me that she had been in England

for only five days when she was sent to my sessions and could not speak any English. She said she was scared because she did not know what to do or how to ask for something. When the translator was not available the response was to stay at home because they did not know anyone to ask how to do things.

- **Are you going to ESOL classes now? Where are the classes? What are you learning at the classes?**

All five ladies have been offered ESOL classes at the local college but have stopped attending. Two have childcare issues because they have husbands who work, and they were not offered alternative times and three did not like the class. They felt they were overlooked in the class because they had no previous English language learning experience. Most of the other learners in the class chatted to each other and were also able to speak to the tutor. All the ladies said that they wanted to be able to go shopping and make friends.

- **Did you like coming to cooking? Why did you like or not like it? What could have been better?**

All the ladies said they enjoyed coming to cooking and learning English dishes as well as making Syrian food. One lady said she does not like English food as it is too dry but likes to cook with everyone. All the ladies said that they liked to learn the English words and they liked writing words and sentences down to practice. They all said they liked teaching me the Arabic /and or Kurdish words so that I understood how hard it was to remember the next week. Two ladies said they particularly liked helping to write a recipe booklet (Appendix 1) with me and contributing to the Syrian/ English picture dictionary we have created. They all said we would like to come more and learn more.

- **Will you go back to ESOL classes at college?**

Four said no, two because the class did not fit with childcare, three said that there were too many people, so they felt hidden, all said they did not understand what anyone was saying, all said the tutor was nice but she did not come help them because many people wanted help all the time, and one was unsure because she felt nervous with the men who were loud and wanted the tutor all the time.

Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews were completed before the lockdown. Originally more were planned but due to the national lockdown these were halted in order to comply with the restrictions. The semi structured interviews took place in my office and the kitchen where the refugees felt comfortable. The results of the interviews have been written up and analysed in this section. The names chosen were chosen by the refugees and are either an English name, a Syrian name or an English translation of a Syrian name.

Mary*

Mary is a 38-year-old Syrian refugee who came to the United Kingdom in 2018. Mary has three sons, is married and a devout Muslim. Mary is a traditional lady who wears a hijab, encourages her sons to fast for short periods through Ramadan and very much lives her life through the Koran. She says she is "**very, very busy cooking and looking after sons**". In Syria Mary went through the 12-year system where she taught Arabic in a University. In order to do this Mary had to do a four-year degree and a one year post graduate programme leading to a teaching certificate and a Diploma in Education. Mary is very aware that "**English is very, very hard**" and that it "**takes very long time to speak English**". She recognises this because she says,

“**Arabic is too hard, could teach you but is very hard, take many years, like English**”. Mary comes from a city in Syria where she was surrounded by people speaking different languages and so is used to listening for different accents and dialects. She tried to learn some English whilst in the refugee camp but she says the classes were not consistent and so she did not make much progress. The family did not have much money and were unable to pay for private classes. Mary managed to access a television and tried to start teaching herself some basic words and sentences. She attributes her ability to do this to her teaching profession because she knew the theory of how to learn. Mary wants to teach in a school in the United Kingdom, but to do so she needs to pass ESOL exams. Mary has tried to get her qualifications verified for use in England, but the University record department no longer exists in Syria. Mary is keen to learn and practices constantly but feels the traditional ESOL classes “**are too loud, noisy, many, many people, all languages, how you teach with that?**”.

Mary knows that to get a good job she needs to improve quickly and so uses her children to model spoken English and insists they only speak English at home.

Hattie *

Hattie comes from a small village in Syria and arrived in the United Kingdom in 2018, she came to my organisation before accessing any traditional ESOL classes and had no English-speaking abilities. Hattie was not offered English classes whilst in the refugee camp, her husband and three children also had no English-speaking abilities, but the children have made good progress since being at school. On arrival in England Hattie was offered ESOL classes at the local college which she attended for a short time because it did not fit with her children, and, as her husband needed

English for his job, he took priority. Hattie's husband has managed to gain employment and has been making some progress which means that Hattie is becoming increasingly isolated and unable to do basic things such as shopping. Hattie and her family came to the United Kingdom when their hometown was bombed. This meant that she left behind her extended family and lost all support mechanisms. Hattie has lost members of her family since she arrived in England and has attempted to still attend classes whilst suffering extreme trauma and grief. Hattie arrived at one session quite quiet, and, on further investigation, it became obvious that her younger brother had been killed the night before in a bombing raid. Hattie had a basic education in Syria which ended when she was 15. After leaving school Hattie joined the family trade and became a baker specialising in cakes, the recipes for which had been passed down through the family. Once Hattie's youngest child went to school, she thought about ESOL classes but all the other ladies she had arrived with had stopped attending by then. Hattie wants to work but recognises that to do so she needs to be able to communicate and understand basic instructions in English. Hattie struggles to communicate with basic services, and this is becoming increasingly problematic as she has recently been diagnosed with an illness needing consultant appointments. Hattie says that she is increasingly frustrated because, although she is willing, she does not see a way for her to gain the skills she needs.

Abdallah*

Abdallah is a 45 years old man who is married with four children. Abdallah came to England with his three children, now four, and wife, none of whom spoke English. Abdallah had a basic education in Syria and had a highly successful business making ladies shoes, owned his own factory, large house and supported an

extended family. Abdallah is originally of Kurdish descent and his first language is Kurdish, this is the one he uses at home and with his family, Arabic is his second language which he uses at work and in daily life. Abdallah says that Kurdish is much harder than Arabic and English is "**very hard, no sense in it!**". That Abdallah has learned a second language demonstrates that he has the capacity to do so if given the opportunity. Abdallah says that the things he learns at ESOL classes are not the things he needs to study either for home or work. Abdallah says that useful things would be to pay a bill, speak with school or make a Doctor's appointment. Abdullah is eager to learn and has been using his children to interpret because he does not feel confident to speak on his own.

Fatima*

Fatima is a single parent whose husband was killed in a bomb strike in Syria. Fatima is thirty-nine, speaks English fluently and was a doctor in Syria. Unfortunately, Fatima is unable to practise in the United Kingdom because, although she has been here three years and seems to have flawless spoken English, has not been able to pass the professional English exam. Fatima is desperate to improve her English further but cannot afford to keep taking the test. She wishes to practice medicine and fully integrate into British society but is unable to do so due to the decline in confidence she is experiencing. Fatima is isolating herself and retreating into her religion because she feels despair that she is unable to progress further when there is such a need for doctors both in England and in Syria. Fatima is losing confidence in herself and her ability to improve any further and this is compounded by the fact that she has been housed in a predominantly white area with few people either Syrian or British with the same skills and educational level as she has.

Minnie*

Minnie is a 56-year-old lady who arrived in England with her son and daughter in 2018. Minnie has no qualifications and does not speak any English. Minnie is still traumatised by the bombing in Syria especially as she has seen one of her children killed in a raid. Minnie relies on her children, who are in their twenties to translate for her and has not found accessing ESOL classes to be successful. Minnie found the classes to be loud and confusing and says she did not like people looking at her and wanting her to speak. She felt hot and panicked. Minnie has multiple health issues and so must attend frequent doctor's appointments which means that attending the ESOL class can be problematic. Minnie frequently feels unwell and so prefers to stay at home where she feels safe and in control. Minnie also has a restricted diet due to her medical issues and therefore struggles with understanding the English produce available to her. As Minnie's children are now attending college, she is on her own for much of the day and does not interact with neighbours, so she only speaks Arabic when her children arrive home.

Hannah*

Hannah is twenty-nine and the mother of four sons. She is a qualified beautician and hairdresser but is unable to work in the UK due to different professional standards and the loss of documentation relating to her hairdressing and beauty. Hannah is Kurdish and so speaks two languages already, Kurdish and Arabic. Hannah attended college for ESOL classes but found it hard to attend due to childcare commitments. Hannah says "i**t (the class) was very, very loud, too many people, teacher no time-no use to me"**. This has led to frustration as Hannah wants to

learn and to make progress. Hannah carries a little book with her in which she writes English words or phrases she wants to remember. Hannah was taught to do that by her friend who is a teacher. Hannah says, "**it is very helpful**". Hannah has left her parents in Syria and is heartbroken that she will never see her mother again especially as she has given birth whilst in the United Kingdom and feels the absence of her mother keenly. Hannah cooks for her family and makes food for neighbours when it is a feast day as she would like to be accepted in England and make friends.

Mohammed*

Mohammed is a sixty-seven-year-old man who has a wife and two sons. Mohammed, who was retired in Syria, does not feel the need to complete any education including ESOL classes. Mohammed does not want to stay in England and so is focussing his thoughts on returning to Syria. Mohammed has multiple health issues and is very sad and frustrated a lot of the time. Mohammed can speak a few words of English but struggles. Mohammed leaves his sons to translate and to speak for him. Mohammed and his wife, although not his sons, are very isolated and not integrated with the local community. This means that while the parents are at home one of the sons needs to be present in case of translation needs.

Philip*

Philip is a thirty-two-year-old who has come to England with one child and a pregnant wife. Philip is a tradesperson in Syria. Philip has multiple health issues which necessitate multiple doctor and dentist appointments. Philip has gained employment and is working as a caravan cleaner however as the other caravan cleaners speak Arabic with him, he is not progressing with his English speaking.

Philip stopped attending the mandated ESOL classes as he firstly picked his daughter up from school and secondly gained employment. Philip did not like the class as "**there was too much talking but not learning**", Philip's wife now speaks good English and so he relies on her to translate for him.

Andrew *

Philip is a thirty-four-year-old gentleman who arrived in England in 2018. Andrew has a wife and three children. Since arriving in England Andrew has experienced racism and bullying culminating in his wife being thrown to the floor by a gang of teenagers. Andrew is now refusing to learn English as he says as soon as he can, he will return to Syria. Andrew takes his children to school and does not leave his wife; although he had gained employment this ceased as he did not feel his family was safe. Andrew has experience working as a plasterer in Syria although he does not have any qualifications. Andrew now speaks a little English so that he can communicate with statutory bodies such as school and the police.

Abdu*

Abdu is twenty years old and arrived in England with his parents and three brothers. Abdu had started college in Syria but due to the war was unable to continue. Abdu has enrolled in college in England and is making good progress in all his classes. Abdu has learned some English whilst he has been in the country and has worked in Weatherspoon's which he said forced him "**to learn quick**". Abdu enjoys talking to others and actively wants to practice the English he has learned. Crucially, he says he does not feel embarrassed if he makes a mistake, just tries to remember the correct way to say something and to practice as soon as it is practicably possible.

Chapter Four gives a snapshot of the refugee learners and their experiences in England and specifically with education in England. Chapter five will discuss emerging themes and the analysis of them.

Photographs and video evidence

Photographs were taken over the past three years, and consent was given for photographic use. Looking at the photographs, images of refugees who stand smiling at the camera, shows us the individuality of the people who have specific needs that are more than a set curriculum. John Dewey (1916) proposed that children learn best by practising both physical and intellectual activities and therefore when we see the refugees cooking (physical) we can see that this is enhancing the intellectual activities that will ultimately lead to mastery of the English language in adults. The photographs chosen are a snapshot of multiple learners, some of whom, I was not able to interview fully due to the lockdown restrictions. They are representative of three different groups in three different towns. The photos were chosen out of hundreds because they tell part of the story of those refugees on camera and therefore give an indication of all the refugees they represent. The limits of this data is the constraint on the number of photographs used but they all tell a story of the struggle to learn the English language. The age range is from eighteen to seventy-three and all have attended traditional ESOL classes. Again, the refugees chose names that they liked whether they be Syrian or English and were happy for these to be used in conjunction with their photographs. Translators from the refugee council were used where appropriate and direct quotes from the refugees are indicated in quotation marks.

Entry one descriptors in the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001) State that at entry one adults can in speaking and listening,

- Listen and respond to spoken language including simple narratives, statements, questions and single step instructions
- Speak to communicate basic information, feelings and opinions on familiar topics
- Engage in discussion with another person in a familiar situation about familiar topics

Reading,

- Read and understand short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics
- Read and obtain information from common signs and symbols

Writing,

- Write to communicate information to an intended audience.

This is the level that most learners were assessed as being by formal education providers.

Case Study

Here my aim is to provide a snapshot of the classes attended by learners at the cooking sessions since 2017 related to both their learning experiences and the social realities they attend class with. I draw on field notes started in 2018 through to lockdown in March 2020 when face to face delivery ceased due to COVID – 19 restrictions.

The learners are between 17 and 70 and have been in the country for at least three years, they all have refugee leave to remain and have attended traditional ESOL

classes. This case study of my group reflects some sessions the refugee learners attended between January 2019 and March 2020. The learners undergo a basic initial assessment, reviews and target setting when they attend cooking although these targets are frequently soft targets. We also complete assessments to ensure that some progress is made as the learners have previously attended traditional ESOL classes which were not successful. The learners have limited support from the Refugee Council and the Syrian Support worker.

Snapshots of the class January 2019

Refugees attend cooking for the first time since Christmas, most have been in England for one year at least. There are ten people attending and all have refugee status. All the refugees keep halal dietary rules and so specific meat must be purchased. When we get the meat out there is a slight panic because it is in a Tesco bag and Tesco does not do Halal, I ask the translator how they know that it is Tesco, can they read it and she says "**no, they know what the picture of the word is**" (Fieldnotes, 21 January,2019). Once we sort out this dilemma there is a buzz as the refugees start to prepare the food. They ask, "**what this**?" (Field notes. Refugee 10. 21 January 2019), "**How you say this**?" "**You say this in Arabic, is hard**" (Field notes. Malan, 21 January 2019), I try, and they laugh. One learner asks about Christmas, "**what is this Christmas?**" (Field Notes. Amer, 21 January 2019). I explain writing key words down for them and tell them about Christmas food "**ah like Eid**" one says. We learn twenty words, write them down and they take them away to practice. "Please could you pass me the baking tray" I say, there is a look of horror on multiple faces, "**Bacon tray**?" says one as he backs away, "No", I say

slowly realising the implications “Baking not bacon, don’t worry!”. They laugh and discuss between themselves the difference between bacon and baking (Field Notes. 21 January 2019).

May 2019 Start of Ramadan

This is the last session before Ramadan starts, the session is tense with anticipation and the refugees are talking in Arabic about Ramadan. I ask them to tell me what they are talking about in English and slowly we write the words down. I probe them both to better understand and to encourage them to use the extended vocabulary. Malan says “**it is very good, you should do it, good for body and for faith**” (Field Notes, Malan, 03 May 2020),I say thank you but we have a similar but less dramatic fast at Easter, called Lent, the class ask questions about Easter, which again opens up an opportunity to ask simple questions and to write down key words and phrases whilst we discuss each other’s culture and religion. We talk about how they will break the fast and what they will eat.

June 2019

The first week back after Ramadan ends, the class is quiet and one of the refugees is very subdued. The class is lethargic and lack the usual eagerness to engage. I ask if they are ok and ask if Rachel is ok, she is quiet and pale and sitting in the corner of the annex to the kitchen. Mohammed says “**no, phone call last night, brother dead, she worries for her children**” I am startled by this and ask, “what children?” as I know she has three with her in England, “**ones left in Syria, too old to come**” he says. I wonder how she is expected to learn with the weight of this on her. (Field Notes, 6 June 2020).

December 2019

We are going to a local House and gardens for a treat day. The hall is decorated for Christmas and there are presents for the children. The bus is crackling with anticipation, they are excited for Christmas. We have talked about Christmas and they have learned words associated with Christmas so that they understand the festival. We are making mince pies which they tell me they love as they like sweet things. They also choose to make Syrian salad, so that we remember Syria. One learner wears the butler's top hat as they go around the house, they ask about the hall and we have made simple information sheets for them to complete. They write simple words themselves and show me with pride how well they are doing. Father Christmas has brought them all a present for which they thank him profusely "**shukran, shukran**" then also "**thank you, thank you**". Mohammed goes to wash up and there is suddenly chaos as the ancient plumbing gives up and cascades water all over him as he tries to stem it with his hands. There are shrieks and laughs and it gives us opportunities to talk about plumbing which was unexpected. (Field Notes, 19 December 2018).

December 2019

We attend a joint Christmas event with another provider. Ten refugees attend with their children, they eat sweets, play in artificial snow and make Christmas decorations. The adults join in and Ahmed writes on his decoration "**God bless Syria**" he covers it in glitter, they all say quietly, "**God bless Syria**" and look at the tree as they hang the decoration (Field Notes, December 20, 2019).

December 2019 Manal and Daldar bring me an envelope covered in the plastic wrap they have purchased the contents in, I open them and smile, the cards are for Christmas, they say, '**Happy Christmas to my Grandma**' and '**Happy Christmas to a wonderful Mum**'. We must work on this once we are back after Christmas. Inside, in halting English, they have written "**from your friends**". (Field Notes, December 21, 2019).

March 2020

Lockdown is announced, I have WhatsApp messages from the refugees "**what this**?", "**what we do**", "**can you help us Sophia**?". I note that there is panic in the tone, there is not enough understanding of the language to comprehend the Government's restrictions. I send out Government information sheets, but they are not user friendly. I make simplified versions with pictures to make it easier for the refugees. All classes cease and we communicate on the phone or WhatsApp. This is definitely not satisfactory, and it is clear that people needing support will need much more once the lockdown ends (Field Notes, March 2020).

Photographs

Photographs have been removed in order to protect the identity of the refugees. (FIeld photographs, Hannah 1. chopping in a cooking session.2019. JPEG.) Hannah 1 is a baker of sweets and cakes; she has been in England for two years. She is smiling in the photograph because she is doing something that is familiar and makes her feel safe. We are compiling a recipe book with favourite recipes, the story of the refugee's arrival in the United Kingdom, and photographs. This allows the refugees to practise their English whilst completing a practical task. Hannah

chose maamoul cookies for Eid to go in the recipe book. These are date filled and are a traditional and popular treat in Syria. Hannah explained that the biscuits are a favourite of her mother and she worked with me to write up the recipe for them to go in the cookbook we have created. As we did this over four weeks her English improved gradually as she carefully repeated the ingredients, went away with them written in a book and came back more confident to share the recipe with both myself and her peers. Hannah has been assessed at Entry One by the college but on reading the descriptors she is well below this level.

(Field photographs, Hannah 2, Miriam and Rachel at cooking. 2018.JPEG.)
Hannah 2, Miriam and Rachel are three ladies who have come from three different parts of Syria and all have different levels of education but who all have a desire to learn English. This photo shows them smiling after they have had a heated debate in Arabic over how much salt to add to the Syrian salad. This is a joke because they say it “is very healthy” and then laugh because, while they say it is “very delicious’ it is the vast amount of salt and oil that makes it so (Field Notes, Refugees 8,9,10. 20 May 2019, Seatown). Initially they were reserved, spoke Arabic and excluded me, but gradually they started to teach me the names of the vegetables they were using in Arabic. In order to do so they need to know the English and slowly they were able to repeat week after week the names of the vegetables in English, they then started to put it into sentences and finally to speak English the whole way through the session. We then put the recipe into the recipe booklet. The three women attended formal English classes but have stopped attending due to childcare issues. All three women were assessed as being Entry Level 1 however on reading the descriptors none were of that standard.

(Field photographs, Malan demonstrating cooking. 2018.JPEG)

Malan is a quiet lady who has four children. She has some very basic English and wants to work in a school. Malan was a teacher in Syria and in the photograph is showing another learner what to do. She is smiling in the photo but is sad because she knows that she will not go home to Syria. She likes to cook as many traditional dishes as possible and carries a notebook with her in which she captures words that she is unsure of. She then practices them multiple times until she knows them off by heart. She is not afraid to practise and to make mistakes because she says this makes her learn. She is cooking Kabseh which is a "**very delicious**" chicken dish. It needs a very particular blend of spices which we had to look for on the internet, this helped both her English and her I.T skills. The recipe has gone into the cookbook and she is proud that she has written it herself. She attended formal English classes but found the noise distracting so has not continued with them. Malan has been assessed at entry three but on reading the descriptors fits comfortably into the entry level two descriptor.

(Field photograph., Mohammed serving food.2018.JPEG)

Mohammed is in his seventies and has multiple health issues. He has two children and a much younger wife who is his carer. The children translate for the parents and tell me that he is very unhappy. He is a gentle man who tries to speak English but does not attend the English class because initially he rarely went out of the house. We encouraged him to attend cooking where he is so eager to help, he chops, washes vegetables, washes up, and feeds people because in his culture this is paramount, he tells me. When Mohammed is with his peers in a social situation, he

comes alive. This is especially evident when he dances to a traditional dance that the refugees love to do at the end of sessions and parties. Mohammed also loves parties and when he feels safe, he will speak more fluently. When Mohammed first arrived in England he was traumatised and would not speak, he can now speak in clear sentences and importantly make himself understood in shops which means he has established a network of acquaintances with whom he can spend an hour practising his English. Mohammed has been assessed as entry one but is not able to do the tasks which fit the descriptors. Mohammed is therefore below entry one.

(Field photographs, Mohammed 2, cooking. June 2019. JPEG).

Mohammed 2 is one of the more accomplished English speakers in the groups. He speaks Arabic and Kurdish and after three years enough English to hold a lengthy conversation. Mohammed owned his own factory in Syria and has a strong work ethic which is reflected in his desire to practise and speak English with his co - workers. He has gained employment cleaning caravans where he says he practises his English. Mohammed is pictured making stuffed vegetables which he tells me is one of his favourite dishes. He also points out that Kurdish food is more spicy than Arabic food. He is glad that his recipe is going in the cookbook because he will be able to show it to his newly born "**English son**", who he says sadly, will never see Syria. Mohammed is working at entry three and fits the descriptor but says he has learned this through working on the caravans and targeted one to one support rather than at college.

(Field photographs, Firas making salad. September 2018. JPEG).

Firas is a tradesman and has been in England for three years. He came to England with his wife and three children. When Firas first came to me he was unable to speak any English apart from hello, goodbye and thank you. Firas is a quiet man but he watched and listened carefully and tried to repeat what he heard so that he sounds like an English person. Firas is making a vegetable dish to go with breakfast and says it is so much better now he can go into a shop and ask for the things he needs for his family. Firas now works cleaning caravans and says it is easier now that he can speak with the people he works with. Firas and his family experienced abuse and he said that speaking some English made it easier to explain to the police what had happened rather than having to use an interpreter. He has enjoyed coming to cooking as he said it was a good place where he could talk. Firas has been assessed at entry one but he did not have the competencies to fit the descriptor.

(Field photographs, Rima smiling. November 2019.JPEG).

Rima is in her late fifties and came to England from Syria with two of her children. She does not speak any English and so any communication takes a long time and much gesturing. Rima is diabetic so she chose to cook savoury dishes and chose chicken shawarma for her recipe. She had not attended any ESOL classes because she said, through a translator that she was too scared. When asked what she feared, she said the noise and different people. She is unable to go shopping for anything other than fresh fruit or vegetables as she does not understand the language and people rush her. When she is shopping, she says she hands over money but does not know what it represents so may not be getting her correct change. We slowly went through the recipes with me speaking the words and her slowly repeating them until she remembered them. This is time consuming and frustration showed in her

face, but she kept trying and by the end of the time I had with her she was confident saying at least fifty words in English. Rima was assessed at entry one which is much more advanced than her skills would indicate.

(Field photgraphs, Amira and Iman baking. November 2018.JPEG).

Amira and Iman came to England at the same time three years ago but through very different circumstances. Amira and her family arrived from a refugee camp in Lebanon, she has three children aged between nine and seventeen years old. Amira had a basic education in Syria speaks Arabic and Kurdish which means she has experience of learning language. Amira has attended ESOL classes but was assigned to an Entry three class when if one looks at the ESOL curriculum she has the skills of someone below Entry Level one. Amira is not able to listen and respond, speak to communicate or engage in discussion, read and understand, read and obtain information, or write to communicate in English which are the level descriptors in the ESOL core curriculum for entry one. Amira has stopped attending the sessions as she has a new baby and cannot attend. When she did attend, through a translator Amira notes that the teacher spoke with a voice she could not follow as she spoke too quickly, and the class made her feel sad because she did not understand anything, so she sat quietly waiting for it to finish. Amira can say twenty basic words and has been aiming for ten words per session to increase her vocabulary. Amira has family remaining in Syria and she says she is sad because she will "**never see dayik (mother) again**" (Field Notes, Refugee 10. 25 November 2018. Beverley). She is smiling in the photo because she says she feels happy with people she knows. Amira chose Kubeh to include in the cookbook as she says it is her husband's favourite dish.

(Field photographs, Iman peeling potatoes. 10 April 2019.JPEG).

Iman arrived in England with three children and does not speak any English. She spent time in a refugee camp in Egypt before arriving in the United Kingdom. The family were lucky as they have been placed in the same town as Iman's brother and his family. She smiles and nods but can only say hello and goodbye which means that she is well below the descriptor for entry level one. Iman has been assigned to an entry level one class but says she sits and smiles because she does not know what else to do. She is smiling in the photo because she has been attending a Friday evening craft event with her children where English ladies have been trying to help her learn a few English words and she now walks to the session with an English lady who helps her with her English speaking. Iman also attends cooking where she is eager to help and join in, we have slowly been introducing words around food so that she can start to go to the shops and ask for an apple, a tomato or lettuce. Iman has had experience of her children being bullied at school because of their ethnicity and through a translator she says she found it frustrating when she could not say to the police the things she wanted to say.

(Field photographs, Kais smiling. 20 September 2018.JPEG).

Kais came to cooking classes within a week of arriving in the United Kingdom. Kais has a family consisting of three children and a wife who do not speak any English. Kais has a small amount of English, and while he fits some of the descriptors for entry one is not consistent in all areas. Kais was put into an Entry two class but stopped attending as it did not fit with his work pattern. Kais is a tradesman who quickly gained employment cleaning caravans as he did not need to speak any

English to do so and wanted to provide for his family. Kais has a strong work ethic and through a translator said that work was more important so that he could provide for his family. Kais attends cooking happily and works hard to pick up English words. His vocabulary has improved quickly and improves weekly as he has more exposure to native speakers. Kais chose to make a vegetable omelette breakfast dish for the recipe book.

(Field poptographs, Amar smiling and waving. 10 November 2018. JPEG).

Amar arrived in England after being in a refugee camp in Lebanon. He has a wife and three sons but also has family scattered through various refugee programmes across Europe. Amar was a teacher in Syria and has been placed in an Entry three class although he more readily fits the descriptors for entry one. Haltingly he says that the class is noisy and he does not always have time to write down in his book the things he needs to know. Amar says the teacher speaks quickly and does not always wait for the class to keep up. He says Arabic is hard but English is harder. He says he is frustrated because he wants to learn quickly but is unable as there are many people in the class who need different things. When engaged in group tasks Amar tries to help those less able than himself and can be seen writing notes so that he can practise at home. In order to do that he needs the teacher to work slowly and to be patient with him. Amar chose to make Kufta Kebab as he says a man needs meat.

(Field photographs, Jamal and Yara smiling. 13 December 2018.JPEG).

Jamal and Yara have been in England for six months. They arrived from a refugee camp in Egypt with no English. They were assessed as being entry level one but do not have the language skills to uphold this assessment. Jamal is a cheesemaker and

decorator and Yara is a housewife. They have had a basic education in Syria but did not live in a city where they were more likely to advance their education. These learners want to be able to speak to the teacher at school so that they can follow their child's progress but do not like the classes. They think that they will learn more through coming to cooking and community learning where they are not constrained by the other people in the class with different needs. Jamal has started working and says that at first, he was shy and quiet but has now picked up some words and feels he can try speaking to his peers.

Informal learning

Included in this group are the groups that I run in community learning. These are non-accredited courses and groups based around community learning models. A basic form of initial assessment is completed and recorded so that anyone who comes in and works with the refugees has an idea of their needs, be they educational or social. The refugees also have a simple individual learning plan where, after basic discussions, easy targets are recorded. Examples include " **I want to be able to say ten new words each time I come see you**" " **I want to learn English for every day, like hello how are you, what is your name, my name is , so I show you recipes you show me English, deal?**" "**my children speak for me; I want to go to the shop and know what names of what I buy**". These are then converted into specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART) targets that are specific to each learner. These are reviewed and recorded along with photographic evidence which is completed once a consent form has been signed. The learners attend sessions where the focus may be one thing, for example cooking, but can be gardening, painting, pottery making or sewing, any practical

activity where the pressure of completing the set targets is removed but learning still occurs. If then a target is to learn ten new words each session that can be incorporated into the session. So, to use the cooking situation, the learners came to help me write a cookbook of Syrian recipes but at the same time learned the name of kitchen equipment and fruit and vegetables or the refugees came to cook a meal for the community and again, they learn the English name for the food we use. In repeating these tasks in following weeks, the refugees learn and retain new words in much the same way a baby learns to speak and to use language. Classes run at times that suit the refugees and a creche is offered so that no one is disadvantaged. The courses are free and can be fluid enough to work for those who have some skills or those with no skills. A downside of this sort of provision is that tutors are not always well qualified, and funding is sporadic which can lead to classes not running. The Key workers then completed a SWAT (Field notes, SWAT analysis, January 2020, Seatown) analysis on the available provision to identify areas of strength and weakness. The results were as follows;

Strengths of the provision are that volunteers are willing and frequently qualified; the volunteers understand the learners needs because they were previously working with other Middle Eastern refugees. Partnership working is also a strength as a network of informal providers has been created and is a source of support and expertise. Inherent to this is the knowledge of the practitioners who work with the refugees.

Weaknesses include service limitations and conflicts within remits making it difficult for cohesive provision to be rolled out to learners. This is especially evident in formal provision rather than informal provision. Lack of accessible provision for learners is also a barrier as refugees need to be able to get to a course, have a time

that is suitable, not just one set time so that if child care is not available parents can alternate their course attendance, although this is contentious, as it is not a cultural norm in Syria to leave a child with anyone except family and so many of those newly arriving from Syria find leaving their children distressing. If course fees are imposed for provision, those on low incomes must choose who is going to attend the class which is often found to be the father as he is the main source of income in the family. Also important is the commitment from local employers who do not always provide time off for classes, have translations of Health and Safety available and are not always aware of cultural needs.

Opportunities lie within the area of volunteer development where more informal language clubs could be organised. This could include peer learning where those who have managed to gain some English language skills and have cultural understanding share their sensitivity to the struggle encountered by many in language learning. Wider partnerships could be created to share resources, and this includes peers from different geographical locations. A further opportunity would be to develop training packages specifically for refugees. This would not necessarily include language learning as individuals have very different needs and reactions to their circumstances, rather something which would foster inclusivity by cultural norms.

Threats identified by the Key Worker are client apathy caused by many reasons including low aspiration, low confidence and feelings of failure after attending traditional ESOL classes but not making progress. Refugees from war torn areas also frequently live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which makes learning difficult. Funding, or lack of funding, also makes language learning difficult as courses have continued to be cut and charities do not have the funding to run

support classes because whilst volunteers can be plentiful suitable premises, insurances, and resources all have a cost. The geography of the area in question is large and transport is not always good. The refugees initially do not drive and indeed until they have enough English language skills will not be able to pass the practical or the theory aspect of the test. This also causes problems once they have passed the test as they do not understand properly the rules of the road when asked about driving in Syria they laughed and said, "**Oh just get in car and go, no rules, all is rules in England, who knows**" (Field notes, Refugee 8, 20 May 2019, Seatown). This means they cannot safely get to widely spread learning centres as they depend on poor public transport provision. Organisational policies, written for the organisation rather than for the learner, suit the organisation but rarely the learner, are frequently barriers to learning.

Discussions with Syrian Key Workers

I have worked with the Syrian Key Worker over the past three years and the recently appointed key worker specifically appointed to work specifically with women. The workers have previously expressed concerns that the refugees were not making the progress expected of them but were unsure as to why this should be. This resonated with my experiences and as a starting point we worked together to collate the provision available to the refugees locally, noting times, days and accessibility. This was completed before we went into lock down and completed face to face. The Syrian key worker had been concerned for some time that refugees were dropping out of classes and were still not making good progress despite some interventions being put in place designed to make classes more accessible. The interventions, such as paying for additional childcare or transport were decided on by various key

workers and were based on their views of refugees needs. In the region there are twelve different potential sources of ESOL provision both formal and informal. The information regarding these groups was gathered by speaking to workers in the Refugee Council and indeed refugees themselves. The provision includes the following:

Conversation groups.

These are informal groups which are volunteer led and meet in four locations. The clubs offer a basic level of English practise and some informal English teaching and are non-accredited. There is no expectation of any previous language skills and the classes are free. The groups also offer orientation and, crucially, cultural discussion which encourages integration. There is no formal enrolment process, no use of a formal curriculum or use of individual learning plans. Refugees can meet and have fun in an informal setting. Whilst attending the conversation group it was noted that the refugees were relaxed and learned as a whole family. Simple nursery rhymes and songs were enjoyed by adults as much as children, and parents were happy to sing along and learn the English with their children. The refugees were relaxed and said they felt able to try speaking English as there was no pressure to do so (Field Notes, 2019). People were happy to correct each other which is encouraging to the person who can make helpful suggestions or who know the answer to something as simple as how to say bread or apple. The conversation clubs are specifically for Syrian refugees and therefore, participants do not have to contend with other cultures or languages which at this early stage can be distracting. Conversation clubs can be held for any nationality and does not prohibit mixing different cultures and languages but feedback from the refugees indicates that they are more

confident, at this stage, within their own language and culture. One refugee said " **It is good, no shouting, can say my way what I need, no laughs**"(Field Notes, Mohammed 3, June 2019, Seatown) another noted that she did not feel pressured because she knew what was expected of her within the group without wondering how to behave with other people (Field Notes, Daldar, May 2019, Seatown). The volunteers, who are mainly ex teachers, say they are able to get to know the refugees and therefore be more helpful in understanding their specific needs. Refugees leave the clubs happy as they dance to Syrian music as a group, make Syrian coffee and chatter in emerging English with their peers, friends and families. Crucially they are ready to try a few words of English in front of their peers and leave feeling positive with their progress.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a positive experience for many of the refugees because they talk of feeling useful and secondly, because they can listen with no pressure to speak until they feel confident and ready. In the area there have been two strands to the volunteering project. There is an expectation that refugees can speak a small amount of English for safety purposes, but refugees are not excluded if they lack English speaking skills as induction material is translated, and the volunteering is a free activity which means no-one is excluded. This is important to the refugees who are, at this stage, on a limited budget. Most of the men have experience in trades in Syria, ranging from making ladies shoes, tile laying, to baking and decorating and are used to being busy and useful. The men expressed interest in a project where a house was renovated inside as they could work alongside English workers. This allowed the learners to learn English words for everyday tools and decorating

necessities whilst encouraging them to see the ways, in which the English workers performed their tasks and observe, expectations as a worker in England. As noted, "**very different Sophia, not like home**" (Field Notes, Ibrahim, 23 May 2019). This means men were equipped to work on similar projects as they were beginning to gain the language skills and understand cultural expectations which differed, significantly, to those of Syria. Interestingly, the men felt more confident after learning basic things such as how to say "fancy a cuppa" rather than the more formal "would you like a cup of tea or coffee" which they felt distanced them from their peers/colleagues (Field Notes, Seatown, 2019).

Some of the women wanted to work with children and therefore needed to improve their vocabulary around working in schools. This was slightly more problematic as, application for DBS checks is required but this also gave more time for the women to improve the targeted vocabulary. In both instances, barriers included lack of available dual translation material on Health and Safety, Safeguarding and Prevent in the case of school. Translation services are not always available as they are expensive and can take a long time, which again is frustrating for learners who want to practise their English and get on with practical tasks.

Further Education

This includes local colleges, one in a small coastal town and one in a large market town. Harrison,(2017) and Selby, (2018) note that most ESOL teaching takes place in further education (FE) colleges. Noting;

"English is the key to finding decent work and having the option to integrate into their new community (ibid)" and classes can include areas covering survival English, functional English, specific speaking and listening skills and sociocultural information

(British Council, 2020). Classes also include a specific curriculum which includes levels ranging from Entry three to Level 2. As discussed earlier, certain expectations around English speaking skills are required, “A very basic knowledge of English” (eastridingcollege,2020), and if learners do not fit into certain categories, they incur fees which puts a strain on an already limited budget. Learners undertake initial assessments and work to targets indicated by their results. The classes are accredited and cover the range from Entry 1 to Level Two depending on the learner’s ability. The curriculum is broken into speaking, listening, reading and writing. The sessions are taught in a classroom and include a range of sexes and cultures. Comments from learners indicate that they find this confusing and often distressing. “ **I cannot find someone for my little boy- he needs mame, no good**” (Field Notes, Maria? m, November 2018, Seatown) “ **It is loud, men shout, sit at the front, I can not talk**” (Field Notes, Hiam, May 2019, Seatown)“ **I feel hot and scared, it is loud, I do not want to talk, too many people, too many different people, not going**” (Field Notes, Philomena, September 2019), “**I want to know how you say, come to my house for coffee and how you say is my boy good at school, not writing, writing, writing, no good, help us**” (Field Notes, Eliza, November 2018, Seatown). Traditional ESOL lessons appear to be failing these learners because it is forcing their needs to fit the provision available rather than fitting the provision to the learners needs. Traditional ESOL is the next stage for the learners who need in the first instance the start -up provision I have described above what I call, “emergency ESOL”.

Adult Learning

Adult Learning at various centres in the region offers ESOL classes but again certain restrictions apply. Provision is based round the ESOL core curriculum, accredited and again expects refugee learners to already have some English language skills. There is a lack of provision for those with pre -entry level needs. The refugees, if they are enrolled onto the courses, complete conversation, speaking, reading and writing. Again, they are assessed at a higher level than the refugee's initial assessment would indicate. Fees apply if refugees do not fit in certain categories. Classes tend to be held on an evening in centralised centres which can be difficult for those relying on public transport. There can be multiple languages, cultures and levels in one class which makes it difficult for those who are already struggling. Teachers tend to be second language speakers; in some of the classes I observed the teachers were Russian and Polish. This seemed to make classes difficult for very basic speakers as they could not understand the English when spoken by teachers who although well trained had very pronounced accents which left refugee learners struggling to make themselves understood and for teachers to understand the refugees. One class was taught by a trainee teacher who as a second language speaker struggled in setting targets for the learners as she had to use an interpreter which doubts the efficacy of the process. Again, as in the college experience learners said the class was "**noisy**", "**too much, too fast**", "**many men talking over us**", "**I want to listen and try what I hear, not write and do work**" (Field Notes, July 2019). Classes were frequently cancelled and there was a lack of provision for childcare. In support of the learning process, one teacher said that she felt sad that she could not provide more, but with four different levels in one class she could not do the best for everyone, and, as there was a financial incentive to get people

through tests she had to focus on those most targeted for funding (Field Notes, 2018). The learners ranged from those with very basic English to Level Two and when talking to the refugee learners it became obvious that there were people who had high levels of learning in their own countries. In one class there were learners who had no English and little education in their own country whilst others in the same group had degrees and taught in their home country. The teacher of the ESOL class had been a University tutor and was used to working with a very different group of learners who did not span such a vast educational range.

Sports teams

Sports teams offer informal support where English can be practised in a limited way whilst encouraging integration. These are informal with no initial assessments or individual learning plans. Sports teams tend to be of the same gender so do not encourage cultural integration however, it is a good place for the younger generation to make English friends and to practise their English without pressure. Many of the younger Syrian refugees attend boxing clubs, gyms and football clubs. The refugees tend to have a grasp of English and being younger feel more confident to practise what they are learning. When asked how they help their parents to communicate they all said that they translate for their parents rather than encouraging their parents to speak more English. Asked why they do not speak English to their parents to encourage English speaking practice they say " **no they do not learn quickly, they are too slow**" (Field Notes, Ahmad, May 2020), ' **we speak English and they speak Arabic- what can you do**"

(Field Notes, Ayman, April 2020) and "**it is easier to do it for them, they see us speak but they do not try**" (Field Notes, Ahmad, January 2020). A couple of fathers

attend the sports clubs or gyms and it is noticeable how they try to speak English when they are with their children but revert to Arabic or Kurdish, when they go home.

Women's Groups

Women's groups are free and offer non accredited English-speaking practice. There are no initial assessments or learning plans and like the conversation clubs are run by volunteers. They are not inclusive as they are the same gender and do not, at this stage, encourage integration however, they allow female refugees to practise their English in a non- judgemental and safe environment. They are a safe space for women who, in a very different world, can relax in a group and culture that they understand. Whilst equality and diversity are to be encouraged it must be recognised that Syrian refugees have very different cultures and traditions and need time to make the change, or to understand the Western traditions and cultures. Women's Groups encourage non accredited English speaking, arts, crafts and gardening. They also offer support for those with medical needs and pregnancy issues.

Chapter 5

Themes and Analysis

The analysis focuses mainly on the perceptions of the students regarding their ESOL experience and that of the support workers from the Syrian Key workers and the Refugee council. I have tried to include available provision and how refugees' needs are being met, constraints met by the refugees, and wider support. I started the research noting Wittgenstein's (1922) words, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world" and my intention is that this research will reflect how important this is to the refugee learners I have been working with, and how their world is still very much limited by the failings of the system providing conventional ESOL classes.

What is revealed about the needs of the refugees?

The refugee learners consistently expressed a need for more adaptability and control over their ESOL experience. The learners have experienced little autonomy over their lives since the war in Syria started. This means that the process of moving to the United Kingdom has been done to them, rather than, with them. This is reflected in much of the research discussed in the literature review and background and context of the thesis (Ali, 2016; Allen, 2015; Belgutay, 2019; British Council 2016, Dennis 2016, DFEE 2013, Hamilton and Hillier 2009, Piller 2018, Refugee Council 2018). The learners have been issued with a home, utilities, clothes, furniture, food but all note that there was no choice available to them (Field notes 2018-2020). In the same way they express dissatisfaction with the ESOL classes, noting that there is no choice in the timing, or day, of the class. Universally the refugee learners agree that they feel they are ignored when they tell people that the

class is not fulfilling their needs and because of this they do not want to speak out when things are going wrong as they feel overlooked. Malan says, "**What is the reason for speaking, we are silent, my voice not hearing"** (Field Notes, January 2019). If three quarters of a million people, as noted in a previous chapter, can speak little or no English (BBC, 2019) clearly their needs are not being met by conventional ESOL classes which leads to frustration and general resentment, this mirrors the findings of Halima Ali in her report of 2016. This will continue to be a concern as families are still arriving from Syria and the Sudan and facing the same challenges. As noted in Chapter One, it is essential that the refugee learners have a basic knowledge of the host societies language in order to start to integrate and make a home. This is reinforced by the British Council (2016) who point out that without adequate language instruction learners will have very limited options. This is acknowledged by Dame Caroline Spelman (2017) who promotes language learning as being invaluable in ensuring that people can get out of the house, do the shopping and mix with other people. Refugee Action (2019) referred to in Chapter Two also noted that education is essential for stability and the ability to work and provide for the family which is a basic need which needs to be fulfilled before further progress can be made, this is further promoted by Haughton, Lowson, Morgan and Ryan (2017). Awad (2017)in the same chapter, also promotes language as being an equaliser and a bridge between communities. This was very evident when observing the learners coming together in community classes and through community support.

Integration

Integration is essential to forming a new life as previously noted by multiple sources (British Council 2016, Spelman 2017, Refugee Action 2019). All the refugees

included in my research have been sent to one of three towns in the north of England. This is due to the government's policy for resettling Syrian refugees but again they were offered no choice in where to go meaning that family members have ended up in different areas of the United Kingdom or Europe. Most of the refugees have experienced a long resettlement process (Tavares and Slotin, 2012) which leads to Clark Tasimu (2017) noting that students have multiple additional needs which need addressing before integration can be achieved (Ali, 2016; British Council, 2016; Chadwick, 2016; Council of Europe, 2019; Dennis, 2016; Foster and Bolton, 2018). Opportunities that are not presently being offered are needed in order for integration into the community to be achieved and to enable connections to be made which would provide opportunities to meet and make friends, to speak in English and to maximise the English provision offered. This is argued by Haughton, Lowson, Morgan and Ryan (2017) and Thickpenny (2017) continues the discussion as he points out that the system does not at present support integration. All the refugees expressed a desire to learn English so that they could be a part of the community, fit in and integrate. In Chapter Two I noted that Joel Bubbers from the British Council in Syria wanted refugees to gain language skills as this enables communication and the capacity for understanding between communities. In support of this all the refugees recognised that to fit in and make a life in the United Kingdom they needed to learn and practise English as most had little or no fluency in English. Mohammed is waiting to be a father and wants to be able to speak with his English boy "**my boy English, I need speak English"** (Field notes 2019) and Amar needs to speak English to support his aging mother.

Emotional Support

Refugee learners have arrived from many camps around the world as previously noted by Dennis in 2016. They have experienced multiple traumas in their move to a new life which has left more than language learning needs. Taylor (2017) notes that culture shock changes every aspect of daily life, affecting the nervous system, releasing cortisol and negatively affecting the brain. Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) Randall and Lutz (1991), Margaritis(2016), Nicholson and Walker (2010) and Kleinmann (1983) also back up this assertion and list manifestations of possible complications. The learners are happy to talk about their lives before they arrived in England and it is clear that there have been many traumatic experiences, for example the lady who lost her brother the night before and was expected to do an ESOL class the next day, the family who would never see their parents again and the mother who had had to leave adult children behind. It is clear that before the refugees are in a position to concentrate on learning English, they need support with health issues and mental health concerns, Hanna- "**I am waiting for the bombs, all the time, children outside , waiting for the bombs**" (Field Notes, Hanna, 21 May 2018) and Mohammed, " **We safe but still we listen for guns**" (`Field Notes, Mohammed 1. 12 October 2018). These circumstances could in turn lead to repressed emotions leading to many support needs as discussed by Coon (2005) and Westermeyer and Ueker (1997).

How are students' needs being met?

All the refugees have experienced uncertainty for an extended period and loss of control and therefore they feel insecure emotionally, physically and mentally (UN

High Commissioner for Refugees,2018). This leads to a need for structure and choice so that the refugees have some control over their lives. In order to achieve this there is a desire to learn English and a frustration that the motivation they initially feel wanes when they experience the reality of the ESOL class. ESOL needs are reinforced in *A New Approach to ESOL* (NATECLA 2009) as discussed previously in Chapter One, and the refugee learner's reaction to ESOL classes reinforces the lack of cognisance of individual needs and circumstances when planning classes and curriculum. Piller (2018) also recognises that governments of the receiving societies want to educate the refugee learners but are unable to apply the theory to real learners rather than their one-dimensional images of refugees' needs. In Chapter One Thickpenny (2017) reinforces this notion as he says provision does not meet learners needs as a one size fits all method is not adequate. This is reinforced in the learner's accounts of their journeys and classes and literature in the literature review. Belgutay (2019) points out that there is a focus on developing resources for pre-entry level learners with a focus on the needs of the refugee learners, although this has not come to fruition at the end of Winter 2020, this is also noted by Timm (2016) and Robertson (2008). One woman says, "**English very easy, class very hard, I just need practice, listen, speak**" (Field Notes, Malan, March 2019) Mohammed 2 says "**I found job, better than class, I speak there**" (Field Notes, Mohammed 2, 25 Feb, 2019).

Self-motivation to learn English

Self-motivation and enthusiasm are not lacking in the refugees included in this research however, as previously discussed 80% of providers still have waiting lists and 66% note this is due to lack of funding (NATECLA 2014) which means that while

motivation is good, opportunities to access classes are limited. Initially the attendance was good at traditional ESOL classes only waning when frustration entered the equation (Field notes 2020). As one lady said, "**Three hours a week not enough, we forget, no reason to go**" (Field Notes, Firas, 1 October 2018). The Syrian Key worker notes that the refugees have questioned him on multiple occasions about the possibility of different classes and the Refugee Council (2018) also expressed similar sentiments. Informal classes however have high attendance rates and find consistency in attendance as they are more able to change class times and days in accordance with the diverse and changing needs of the refugees.

Informal learning and networks

Over the course of the research, I asked the refugees about their informal learning, posing the question, what do you think you do to learn at home or when you meet at drop ins? There was a consensus around watching television, particularly American television, speaking with their children who become proficient in English very easily, speaking with friends and trying to read English adverts (Field notes, 2020). There was also agreement that going to cooking sessions helped because the learners could ask questions specifically regarding their needs (Field Notes, 2018-2020). Informal learning takes place, and it allows for many learning opportunities that are outside the formal educational framework. It is at this stage that progress can be made which will lay the foundation for more formal learning (Haughton et al, 2017; Martin, 2016). Learning by stealth through cooking, gardening or practical tasks has the potential to develop both practical and language skills.

One area that the refugees have control over is who they make friends with. They may have arbitrarily been put with a neighbour with whom they have nothing in common, but the benefit is that new friendships are formed and opportunities for speaking English with someone who understands the difficulty they experience is made possible. One lady, a teacher in Syria was housed near a lady who was a beautician. In Syria they say they would maybe not mix but in England they help each other with different aspects of life in the United Kingdom and practise English together. The women attend an informal session together where they cook a Syrian dish and write the recipe in English. They then take what they have learned and develop other refugees' abilities through shared experience, and this is reflected in Besiers (1999) work on the significance and importance of shared experience. Sharing experiences with those from similar backgrounds, particularly linguistic ones, allows for the greater possibility of navigating living in the United Kingdom. Church groups offer social opportunities for the Syrians to meet local people and attend community events. Spelman (2017) and Burke (2018) note that informal support is not consistent with varying degrees of quality and effectiveness, but also that there are plans for community based English language programmes and networks of conversation clubs where quality could be maintained. As there is no mosque in the area the Syrians live, the opportunity for collective worship has been denied to them and food is also an issue and so a group drive through to a larger city where Halal meat can be purchased. Until someone learned to drive this involved a lengthy train journey but through collaboration this was achieved and offered an opportunity to speak English in a different setting. (Field Notes, 2018-2020)

Material Needs

Although the material needs of the refugee learners have been met on a basic level and they have a place of safety, for some those houses have become a barrier to learning English. Mohammed and his wife rarely leave the house as he has health issues, and she cares for him. He has not learned any English and she relies on her sons to translate for her. She cannot attend ESOL and does not have neighbours who she can meet with. Financially they are on the minimum benefits which means they have enough for survival but not for extras where she may have more opportunities to speak English (Field Notes, 2018-2020).

Barriers and constraints

Most of the refugees in my research have undergone traumatic experiences and this carries over into life in the United Kingdom. Piller (2016) notes this in her work where she experiences similar concerns with her learners. Learning English in a formal manner becomes less important when people are in a state of anxiety about those they have left behind in Syria or those in other countries. There is limited support available for those suffering trauma and mental health needs and this lack of support can be observed in their behaviour. This can manifest as lack of trust, distraction, aggressiveness and hostility. Unfortunately, translators are expensive and so frequently are unavailable when the refugee learners need to talk about their concerns. Unless the provider has similar experiences and culture it is very difficult to understand the trauma experienced by these learners whilst in, and travelling from, Syria. (Field Notes, 2018-2020). This is reinforced by Schunk (2012) in the literature review who points to the correlation between low self-image, scholastic

competence and inability to cope in their new home country. Barriers are also imposed by constraints with the education system itself (Marsden, 2018) such as means testing, eligibility, childcare, lack of classes, lack of financial support and lack of classroom support (BBC, 2019; Casey, 2016; Cole, 2009; UNHCR 2018). Spelman (2017) upholds this further as she notes that without the target language of English leads to further separation from their neighbours. Pickles (2012) also points to lacking English skills being a barrier to taking part in their community and the wider economy. PTSD is also cited as a barrier (Refugee Action, 2017; UNHCR, 2013; Coon, 2005; Westermeyer and Ucker, 1997) and this needs culturally responsive teaching rather than a deficit model. Those who are excluded from education face further barriers through the lack of translation services (Casey, 2016; Highton et al, 2019; LGBT, 2019; Lefroy, 2017; Spelman, 2016) this impacts on children who act as informal translators (Narchal, 2018; The Children's Society, 2019; Apolitical, 2020).

Gender

Gender plays a part in accessing services, as in the Syrian culture the mother looks after the children and the home, Malan says " **I am very busy for class, I have to cook and clean and look after my children, no time, no time**" (Field Notes, 3 April, 2019) and Shadya "**Oh no more class and I have English baby so no more learning**" (Field Notes, 3 April, 2019). This echoes the findings of the Casey (2016) report discussed in chapter 1, and Refugee Action in Chapter 2. The refugees, both men and women, are happy to come and cook in informal sessions together because they can talk, socialise and eat. Once the men gain employment then the attendance wanes even, if the job is part time, with the women reverting to cooking

them a meal to take home. Traditional classes at the college have a higher male attendance as initially the men need to speak English in order to start work or to pass a driving test. The classes are also at a more accessible time for the men who do not have childcare responsibilities (Field Notes, 2018-2020). Refugee Action (2016), U.K Parliament (2018) Haughton, Lowson, Morgan and Ryan (2017) and Piller (2018) also acknowledge the difficulty women have in attending ESOL classes and this supports the sentiments echoed by both the refugee learners and their support workers. Women also do not want to leave their immediate area and go to classes due to lack of confidence and potential safety issues (DFID, 2015).

Social activities

Although the Refugee council provide a certain level of support the refugee learners say they lack social activities which would give them the opportunity to meet others and to practise their English speaking. They do not have anywhere to meet and so the cooking sessions allows them the time and space to meet, chat and eat together in a social situation. This has been recognised by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) but little seems to have been done to address the lack of opportunities. The refugee learners invite anyone in the building to join them for the meal, to eat, to chat and to tell stories of Syria and their culture. Included in the social activities has been the creation of a cookbook which tells the story of each family and their favourite dish. This serves a dual purpose to improve their English and to make others aware of the story behind their arrival in the United Kingdom. This echoes Erden (2016) and the Council of Europe (2015) who also call for more social events providing opportunities for progression to formal learning but

at a later stage. Unfortunately, as of Autumn 2020 any social activities have been totally curtailed due to the Covid 19- lockdown. (Field Notes, 2018-2020)

Racism

The lack of integration is heightened for a family who experienced pronounced racism leading to their refusal to leave the house. The learners do not have the language skills to speak with their neighbours or to reason with them (Taylor 2017). "**They pushed wife to the ground, she hurt arm, she could not say stop**" (Field Notes. Amar, 01 July 2020) and "**My wife took daughter cooking, they say, she took food, she helping, not take, could not say, say, crying**" (Field Notes. Amar,01 July 2020). The comments illustrate the need for basic language to be taught swiftly, if for no other reason than for safety and basic communication (Field Notes 2018-2020). Bensemen (2014) already discussed in Chapter Two reinforces the notion of the impact on the refugee learners when he notes that this lack of communication can lead to an underclass of refugees who are open to direct and indirect discrimination.

Legal, education, medical and language support

The refugees have basic support from the Refugee Council and the Syrian Key Worker but this is for a limited time. Learners have pressing needs but lack the language skills to cope with this as noted by the British Council (2016) and Mallows (2016). Formal letters are written in language that many native speakers would struggle to understand and as Casey (2016) notes this reinforces the notion of further trauma for children who are too young to translate but who, having more advanced English language speaking abilities, have to translate. This means that

important meetings are missed, and health can suffer, or benefits are lost (Piller, 2016). The refugees frequently have queries and concerns which need to be dealt with before we start learning and cooking. Learners do not have the language skills to tell the doctor or dentist what is wrong and frequently do not have access to translation services (Field Notes, 2018-2020) (British Council, 2016).

Classroom culture

In Chapter two I noted that Jenny Scott (2012) was vocal in her promotion of language learning that did not focus on grammar, rather the need for confidence to perform specific tasks, that formal learning could be achieved at a later date. It was also noted that if the basic hours allowed for ESOL were attended it would take at least eight years of progress for an adequate standard of English language to be achieved. This does not happen and there are still nearly a million people in the United Kingdom who do not have, or have poor, English language skills (ONS, 2014). If, as noted by Casta (2019) formal classes put pressure on an already pressured people, informal community classes provide support where pressure is less, and more support can be given. The refugees attend a weekly cooking session with me, and the session is well structured with set protocols for politeness, punctuality and attendance. The sessions centre round cooking a meal but allow for informal learning, where the focus of the session is not learning English but nonetheless this happens throughout the session (Sharp, 2012) in a naturalistic and relevant manner. The refugees also attend a drop-in which has less structure and there is a further opportunity to bring comments and learn how to contact structures such as the doctor, dentist or job centre. Faisal had chronic toothache for two months until he came to cook, and we were able to show him, and therefore others,

how to make an appointment at the dentist and what to say in other similar situations. Saeed needed to make an appointment for his wife as her legs were hurting but did not know how to phone the doctor and ask for an appointment, we managed to write a simple guide so that he could follow the steps himself once we had shown him what to do. We have tried to keep other issues outside of the learning environment however, it has been more productive to use the issues as part of the learning environment as they are relevant to the learner.

The aim of the sessions is to create a safe, stable space for the refugees where they can learn English that they feel they need, in opposition to the unstable and uncertain environments they have left in Syria. The refugees feel comfortable and safe to share their experiences in the sessions and this allows for deeper and more relevant language learning. In learning a new language, the refugees gain a new voice which will allow them to make the language real and meaningful to themselves and their life. At the start of the sessions it was obvious that the refugees were struggling to make meaning through their new language of English and communication with others was difficult. This has gradually changed as the refugees bring their experiences and feelings into the sessions and as they start to explore ways to communicate and explore their new culture (Field Notes, 2018-2020).

Peer friendship

There is a strong culture of friendship within the Syrian refugees’ groups which helps them to create social activities outside of the classroom. Two ladies meet and practice their English on a weekly basis and find recipes to teach to peers in the cooking sessions. The men meet for coffee and chat and review the language they have learned through employment. This means that the refugees have freedom to

explore their linguistic resources in an informal situation (Guardian, 2016) (Refugee Action, 2019) (Marsden, 2018) (Lai, 2017) (Kleinmann, 2017). The refugee learners also use English in local shops which are receptive to their practising while purchasing groceries. Humour is also evident when refugees acquire English skills and they laugh with each other as they practise and make mistakes. In contrast to this, learners reflect, that in formal ESOL classes they do not feel able to laugh and instead feel tense and anxious, "**I do not laugh in the class, too noisy, not happy place**" (Field Notes, 23 May, 2019).

Lack of language support

Although ESOL classes are mandatory in many cases there is a lack of support in these classes (British Council, 2016). The Refugee Council offer limited support across the region, but this is not consistent either in quality or support offered (Narchal, 2018; The Children's Society, 2019; Casey, 2016; Mcleod. 2018). Drop -ins are cancelled with no notice and refugees are left with translation issues that need to be dealt with (Field notes, 2020). The Syrian Key worker has been unable to offer any face-to-face support during the national lockdown and the refugees have been unable to access volunteer support or cooking due to the same restrictions. Support has been offered over the phone and latterly in the garden however issues that were there before the lockdown and the inability to communicate, has been heightened by the lockdown. This highlights similar responses from the refugees indicating that they have specific needs in relation to ESOL and learning English. The refugees are on the whole eager to learn English on arrival in England but this enthusiasm wanes when they encounter classes that they feel are not catering to their needs. Some refugees also have limited educational levels in their own language which also

makes learning in formal classes more difficult. De Capua and Marshall (2015) in Chapter two reinforce this notion as learners who leave education at around age fourteen need to be taught in a culturally responsive way rather than being seen as a deficit. Once the refugee learners are engaged in community learning where there is less pressure and there is more response to individual needs through enhanced support, commitment to learning improves. This has previously been noted by Fisher (2019), Refugee Action (2017). The refugees enjoy the community aspect and the experiences this brings in learning by stealth. It is recognised that it is necessary for the refugees to learn English but there is a need for this to be rethought as there are still over a million people in England who are unable to speak English or who are not making satisfactory progress. As previously discussed in the literature review 863,00 with very poor English skills and 138000 with no skills at all (ONS, 2014). Funding has been cut by 60% (Marsden, 2018) and therefore new and innovative ways need to be found so that the number of refugee learners who are not able to speak English does not grow. This research aim of investigating the value of experiential/informal learning with Syrian refugees in the ESOL context is an important part of the learning process, but this is expanded to recognise the complex needs experienced by the refugees who have multiple barriers to learning English particularly in a traditional language class.

It is clear that as we look at the data and analysis that a set of occurring themes occur that are relevant to all the refugees including lack of choice and uncertainty which clouds so much of their experience both in Syria and the United Kingdom The needs the refugees have, and the underlying issues that have been experienced have an impact on the ability to learn English and their integration into British society (Collyer et al., 2018; Degler and Liebig, 2017; OECD, 2016). The

refugees note that although they are safe and now feel secure there are constraints to integration and learning English which means their needs are not being adequately met. There is a desire to address these needs by support agencies and learners, however, inter-agency support seems to be lacking effective support for language teaching. This in turn hinders integration as learners' needs change as they gain more skills. This then leads to greater confidence and a greater desire to take part in more active learning. The refugees all live in small towns, away from large cities, which have only recently been designated as an area for refugee dispersal. This means that the towns were not prepared for refugees to arrive with a wide range of learning needs and communication issues.

The refugee's basic needs are met and there is also basic support offered through the Refugee council and Syrian Key Worker. My research indicates that the refugees have a desire to learn and are at first eager to learn English. Language support that is focussed on the diverse needs of the refugees including much informal support is effective (Morrice, Tip, Collyer, and Brown, 2019). The learners are not particularly happy with the traditional provision that they are offered, mainly because of the loud classes, the swift pace of the tutor and the lack of flexibility in class timing. When we analyse their needs, it is clear that more opportunities to engage in learning emergency English would enable them to engage more fully in British life and would allow them further opportunities to speak English with their peers and neighbours as refugees with poor language skills risk exclusion or long-term dependency (Collyer et al, 2018). This chimes with Benseman who in chapter two notes that it can take four years to get comfortable in survival English. Social networks enable refugees to access peer support, language learning and access to statutory services which accelerates the language learning process (Cheung and

Phillimore, 2016). This would allow the refugees the opportunity to communicate their experiences and feelings and achieve basic tasks such as shopping or to apply for jobs (Degler and Liebig, 2017). They would also benefit from enhanced cultural knowledge, information and advice rather than adhering to a centrally designed curricula and government targets. The lack of a cohesive supportive learning environment does not help the learners who are suffering from depression, loneliness, anxiety and lack of acculturation. The refugees also have few opportunities to use their English whether in an ESOL class or within their community (Tip, et al, 2018).

The Syrian Key Worker is pivotal to supporting the refugees and frequently acts as an advocate for the refugees. They also bring their support needs to the community cooking classes where the lack of language skills is evident. Language teaching in any setting is made more difficult when the tutor has to act as support for daily issues rather than focussing on language classes. The refugees enjoy the classes we provide and feel that there is no pressure to achieve and so are able to focus on the practical task whilst also practising English. Classes have been made more difficult through the Covid 19 pandemic as it is hard to maintain professional relationships with people who lack both language and I.T skills. The research I undertook was limited by the pandemic restrictions and frustrated the refugees learning. The college and other agencies do not seem to be adequately prepared to respond to the differing needs of the refugee learners which leads to a need for a more targeted partnership between the college and other agencies in order to support the language and pastoral needs of the refugees. In doing so this will provide a great benefit to the refugees and the wider community as there will be opportunities for integration and improvement of language skills.

Refugees needs are determined by experts where the learner's needs are closely linked to college and government agendas. This is frequently based around what organisations think people need in order to pass exams or to attract further funding for the learning provider. If the focus is to pass exams this compartmentalises actual needs by focussing on language learning with a very narrow view of language learning defined as grammar and lexis and with little heed to the actual social learning needs of the refugees. The refugee's needs are frequently looked on as a deficit, that they are problems to be sorted out rather than as people with skills and resources who are able to state their needs rather than having to be told what their needs are. The needs of the refugees emerged after observation and speaking to the refugees who told me about their everyday lives and their hunger to learn English since their arrival in the United Kingdom. This also applied to the Syrian key workers who were forthcoming with the needs the refugees had communicated to them. The research was in depth and was gained through semi structured interviews, observation, field notes, questionnaires and discussions. Analysis demonstrates that the refugees had similar, frequently complex needs. Their needs relate mainly to language learning, but these are needs which cannot be separated from their social, physical, emotional and cultural needs (Fingeret and Drennen, 1997; Auerbach, 1996; Fingeret, 1983; Merrifield et al, 1996; Norton and Toohey, 2001). Indeed, many learning opportunities take place outside of the classroom environment, but this is not always taken into account by traditional learning providers who are bound by multiple constraints. The Syrian refugees do not have cultural capital or resources and therefore need more support than traditional ESOL learners. Norton and Toohey (2001) argue that in order to understand good language learning it is vital to think about the social practices in the

context in which individuals learn. This differs greatly in the autonomous West to the more restricted and less autonomous Eastern countries. Therefore, the one size fits all class is not taking this into account when curriculum planning. There should not be a one size fits all approach as low skilled refugees need intensive language learning and support which is longer than that which is offered. Refugees can be deterred from English language classes due to their lack of literacy skills in their native language. This can also neglect the high levels of stress, anxiety and uncertainty experienced by the refugees and which acts as a barrier to learning. Learners attending traditional ESOL classes and who are traumatised, drop out if they are not identified and measures put in place early in the learning process. This seems to have been the case with the refugees interviewed who felt that they were invisible in the class while the tutor focussed on those with the loudest voices. Which is the point of this research, finding a way to give the refugees a voice in the most effective and timely way. This research has attempted to demonstrate that effective language learning and integration are tailored specifically to the needs of the refugees and are a long-term project rather than a short -term allowance. Participation in community learning has had a positive impact on the refugee's language learning, self-esteem and general well-being. The most effective learning happens when it occurs naturally and takes into account the presence, or indeed absence, of the family or extended family in the United Kingdom, the state of the refugees mental and physical health, their ability to speak English and their literacy competency in their first language, any previous qualifications and any employment experience either in the United Kingdom or Syria. Effective language learning needs time and resources which are not always available which means that the possibility of precarity and long-term exclusion from integration exists.

In order to engage refugees and run successful courses a deeper understanding of specific refugee learners' needs is vital. Whilst the government designs policy frameworks it is up to learning providers to create conditions conducive to learning and to recognise that learners have needs that exist outside of the curriculum. Public perception of refugees is linked to language speaking and when this is fluent the refugees were more easily integrated into the community and made friends which further enhance the language learning process (Sobolewska, Galandini, and Lessard-Philips, 2017).

Chapter Six summarises the key findings of the thesis and makes recommendations for the future.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter draws on the main discussions and findings from the previous chapters. It highlights the main issues for the Syrian refugees attending ESOL classes raised by my research and highlights the strengths, limitations and challenges faced by refugee learners. The chapter focuses on the key lessons learned through the research and how these might inform other similar refugee programmes in England. This is a small- scale research study with limited numbers of learners and support staff involved and as such findings and recommendations should be interpreted within that context. Further research is needed to recruit larger groups of learners, teachers and support staff in order to test findings on a bigger scale. A pattern emerges from this research which is common to the Syrian refugee learners who attend my classes and who have ESOL needs. Initially they feel safe to be in the United Kingdom and are grateful for the economic support they receive. However, their frustration becomes clear when encountering the lack of effective and supportive ESOL teaching. There are major gaps in the provision on offer, and this is evident despite the attempts by policymakers to address the pressing needs of the Syrian refugees. This research has been conducted at a very particular time, in a very specific location away from big cities where provision may be more effective. However, the literature review reveals that there is a lack of effective provision in all areas, it is not restricted to the North of England. The small towns where the refugees have been sent in this research are not well prepared for refugees, there

has not been an established infrastructure ready to offer support with no established communities to offer support and join in with on arrival. This extends to lack of shops for purchasing familiar foods, halal products and modest clothing. The refugee learners want to learn to speak English and to integrate, they try to make friends and want people to understand them and to understand others. The learners are not making the progress they should in the formal ESOL classes and are dissatisfied with the existing provision. The refugee learners would benefit from more opportunities to undertake relaxing activities that would allow for learning informally in a familiar context which encourages practical activities and skills. A small town has multiple issues and so for those of a different religion, language and colour these issues are heightened.

ESOL provision

Language classes that are tailored to the needs of the refugee learners are the most effective; these include informal learning for those with limited educational backgrounds with informal learning by stealth useful in the repertoire of teaching solutions. Basic, emergency, ESOL provision should begin as soon as the refugee learner arrives in the United Kingdom in order to start the integration process which will lead to less economic dependency and greater autonomy. Timing, intensity, duration and format of ESOL provision in order to meet the needs of refugee learners needs to be re-evaluated in order to be more effective in responding to the complex needs of these learners. Rather than one traditional formal class this research suggests that greater benefit is gained from a variety of classes delivering varied support depending on individual learners needs. This would provide a mixture of classroom based and extra curricula/informal learning sessions. Preferences of

learners are important as they allow for autonomous growth and should be taken into account when planning the content and approach to ESOL classes and delivery. Classes need to take into account the previous learning experiences as well as the particular set of circumstances experienced by individual groups with individual goals. This thesis has drawn attention to the number of reports and studies completed on ESOL learners and refugee learners which have focussed mainly on formal ESOL classes rather than informal community learning. If more research were to be completed on informal provision it would provide more contextual detail on these learners, their learning experiences in the classroom and in the wider context ensuring learners have the right to account for pedagogic practice and experience from their perspective.

Recruitment of refugee learners

Recruitment of learners did not pose a problem as community outreach allowed for multiple enrolments across three towns. Learners were signposted to the provider and enrolment paperwork completed. Unlike traditional providers provision, in depth ESOL assessments were not completed rather observation by a qualified ESOL teacher allowed for a diagnosis of the refugee learners immediate need. Progress was tracked throughout the programme and progress recorded and recorded. The refugee learners were eager to join the provision as there was a desire to learn and also a sense of community which the programme allowed for.

ESOL teachers

ESOL teachers in formal provision have to deliver a specific curriculum and frequently have multiple levels in one class. They also have to act as advocate and

support worker which adds to their role and makes it more challenging. Teachers have heavy demands placed on them and are frequently second language speakers themselves. Teachers also have demands placed on them by targets they have to achieve often in order to satisfy funding requirements. Colleges are not adequately prepared to respond to the needs of refugee learners whose needs are much more complex than learning needs of mainstream ESOL learners. An effective liaison between ESOL teachers and other support agencies is needed in order to better facilitate effective learning.

Childcare issues

Childcare issues and provision of childcare was not a major issue through the informal programme as we either moved sessions to ft with school hours or provided solutions at our centre which enabled parents to still attend the sessions. Learners noted however that attending traditional ESOL courses was problematic as there was absolutely no possibility of moving classes to fit better with childcare arrangements. This means that generally fathers attended classes whilst mothers were unable to. A recommendation for more formal and traditional ESOL providers would be to be more flexible in course timings in order to fit in with learners who are frequently living under difficult and challenging circumstances.

Partnership working

Partnership working has been shown to be a vital element in learning English. Links were strengthened between agencies such as community projects and formal bodies including the Refugee council, the Syrian Key Worker for the local council and local museums. These partnerships were developed through informal networking and

arranged independently by the various agencies. Partnerships working allowed for extra support for the refugee learners and increased potential for learning to speak English. Community learning provided unique opportunities to work outside the fixed formal ESOL curriculum and provided bespoke training for those failing in traditional ESOL classes. There were challenging issues to overcome in order to provide a valuable service to the refugees including funding, availability of volunteers, suitability of provision provided but, on the whole, these were overcome successfully. There is great potential for further research to be carried out to explore in more detail the benefits of using community and partnership working to provide informal ESOL classes. Social networks provide support which can have a positive effect and lessens feelings of isolation and depression that many of the refugee learners in this thesis talked about. Effective language learning also reduces anti-migrant sentiment as refugees are able to integrate more successfully and make friends with their new neighbours which acts to alleviate suspicion around communities that outsiders have no access to.

Structure

As an independent provider there was potential for autonomy in the delivery of the programme as long as it fitted in with the general aims of the funding behind it. Learners were recruited into a programme that lasted as long as was necessary before the refugee learners were ready to move on to formal classes or to work. Informal learning by stealth was a valuable tool in the process, as it allowed for the refugees to complete tasks which they enjoyed, and which vitally allowed them to feel at ease. This meant that they did not feel pressure to learn and were therefore more receptive to learning rather than being sat in a formal classroom where various

factors such as noise, poor timing, suitability of provision, ability levels in the classroom, made learners feel 'hot and panicked'. The provision is located in a community building with easy access and on a local bus route. Although provision was based in a Church property this did not put the predominantly Muslim learners off attending and indeed provided opportunities for them to ask questions and to compare and contrast different traditions using their emerging English-speaking skills. Although the learners were reluctant initially to move outside of their comfort zone of familiarity with each other this was gradually replaced with curiosity and a desire to learn. Hard to reach learners initially attended for the social aspect but embraced the 'emergency' English being introduced in the informal setting. Through the informal nature of the classes it became apparent that the men and some of the women wanted to work and so, within the context of local labour market conditions, some classes were based around the local labour market and the world of work. In future courses it would be optimal to include specific groups of sessions based around themes such as work, home, benefits, shopping at least initially although this could be built upon. The key point to remember is that in formalising what is delivered there is a subtle move towards formalisation and the formal curriculum, and this was the very thing that restricted learning in the first place. This means that there should always be practical tasks where learning can be incorporated through the informal experiential method. The Refugees need time to improve their language skills, education and training in order to benefit most from education and to avoid long term exclusion.

Traditional ESOL classes

ESOL is failing this particular group of Syrian refugees and as there are many refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom who do not speak English this means that it is likely there is a failure for them too. Some refugees are illiterate in their first language and therefore are hindered in accessing traditional ESOL classes which are designed for learners who already literate and have some English-speaking ability. Teachers may need to be offered support on effectively teaching these particular learners and resources made available to support this. Comments made by the refugee learners warrant further exploration if ESOL provision is to be tailored around individual learners or specific groups rather than learners having to fit with what is on offer to everyone. This could involve focus groups and face to face discussions where learners are seen as individuals rather than as a homogenous group with identical needs. Formal ESOL classes need to be remodelled and reshaped to be inclusive to all learners. 1.5 hours per week is not adequate for sustained and probably more importantly a speedy acquisition of basic emergency English, and therefore a more intensive initial offering could speed the process of integration. Traditional ESOL classes do not allow for socialisation and interaction with those who are fluent in English speaking which is needed to make good progress. Refugee learners suggested that bilingual Arabic/ English teachers may be a better choice as they will understand the immediate needs of the learners and more likely to address these.

Sustainability

This type of provision, informal, community-based classes, could be developed in any town where there are refugees. In the context of my research what was achieved was achieved because I am a qualified teacher and have taught ESOL for many years but also because the funding for this provision allowed greater autonomy enabling me to digress from formal curricula and to work on an individual level with learners. This meant that I could tailor sessions around emerging issues thus providing an emergency English which helped with immediate issues. I am not making claims that this provided a basis for grammar learning rather it allows for coping with life as it happens before formal ESOL is involved. Local hubs could be created as discussed in this research where provision could be collated, and suggestions made for signposting and supporting learners. This would also allow for discussions around the local need and provision. Moving forward volunteers who are well qualified could be recruited to facilitate such sessions as funding is difficult to access and has been reduced over the past decade. Although funding has been cut, lobbying for more funding is needed both for provision itself to adequately support the costs of childcare and other barriers to learning. Community networks could also be developed to assist volunteer networks to teach their own language as an additional language. This is because there is the potential for refugee learners who have moved onto formal ESOL sessions to support their peers as they will be much more aware of the needs of the new refugee learners. This would ensure that language provision would address the needs of everyday situations such as discussing medical, shopping or social needs. Providers need to cater for all levels of learners and this includes pre-entry where the initial need is greatest.

Soft outcomes

Originally, I had no expectations that when the refugee learners started to attend classes we would be thrust into learning emergency English, rather assuming that soft outcomes would be the result of the learning. So, whilst learning English was in some ways an unexpected by-product, soft outcomes were also welcome as a measure of progress. Interestingly as self -confidence, and motivation increased the capacity for learning English also increased. This seemed to be because learners lost their inhibitions and used English naturally, however imperfectly, which helped them to progress. Throughout the programme we used the blob tree, a soft skill tool, as a way to informally measure self- confidence and to ensure progress was being made. On a more formal level we also completed individual learning plans and reviewed these frequently as the learners could see that they were in fact making progress.

Solutions from learners

Refugee learners made a number of suggestions as to how to improve ESOL which would cater to their needs. Unanimously they found ESOL classes to be bewildering, noisy, pressured, too many people attending, too many languages spoken and issues with many ESOL teachers being second language speakers themselves. They want ESOL classes to be welcoming, a place to have fun and learn at the same time. Many refugees have poor literacy skills in their first language and therefore struggle further when trying to learn a second language. They suggested that in sessions where there was less pressure they were more successful because they helped the learners gain some skills quickly so that they were able to go to the

shops and buy minced chicken and peppers or ask if meat was halal and to understand the answer. They did not want to be perfect initially, just to be understood. The refugee learners thought that co -production of classes would be more successful with the Arabic speaking community helping with the classes, especially those who had already gained some skills. The refugees feel safe in England but insecure because of a lack of connection with their new society and the inability to communicate. Initially they are very dependent on the Refugee Council and Syrian Key worker assisting them but when this support is mostly withdrawn, they are once again lost in their new home.

Funding

The government needs to increase funding so that more variation in provision can be achieved rather than solely relying on formal ESOL classes. Learners could then focus on learning English in new and innovative ways. Allocating funding to dedicated ESOL classes traps learners with few alternatives, allocating funding to some community learning would allow for qualified teachers to provide informal, emergency learning without the formalities demanded of the current statutory providers. In the long run this would enhance existing provision and learners would be able to gain skills which would firstly allow them to gain employment and therefore contribute to the economy and secondly integrate into the community better thus needing less ongoing support. Widening eligibility for full funding to include those who are excluded such as those not in receipt of benefits, those in receipt of benefits not related to employment, asylum seekers and those with low literacy levels in their first language. If English skills are not gained, then learners may enter low skilled work that does not require knowledge of the English language.

This could then lead to long term marginalisation requiring more financial support from the benefit system.

COVID-19

COVID 19 has made everything much more difficult for the refugee learners and whilst teachers generally congratulate themselves, I have done this myself, on using Zoom to deliver effective sessions, the refugee learners have mostly been forgotten in this process.

Learners reported that the use of online courses was a major issue for them as they did not have the technology, the skills, and the ability to use basic skills such as turn taking or recognising visual clues from body language whilst trying to understand English at the same time. In order, to deliver effective and targeted learning online further research needs to be explored for example assessing the type of online course that would be accessible to ESOL learners with very basic needs. Online courses are available, but they are in English and without a dual translation are inaccessible to learners who do not have any, or poor, English speaking skills. Provision for hardware and software availability would have to be made if this were to become a long-standing teaching strategy. Refugee learners who have multiple issues to overcome have had little support due to the Refugee Council, Colleges and Syrian Key workers working from home through the initial lockdown period. On returning to face to face delivery it was obvious that many skills have been lost and will take time to re-establish for learners who were struggling in the first place.

Limitations of the research

This research was limited by the size of the study and the COVID -19 pandemic both of which limited the scope of the research. Future research could include an

extended group of refugee learners in towns and cities spread throughout the North of England.

Final Comments

Refugee learners come in many guises and all have very different needs with varying levels of complexity. Traditional ESOL classes have their place but for initial, emergency ESOL, experiential, naturalistic learning within less formal classes seems to be beneficial to most learners despite their initial level of English speaking. There are four domains that are considered reading, writing, speaking and listening and informal community learning classes allow for refugee learners to start to gain skills initially in listening and speaking which are the first skills needed to integrate into the community. This means that those who are not literate in their first language are not left behind and start to learn, whilst those who are more advanced learn more gaining different skills at a different pace. Basic words can also be taught, such as hello, goodbye, stop or please and essentials such as their name or their children's names, telephone numbers and addresses. Refugee learners have different life experiences and also different levels of ability which means that some learn more quickly than others. This means that traditional ESOL classes can overwhelm and move too quickly for some learners. This leads to learners being unable to process the material and they may stop attending classes. Community learning is more able to adjust the pace and take into account individual learners' needs. Unlike traditional ESOL classes there can also be more support in the form of volunteers who can work intensively with the refugee learners. One benefit of this is that the same material can be practised over and over again until it is understood and can be applied independently. Barriers can be broken down and planned for giving the

learner more autonomy in the learning process. Once the learner has some control over the English language, they can speak in the more traditional, formal class which has an essential part to play in the learning process. This research has covered my own experience and the experience of a particular group of learners but has demonstrated that others working with similar groups have experienced similar problems with their refugee learners and ESOL classes.

Through the unique perspective that I have working in community learning, I have been able to establish the role and power experiential learning has on the learning process for this particular group of refugee learners. Through guided and experiential learning, barriers that inhibit learning have been removed and learners have worked together, learning incrementally and sharing their experiences. This is a learning community where family, community and sharing is paramount and the collegiate nature of the learning we have undertaken has reminded the Syrian refugee learners of a time when they felt safe and their lives were very different. They have left their home, arrived in a new land, been given other people's things and had choice taken away from them. In order, to make progress it is an absolute necessity that these barriers be recognised and used as a starting point for educational purposes. It is because I have sat down and eaten with these refugee learners, listened to them and gained their trust that they have learned to trust me and I have learned about their needs and about them as individuals.

+ Learning a language is hard and when added to the psychological and physical issues experienced by refugees it becomes another hurdle to be surmounted. More research covering further refugee groups is needed as it is clear from the literature reviewed that this has been an ongoing issue for a number of years, but very little has changed. This research started by looking at the effectiveness of informal,

experiential, learning with refugees in the ESOL context and this is still important in the process of learning emergency English which is needed at the very start of the learning process, but it is also about providing a safe, quiet space where learners can take their time to gain very basic skills before moving on to formal ESOL classes. This research is important because I have been in a unique position to work with Syrian refugees under very few organisational constraints such as set curricula or targets to meet. Through my research the current ESOL provision is inadequate for the needs of refugee learners who enter the country with a complex set of barriers that need to be addressed before meaningful and deep learning can start to take place. Lincoln and Guba's 1985 suggestion of the use of a thick description has allowed me to provide a detailed and robust account of my research and data collection. This research should enable other researchers to construct an impression of the work forming the basis of the research study and gives an insight into the individuals ,and challenges that have confronted them, when learning English. This research, whilst undertaken in a specific context, should be relevant to other researchers who may carry out research in varying circumstances but with similar cohorts of refugee learners. This research has already been incorporated into ESOL delivery by the local Syrian Key Workers in two local areas and is being expanded into partnership work with voluntary and community groups in similar areas. Further research is needed to continue the exploration of the most effective way of teaching English to refugee learners particularly whether cultural capital and gender has implications for accessing ESOL classes successfully.

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